



# THE BOAT DEALER'S GUIDE TO WORKING FROM HOME

Dealers share insights, lessons learned and the why behind allowing their employees to clock in remotely.

## INCLUDES:

- › Dealership examples
- › How to manage communication
- › Employee and employer WFH resources
- › Hidden benefits for your dealership

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## CONTENTS

› TECHNOLOGY	PAGE 4
› WHAT ARE STAFF DOING?	PAGE 6
› MANAGING & COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR TEAM	PAGE 9
› HIDDEN BENEFITS	PAGE 10



## LESSONS FROM DEALERS OFFERING WORK FROM HOME

If someone would have asked you a few months ago what work from home looked like for your dealership, you probably would have thought that was never possible. You're a brick-and-mortar retailer. How could your staff work from home?

But now, faced with state closure orders and the threat of COVID-19's spread, dealers are being forced to close their doors. For many, closing up business, however, isn't an option. There are employees who need paychecks; there are still a few sales to be made; there are relationships to be built; and there is more that can be done.

To meet those needs, many dealers have moved some or all of their staff to work-from-home status. But it's a tricky situation — many retailers weren't prepared to move to work from home, and of course, many of you never thought this would be an option.

Luckily, dealers are learning there are some unexpected benefits that have come from both working from home and having this downtime to reflect and get some different work done.

> WE CAUGHT UP WITH FOUR DEALERS ACROSS NORTH AMERICA WHO HAVE MOVED AT LEAST SOME OF THEIR STAFF TO WORK-FROM-HOME STATUS AND GATHERED BEST PRACTICES FROM THEM.

## MEET THE DEALERS



> CARLY POOLE  
BUCKEYE MARINE  
BOBCAYGEON, ONTARIO, CANADA



> RAY FERNANDEZ  
BRIDGE MARINE  
LAKE HOPATCONG, NJ



> PETE CAROLIN  
BRINSON MARINE  
SYRACUSE, NY



> JERRY BROUWER  
ACTION WATER SPORTS  
MICHIGAN & FLORIDA



## TECHNOLOGY

One of the first things dealers have had to consider when transitioning their teams to working from home is technology. So much of our technology is based on being in the dealership itself, so having to go remote, especially at such short notice, has led to some challenges, some changes and some revelations for dealers.

“While everyone was running to Costco for toilet paper, I went in and bought six or seven laptops and got those out,” said Ray Fernandez, president of Bridge Marina in Lake Hopatcong, New Jersey.

He said his organization was already heading toward cloud-based systems; the pandemic, however, quickened the pace on remote work.

“Thankfully, last fall, we were migrating over to everything in the cloud anyway — Microsoft 365, accounting in the cloud. We were actually really well poised for it,” Fernandez said.

Other dealers have found ways for their employees to access their work desktops from their home computers.

Buckeye Marine, in Bobcaygeon, Ontario, Canada, only had five ports in its virtual private network, or VPN, so the dealership set up Google Chrome Remote Desktop to allow employees to see their work desktop from home.

“That allows employees to literally — if they have a Google account or we set one up for them — to work at home on their actual work desktop,” explained operations manager Carly Poole. “I actually use it myself, and it is

## TECHNOLOGY DEALERS ARE USING

### Microsoft 365/Office 365

This service gives users tools such as Outlook, Word, Excel, PowerPoint and more. According to the [Office 365 website](#), with a subscription, it’s always up to date, available on all devices and keeps your work in the cloud using OneDrive.

### GoToMyPC

According to the [service’s website](#), GoToMyPC offers remote desktop access on any remote computer, iPad, iPhone or Android device.

### Google Chrome Remote Desktop

According to [Google](#), Chrome Remote Desktop is a free way to securely access your computer’s desktop from a phone, tablet or another computer.

### Lightspeed Texting

Available through CDK Global’s LightspeedEVO DMS, [Lightspeed Texting](#) allows for two-way texting directly from the DMS.

### VPN

A virtual private network allows you to access your server from a different computer. According to [TechRadar](#), it “lets you effectively trick your laptop or mobile device into thinking it’s in another location.” There are various services that offer VPNs.

### VoIP

Voice over Internet Protocol “is a technology that allows you to make voice calls using a broadband Internet connection instead of a regular (or analog) phone line,” according to the [Federal Communications Commission](#). Again, there are many services that offer VoIP.

amazing, quite seamless. You can access anything on your computer.”

Pete Carolin, owner of Brinson Marine in Syracuse, New York, has a similar set up. Using GoToMyPC for PC users and a similar system for Mac users, Carolin’s staff is able to access their work desktops from home. With Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) phones, staff was also able to either take their phone home with them and plug it into their home internet, or forward the calls to their mobile phones.

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From all of us at the Marine Retailers Association of the Americas, a sincere thank you to our Strategic Partners and Education Champions for everything you do to fuel dealer success. Today, more than ever, your support of the MRAA enables our team to provide direct support for their businesses during a challenging and uncertain market. Thanks to you, MRAA has the privilege to produce critical tools, resources and educational programming that our dealers need in order to survive and thrive, both now and into the future.

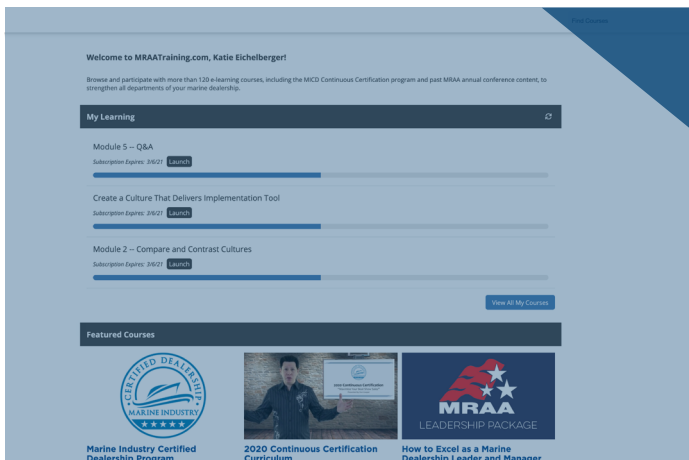




Jerry Brouwer, owner of Action Water Sports, with locations in Michigan and Florida, relied on VOIP phone access as well when his Michigan employees were sent home a couple of weeks ago. And he accelerated the use of a new VOIP app available on mobile phones, so his staff can use their mobile phones just like they're office phones, even relying on things like internal transfers.

They also looked at other technologies they could employ. For example, the Lightspeed DMS has offered a texting function, but they hadn't pushed the launch button on it until they moved remote.

"There are things that we're finding and that are new technologies, that we weren't thinking of switching to that eventually we would have, but this is forcing us to be much more savvy," Brouwer shared.



### RESOURCES FOR YOUR EMPLOYEES

- › [Work-From-Home Tips & Tricks](#)
- › [Self-care Resources](#)
- › [Resources for Kids & Families](#)
- › [Technical tools](#)
- › [Webinar: How to Establish Rhythm & Accountability for a Remote Workforce](#)

Brouwer's staff has prioritized reaching out to customers that will want their boats ready for summer. Over a recent week, they contacted more than 60 people to set up future service appointments, time and date to be determined.

"The more we can connect with people now, the faster we can hit the ground when this is over," he said. "We would get bombarded if we didn't do that."

The sales team is working on staying in touch with their past customers and their drip leads, and marketing is developing content to keep customers apprised of the dealership's digital presence and to get customers excited about the upcoming boating season.

"We've said let's continue to market to people, but we were very strategic at how we're marketing, and it's much softer: We're concerned about our customers; we're concerned about our staff; and we're here; and here's how you can communicate with us," Brouwer said.

He added, "Marketing is wrapped around the summer and not necessary trying to sell you something but just promote boating, promote the boating lifestyle, promoting our organization and what we have to offer."

The hope is that by reaching out and staying in touch, customers will remember Action Water Sports when the weather warms and the season gets moving.

### WHAT THE STAFF ARE DOING

Having employees work from home offers two big benefits for dealers: 1. They're able to keep their staff employed and paid, and 2. They're able to drive their business forward in various ways.

"We're trying to give people something to do and keep paying them," Carolin said.

Brinson Marine has its entire full-time staff working from home, focusing on a variety of tasks. "They are doing either sales training, which is mostly through MRAA videos, or we are getting emails and getting calls, and people are still buying things, not to the same extent as normal, of course," Carolin explained.



“What that does, it shows your priorities, that you’re thinking of your customer, that we’re here, we’re fine. And hopefully when they are ready to buy, they exit this going, ‘You know what? No one else was touching me,’” Brouwer said.

Fernandez has his sales team and his dockhand manager working on relationship development, making hundreds of calls, checking in on customers and prospects. “We’re doing all the relationship development that we usually stop doing this time of year,” he said.

“DEALERS NEED TO REMEMBER THAT THEIR SALES DEPARTMENT FOR THE MOST PART ALREADY KNOWS HOW TO DO THIS. THEIR SALES DEPARTMENT ALREADY WORKS OFF-SITE AT A BOAT SHOW. THE SETTING IS JUST DIFFERENT. INSTEAD OF YOUR SALES DEPARTMENT WORKING FROM A FLORIDA BOAT SHOW, THEY’RE WORKING FROM THEIR HOUSE,”

Many of the customers so far have said they’re not quite ready to buy, and sales have nearly dried up, but the calls are building connections and giving some customers someone — anyone — to talk to. Bridge Marina’s office and accounting staff are also working from home, while one tech, the general manager and Fernandez himself — stepping in as an additional tech — continue working within the dealership. The crew has been able to get 30 boats out already.

Buckeye Marine’s management team created a list of what they want to accomplish during this closure before they shut the doors. They also keep a running Excel document of suggestions to add to the to-do list.

The sales manager is working on contacting those who have already put their deposits down on boats. A phone campaign to call the dealership’s 500-plus storage customers will begin this week, and the staff is participating in e-learning and attending the MRAA Ask the Expert Webinars as well.

The parts manager has discovered he can still order parts from home, though that has slowed, so he’s found

another task to keep himself busy. “Right now I have him working on our obsolete parts, so he has a report on all of our obsolescence, and he’s going about putting it on Facebook Marketplace and Kijiji, which is big in Canada,” Poole said, adding that some parts are also being posted back to manufacturers’ sites. “He’s coming up with a plan of what he can do with the rest of the stuff, so we’re still generating some income, and it’s a really big thing we needed to do anyways.”

Things that were at the bottom of many people’s to-do lists, such as clearing out obsolete parts, are now top of mind.

Brouwer said his techs are getting caught up on training. And the dealership staff is doing more of working on the business, since there isn’t an open dealership to work in right now.

### WEBINAR: HOW TO LEAD DEALERSHIP EMPLOYEES AT HOME

› In this MRAA Ask the Expert webinar, MRAA Certification Manager Liz Keener covers the work from home best practices learned from dealers. The webinar is slotted for Thursday, April 16 at 12 p.m. EDT/11 a.m. CDT, and a recording of the webinar will be on [MRAA.com](http://MRAA.com) afterward.

“We’re trying to get a lot of things completed that were on the back burner, that were important but not urgent,” he reported.

On top of beefing up training, Carolin’s staff is working on projects, such as updating the website and revamping sales processes.

“We’re trying to do things that will make it more efficient once we’re out of this,” he said.

Bridge Marina is working on making service more efficient, going paperless and training customers to go paperless.



## EMPLOYER RESOURCES

A month ago, no one thought we'd all be working from home, especially those of us at retail dealerships. Fortunately, there's been an ongoing remote-work movement, and there are numerous resources and advice-driven articles available to help you evolve to a work-from-home scenario. Here are a few of our favorites.



### [15 Questions About Remote Work, Answered](#)

In this edited Q&A, drawn from a recent Harvard Business Review subscriber video call in which listeners were able to ask questions, the author offers guidance on how to work productively at home, manage virtual meetings, and lead teams through this time of crisis.

### [A Guide to Managing Your \(Newly\) Remote Workers](#)

Although it is always preferable to establish clear, remote-work policies and training in advance, in times of crisis or other rapidly changing circumstances, this level of preparation may not be feasible. Here's a guide to help.

### [23 Tips for Working From Home](#)

As someone who has worked from home for more than two decades, regular MRAA subject matter expert Don Cooper can attest that it's not as easy as some people believe it is. But it's not an insurmountable challenge either. Here are his 23 tips, tricks, and strategies for staying productive while staying at home.

### [6 Key Steps to Making Video-Based Boat Sales](#)

This current interruption in our sales process is the push needed to make dealers use video and to make them more comfortable with this tool. MRAA Lead Certification Consultant Bob McCann is certain that when things get back to normal, lessons learned during the COVID-19 crisis will change the way we sell boats. Start here.

### [Sample work from home policy template](#) *Courtesy of Momentum Law Group*

### [Design Your Ideal Day, Week, Month Tool](#)

- A **template** (daily, weekly, and monthly) that helps you streamline tasks, align your actions with your priorities, and prioritize your well-being.  
*Courtesy of SHIFT*





### MANAGING & COMMUNICATING WITH THE TEAM

Many dealers have submitted questions into the MRAA about how to manage work-from-home employees. The dealers who have been running work from home operations for a couple of weeks say there are a few keys to the management piece.

The first, is trusting the people you've hired and allowing them to do the jobs they've always done in new ways.

"Tons of trust," Fernandez said. "We have a smaller team. We're pretty tight."

Poole said her staff is used to occasionally working off-site, so this is similar, in a way. "Dealers need to remember that their sales department for the most part already knows how to do this. Their sales department already works off-site at a boat show. The setting is just different. Instead of your sales department working from a Florida boat show, they're working from their house," she explained.

Also important is communication. Poole says this is crucial for both employees who are working from home, as well as those who have been laid off or furloughed.

"There's regular communication with the staff, and it happens very routinely, so everyone is in the loop and everyone knows what's going on. Whether it pertains to them or not, or whether they care or not, they still have the info," she said.

Buckeye Marine sends two staff emails per week — one with important dealership information and government

updates, and the other with something fun. Recently, the fun email included a word search created by the dealership's receptionist and her husband. Everyone who participated — still working or laid off — was entered into a drawing for a \$50 gift card to a Bobcaygeon restaurant.

Poole is also doing personal outreach to her team. "As a manager, as an owner of the company, it is super important to stay in touch with those folks. I personally made a call to every single one of my staff last week," she said. She plans another individual check-in just before Easter.

Brouwer has been doing weekly check-ins with his team, alternating between "state of the union" conversations to letting the team know the management staff is thinking of them.

The calls are designed, he said, to "Keep them confident that the business is strong, and we've got their interest at heart."

Fernandez and Carolin both rely on phone calls, team chats and video conferencing to connect with staff.

"I feel like I'm as busy as I've ever been," Carolin said.

Of course, there are also metrics dealer principals and general managers can check in on. Brouwer's team, for example, uses Salesforce, so he can look at that data to see how many calls are being made on a weekly basis.

However, metrics may be skewed as employees are adjusting to their new work-from-home environment, may be home with more distractions than usual and may be reaching out to hesitant customers.

"Obviously we know they're not working normal," Brouwer said, "but if our service writers, I'm seeing, logged 60 customers this week for appointments, they're working."

### SOLUTIONS FOR YOUR DEALERSHIP



[Visit MRAA's COVID-19 Resources](#)





## HIDDEN BENEFITS

Dealers have found some extra benefit from being forced into this work from home and slowdown time. In addition to being able to tackle a few backburner projects, they're also learning about their flexibility as an organization and the resiliency of their staff.

"It's amazing how much we don't need to be here and how productive everyone can be remotely when you have a good team," Fernandez said.

He said the silver lining is that the team has been put in an uncomfortable situation, which is helping them to try new things, and Fernandez himself has even been given the opportunity to get back out into the yard, going hands on.

For Carolin, the negative side of all of this is not getting to see the team every day, as well as the store manager's often-present dog. But there have been some good lessons learned as well.

"I think the positive thing that I learned is let's say someone isn't feeling well, and say before they came in, now we could set them up at home, and they can still help here. And in the future, that will be possible. If they want to be, they can call in and take calls and really be helpful that way," Carolin said.

With all the innovation that has come from his team, Brouwer said he thinks they'll come out on top afterward.

"I think all of us are convinced that we're going to be a better organization coming out of this," he said, referring

## DEALER BLOG



› PATRICK GREEN  
TOBLER MARINA  
HAYDEN, ID

We were classified into the "non-essential" category, by the State of Idaho. So we met just after the state shut everything down, to discuss options for our employees.

Our leadership team came to the decision that the "right thing to do" was to retain our team and have them be paid for the two weeks of the shutdown.

[Read more on MRAA.com.](#)

to the new things the team has learned and the new technology that's being used.

"I think that the key is don't crawl in the fetal position," he said. "You need to keep communicating with current customers and potential customers."

Poole was surprised at how fast her entire team adapted and may be changing some dealership processes as a result of this stay at home period. In the meantime, she's trying to be agile, while hoping for a good boating season ahead.

"It's just being really flexible and adaptable, which as business people, we aren't always," she said. "Make a plan, change the plan and change the plan again."



## 5 QUICK TIPS FOR WORK FROM HOME

### **1 Find the technology that works for your dealership.**

Your staff may need computers to take home. They'll need access to certain systems, programs and software. Ask everyone what they think they'll need to continue to work and provide it, as necessary.

### **2 Communicate frequently.**

Make sure someone from management is checking in with every team member at least once per week. Your staff may need extra guidance and check-ins because they're missing that casual work-related banter that comes from being in person. Plus, they're likely also dealing with a range of emotions while being cooped up at home.

### **3 Be flexible.**

As Jerry Brouwer said, "Obviously we know they're not working normal." Many people are at home with their kids and/or partners. They may not have the most ideal space for a desk. Give them time to settle in and, if possible, allow them to work some off-hours, like after the kids go to bed.

### **4 Consider training.**

If you want to keep your staff on the payroll but don't have a lot for them to do, look at what training opportunities are available. All MRAATraining.com courses are available for free through May 31. Take advantage of that opportunity. Also, look for other webinars and trainings sent via email, posted on LinkedIn, etc. Ask your team to find some on their own as well.

### **5 Check off that to-do list.**

If things are a little slow, this is the perfect time to work on your business, rather than just in your business. What is important, but not urgent? What's been at the bottom of your to-do list for months? Maybe it's a website project; maybe it's revising process maps; maybe it's a look at your job descriptions, or wrapping up Dealership Certification or getting caught up on 2020 Continuous Certification. Check off as many of those things you can, so they're done before the season gets busy.



## CONTACT US:

We're here to help! As you work through and make decisions for your team and business, don't hesitate to reach out to the MRAA team for support.

### THE MRAA



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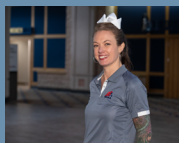
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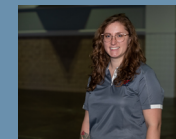
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