

The Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis on Anticipated Boating and Fishing Activity in 2020

The emergence of the COVID-19 crisis has severely impacted nearly every aspect of society. And, while there are more important concerns than going boating or fishing, these activities remain important to the lifestyle of many. In this article, we discuss the findings from a recent survey regarding how boat owners anticipate the current crisis will affect their on-water activity and how dealers and marinas can support them at this time.

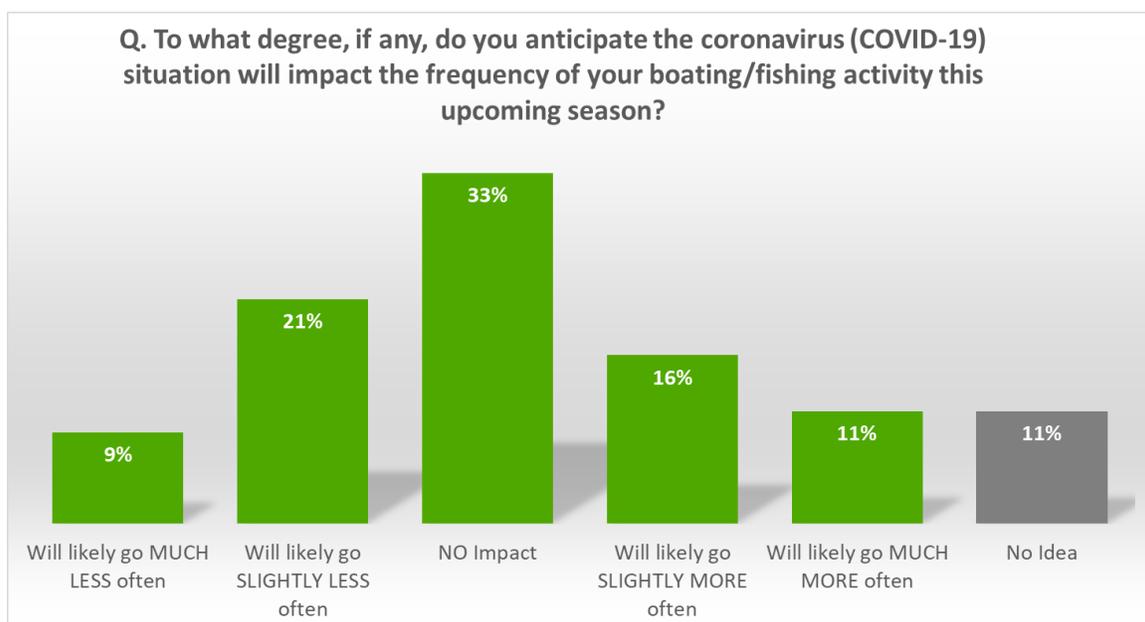
Background

An online survey was conducted with members of the BoaterInput online community (developed by Left Brain Marketing, Inc). The survey was conducted between March 22nd and March 31st, 2020. A total of 151 responses were received from boat owners across the country.

Findings

While the COVID-19 crisis will curtail boating for some, many boaters *intend* to remain active.

In our survey, over half (60%) indicated that they plan on boating as much (no impact) or more as a result of the crisis. Nearly one-third (30%) will likely boat less.



Of those who intend to go at least as much as before, key reasons were that they already boat/fish by themselves or with close family members only, they have more time, or it is a good way to practice “social distancing”. However, many acknowledged that the closing of lakes or parks could impact their plans and, when they do go, they would be less likely to visit marinas and other on-water establishments.

- *“For me, it’s a good way to social distance. I fish by myself.”*
- *“COVID-19 should have NO impact on myself or fellow boaters if we all agree to work diligently with public health officials, CDC, etc. It is my, and my fellow boating Americans, responsibility to make sure we are not spreading the virus. I cannot speak for everyone but I typically boat/fish alone or with a close friend, and never in a large group. Mostly recreational. I feel that it’s a great time to continue to participate in outdoor activities and boating/fishing just so happens to be one of a few activities to allow us to distance ourselves socially while keeping up our spirits at a time when the world seems to be under a massive amount of pressure. It’s an ideal stress reliever and as long as there is no evidence to suggest being out on the water is dangerous, I will be there.”*

But for the nearly one-third (30%) of boaters who will likely boat less, lake/park closures, travel restrictions and the need to limit who and how many can boat with them were the key reasons.

- *“Because we usually go camping when we go fishing and all the places we go camping are closed because of the virus. So not sure if we will even buy a fishing license to go this year.”*
- *“During the state of emergency in Michigan, we are required to shelter in place. We are only allowed to leave our home for necessities like groceries or a medical emergency.”*
- *“I will be reluctant to invite other than immediate family on my boat until while social distancing recommendations are effective.”*

Concerns regarding the virus will impact WHO people go boating with.

Half of the boaters surveyed indicated that the current crisis will change *who* gets to go on their boat. For many, this means that only their spouse/significant other or close family members (i.e., children) will be able to participate.

However, approximately only a quarter indicated that the current situation will alter *where* they go boating or *what* they do when taking their boat out.



Many would like to see dealers and marinas remain open and accessible for service or maintenance items during this time.

When boaters were asked how the industry could support them during the crisis, the most common response was that they *did not need support*. This was especially true among those who don't plan to use their boat or will use it less often.

| What, if anything, would you like to see dealers, marinas, boat manufacturers or retailers do to assist you with using or maintaining your boat at this time? | % |
|--|----------|
| Nothing/Don't need support | 33% |
| Keep dealers/marinas open | 12% |
| Lower prices | 9% |
| Practice safe habits | 8% |
| Pick-up and delivery service | 6% |
| Available for repairs/service | 5% |
| Availability of supplies/maintenance items | 4% |
| Make employees/technicians available for questions/issues (phone or chat) | 3% |

* These are the coded responses to an open-ended question. Only the most frequent suggestions are listed.

However, others felt it was important for dealers & marinas to keep their doors open (even if for a limited time), practice safe habits (e.g., keep facilities clean, wear gloves/protective gear, disinfect surfaces, schedule appointments to minimize congestion, etc.) and offering alternative ways to purchase parts/maintenance items or receive service.

The following are some of the specific suggestions offered:

- *“In my area, we need the marinas to stay in operation.”*
- *“Just have someone available to either repair or contact for problems.”*
- *“Just staying open for parts and repairs.”*
- *“Be available to service and repair my boat when needed.”*
- *“I would love to have my local service center come pick up my boat for service and then return it when done.”*
- *“Simple drop off and then pay online then pick up for any needed services.”*
- *“Provide ways to pay online for service, and maintain social distancing in the shop.”*
- *“Keep facilities clean.”*
- *“Servicemen and maintenance individuals providing sanitization after handling controls or any door access points.”*

Conclusions

In normal times, boating and fishing is an important recreational activity to millions of families in the US. However, during the current COVID-19 crisis, it can also provide a much-needed distraction from the chaos going on in our world.

Because many intend to continue to boat and fish this season, dealers and marinas need to find ways to support them as best as possible. Some actions to consider are as follows:

- **Communicate with your customers regularly.** Boaters have questions regarding how to get supplies or service, which lakes or ramps are closed in the area, and what precautions have been taken at your business to protect their safety. A weekly newsletter along with more frequent social media posts would go a long way in alleviating these anxieties.
- **Offer pick-up and/or delivery service.** Like restaurants and “big box” retailers, find a way to allow your customers to order products or schedule service without having to physically enter your place of business.
- **Offer phone or chat support for questions or technical issues.** Some issues can simply be handled over the phone or via a video call without having to visit the dealer. One way to manage this is to use an online calendar tool such as [Calendly](#), [Doodle](#), [YouCanBook.me](#) or [ScheduleOnce](#) that enables your customers to book an appointment with a service technician. You could even have a virtual “tip jar” via Pay Pal for customers to thank technicians as they see fit.

- **Implement safe practices.** As noted earlier, it is important for dealers and marinas that remain open to take steps to protect the health of their employees and customers. Check out the [CDC website](#) for the latest guidelines for businesses. And you need to let your customers know that you have taken these steps for their protection.

For more suggestions for how to serve your customers during these times, see the MRAA publication on [29 Tips to Sell and Service Boats Safely](#).

Undoubtedly, the ongoing pandemic will have a severe impact on companies that are part of, or support, the boating industry – including my own. But the good news is this crisis is an opportunity to develop new ways to serve your customers and implement procedures to engage them long after the sale that should pay dividends after this storm is over.

Jerry Mona is President of Left Brain Marketing, Inc. and is often considered the leading research expert in boating. Contact Jerry with questions or comments at jerrym@leftbraininc.com