

Resort Marina Success: Coming Soon to a Dock Near You?

When marina owners dream big, they dream their docks are like those of resort marinas in Monaco, the Caribbean, or South Florida. They dream of slips brimming with large pleasure vessels and megayachts; of docks alive with happy and carefree visitors; of infinite skies filled with sunlight and warm breezes; of clear waters bustling with traffic. Their dreams of these waterfront paradises are so vivid they can almost hear the boats--and smell the money--sailing into their waters.

Most marina owners dismiss these visions as fantasies, if not delusions of grandeur. While some of these visions are beyond human control, the dream of creating a more successful marina often is well within reach. Where many marinas fail, however, is in their unwillingness or perceived inability to stretch for what seems beyond their grasp.

Unlike the weather, with thorough research, planning, and optimization of available resources, marina owners can create and control the conditions necessary for success.

The Appeal of Resort Marinas

One of the most alluring features of resort marinas such as Atlantis Marina at Paradise Island (Bahamas) or Harbour Towne Marina (Dania Beach, Florida) is the full-service experience and hospitality they provide. From on-site golf courses and chartered tours to five-star dining, shopping and hotels, resort marinas cater to every whim of their guests, and offer a wide variety of activities for visitors not arriving by boat.

Since smaller marinas typically do not have the space or capital to construct these high-priced luxuries, it is imperative they discover the larger role their marinas can play along the waterfront and incorporate all that the host community has to offer into their "guest experience package."

This requires more than simply asking a marina consultant how to lengthen your docks and add more slips.

Where Marinas Fail to Succeed

"One of the biggest obstacles to successful resort (marina) development is perpetuation of the 'suburban mentality,'" says **Raul A. Lastra**, Principal and Director of Design with **OBM**, an architectural, design and town-planning firm →

based in Miami. "More and more, developers locate resorts and marinas far away from where the action is taking place, which runs counter to the recent and successful development model of 'creating a village.'"

While the purpose of resorts may be to "escape from the ordinary," placing a resort marina in an area isolated from shopping, commerce, entertainment and the flow of public traffic can be disastrous. "People are fascinated by and drawn to the idyllic images of life in quaint seaside villages and bustling downtown waterfront communities," says Lastra. "Finding a way to incorporate these 'experiences' into your design is a key ingredient for success, regardless of the size of your marina."

Lastra, who has been involved in numerous successful resort marina development projects in the United States and Caribbean, has gained insight from studying how other resort marinas have failed. "Developers--particularly in the Caribbean--often try to build elaborate resorts with only a small portion of land dedicated to amenities," he says. "And the overwhelming tendency of developers is to emphasize →

"What's most important is providing visitors with... something worthy of experiencing along the water's edge."

EPA Extends Deadlines for New Oil Pollution Prevention Rules

In 2002, the EPA amended the Oil Pollution Prevention regulation of the Federal Clean Water Act, which addresses Spill Prevention, Control and Countermeasure Plans (SPCC Plans). The new SPCC regulation became effective August 16, 2002, but the EPA published a final rule in 2003 extending the deadlines by which facilities must amend and implement their SPCC plans.

Onshore or offshore facilities that were in operation on or before August 16, 2002 must amend their SPCC Plan by August 17, 2004 to ensure compliance. Facilities that became operational after August 16, 2002 and could reasonably be expected to have a discharge must prepare a SPCC Plan by February 18, 2005. Facilities that will become operational after February 18, 2005 and could reasonably be expected to have a discharge must prepare and implement a SPCC Plan before beginning operations. **All SPCC Plans must be fully implemented by Feb 18, 2005.**

For more information about the EPA's SPCC regulation or how your facility may be affected, visit the EPA's website (www.epa.gov/oilspill), or contact Sam Phlegar (877-438-3002).



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(800) 275-6488
Marina@appliedtm.com

Calendar

July 8-11, 2004
Las Vegas, NV
Marine Aftermarket
Accessories Trade Show
(312) 946-6252
www.nmma.org/maats

August 14, 2004
Everywhere, USA
National Marina Day
(202) 721-1636
www.moaa.com/nmd

September 16-19, 2004
Tampa, FL
Tampa Boat Show
(954) 441-3220
www.tampaboatshow.com

September 18-22, 2004
Kalispell, MT
SOBA Annual Conference
(406) 841-4003
www.sobaus.org

September 23-26, 2004
Norwalk, CT
Norwalk International
In-Water Boat Show
(212) 984-7000
www.discoverboating.com

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single family lots instead of commercial, multi-family, recreational or mixed-use spaces, thus limiting the potential of the waterfront's success."

Design Do's and Don'ts

While the size and scope of marina development and renovations vary, several development "do's and don'ts" are equally applicable for marinas of all sizes, whether in the Caribbean, along the coast, or in inland municipal locations.

1. Don't think of marinas as "parking lots for boats"

As worn out as this cliché may be, many developers, boaters, non-boaters and marina owners(!) still think of marinas as parking lots on the water, or simply as a means of entering a city. Perpetuation of these outdated stereotypes ignores the industry's shift from that of storage to hospitality, and dashes all hope for drawing people to the water. Instead, try to...

2. Create a "dynamic sense of place"

Although marinas are not always nestled in cozy seaside villages or busy inland waterways brimming with condos, golf courses and shopping boutiques, Lastra says planners must find ways to "harvest the energy" present at a location to create energetic, vibrant and enticing places to visit. "People are naturally excited by the open sense of access, the simplicity, the glamour and the vibrancy of urban public spaces," says Lastra, and crafting this "dynamic sense of place" will, in turn, foster further commercial development. "What's most important," Lastra says, "is providing visitors with a feeling there is something worthy of experiencing at the water's edge. Boaters and non-boaters need places to go and things to do along the water, and must have ample opportunities to spend their time (and money) once they arrive at the docks."

3. Don't dismiss the needs of the public

Sound market research and planning incorporates the visions of boaters, community leaders and private and commercial investors. Private marinas and waterfront developments also must consider the wants and needs of the local community, who can quickly convert what appears to be a sound development plan into a political quagmire. By listening to the public's wants, keeping them informed about the project's progress and intentions, and providing adequate access to the water, many unnecessary obstacles can be averted and unforeseen gains can be reaped. Moreover, good communication is necessary to convince people that "parked" boaters (see #1, above) need places to eat, shop, play, unwind, relax, sleep and live.

4. Maintain "FUNCTIONALITY" at the waterfront

"The most successful resorts and marinas are those that offer something for everyone," Lastra says, which can be accomplished by "maximizing the

square footage, the views, and the character of the waterfront." This includes incorporating residential, commercial and public spaces and needs into the design matrix. By increasing the amount of public spaces (e.g., parks, piers, boardwalks) for visitors to enjoy, demand will grow for commerce, residential space and private businesses, and vice versa.

5. Don't forget about the boaters

In today's marine industry, service and hospitality are the rule--not the exception. For example, it is no longer possible to offer only one power configuration at a marina. Larger boats require more power, more services, more security, and more space. Likewise, more sophisticated boaters require more sophisticated and specialized amenities, attractions and incentives for visiting. Knowing--and meeting--the ever-changing demands of the boats and boaters visiting your docks is critical for the success of your marina.

6. Know the market demands and limitations

Serious plans for updating, expanding or building new marina facilities require considerable market research. What is the anticipated demand for this facility? What upland features and facilities do visitors desire most? How can the allotted space best be optimized? What are the environmental limitations? Would dry stack storage be a profitable addition? Will you be able to secure necessary regulatory permits? How will you be affected by competition? When can you expect to see a return on your investment?

These issues and others require thorough analysis via marina valuations, due diligence studies and pro forma projection modeling. These invaluable processes are vital for marina owners and investors seeking to assess their risks *before* beginning construction and accruing significant costs.

Success, in a nutshell

Ultimately, the key to success for any marina--whether for megayachts, private resorts or municipal facilities--is to give the boaters, the community, and those with a vested interest in the waterfront what they want and need, and plenty of it. After all, if you don't satisfy your boaters and visitors, they will find other places to spend their time...and their money. ☉

Bringing it all together: Emerald Bay

The new marina at Emerald Bay Resort on Great Exuma (Bahamas) exemplifies the concept of maximizing the waterfront's functionality, square footage and "dynamic sense of place." Adjacent to the *Four Seasons Hotel*, the marina includes several "micro-basins" designed to meet the needs of residential and transient boaters, chartered tours, sportfishers and megayachts. With a yacht club, golf course, amphitheater, single- and multi-family housing, and a balance of commercial, private and public space, Emerald Bay raises the bar for mixed-use marina development throughout the region.