



January 18 – 24, 2021

## Canada's First-Ever Virtual Boat Show Delivers Successful Event to Connect Consumers with Boating Industry During Pandemic

### *Exhibitors and consumers alike embraced new digital way of shopping and boat show experience at the 2021 Virtual Toronto International Boat Show*

Toronto, ON (January 26, 2021) -- **The 2021 Virtual Toronto International Boat Show** has successfully concluded its seven-day show, January 18 – 24, during an unprecedented year that saw Canada's largest in-person boating event go virtual for the first time in its 60+ year history. After announcing the cancellation last September of its annual indoor event in light of the pandemic, Canadian Boat Shows forged ahead to present a virtual show in response to consumer and exhibitor feedback, record demand for boats, and growing interest in the boating lifestyle.

The Virtual Toronto Boat Show attracted **35,641 registrations** made up of returning boat show patrons, new boaters, and first-time show attendees from the Greater Toronto Area, regionally across Ontario, and as far reaching as British Columbia. **26,340** of registered individuals actively attended the show at least once (73% engagement rating); contributing to total visits of **46,938 times**.<sup>1</sup>

Consumers flooded the show eager to shop, experience and interact on the new platform. The newly developed virtual show, designed by Canadian company Unity Event Solutions, seamlessly supported highly innovative and interactive virtual showrooms, thousands of product listings, video content, as well as live-streaming and chatroom capabilities.

Exhibitors found new ways to connect directly with consumers during the Virtual Toronto Boat Show. Many utilized virtual appointments, online live chats, Zoom meetings and Facetime, 3D technology, virtual boat tours, and live showroom cameras that offered personalized customer service as with an in-person experience. "We saw an overwhelmingly positive response from our participating exhibitors; and were impressed by their creativity, innovation and resourcefulness to adapt from preparing for an in-person show to a digital environment," says Linda Waddell, Director of the Toronto Boat Show.

A comprehensive marketing effort helped to drive registrations and more than **1.3 million page views** to the show during its seven-day run. The media buy heavily focused on digital ads, social ads, and a targeted Toronto radio buy; while a strategic PR campaign garnered more than **90+ million media impressions**, highlighted by national and syndicated media coverage.

"The show was an absolute success! All the hard work of organizers paid off; we had a near perfect experience as an exhibitor. The setup of our virtual booth was relatively simple, and we didn't have any technical issues throughout the entire show. The virtual environment had a significant benefit in attracting qualified customers, even more so than the in-person show. We probably had a more successful week than the in-person experience," says Chris Purchas, Marine Solar Innovations.

Toronto Boat Show organizers are currently reviewing extensive post-show analytics, which will be shared with exhibitors and industry at a later date. In the meantime, some preliminary insights include:

- 76% of attendees have visited the Toronto Boat Show in the past
- 24% of attendees are new to the Toronto Boat Show
- 17% of attendees came to the show with the intention of purchasing a boat
- 45% of attendees came to the show with the intention of shopping for accessories and services
- 44% of attendees came to the show with the intention of a boat purchase in the future
- 15% of attendees came to the show to learn about boating

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<sup>1</sup> Cumulative attendance is counted by number of times each attendee logged-in to the virtual platform during the entirety of the show run from Jan. 18 – 24.

In addition to a robust online marketplace featuring thousands of used and new boats, services, marine accessories, product debuts and boat show deals; it was the live programming created by organizers and user-generated content that were stand-out successes. The Community Chatroom discussions brought the camaraderie to the virtual show, allowing participants to post discussions and questions to fellow boaters; while *TIBS LIVE* streamed daily content curated for boaters including live interviews, expert panels, boat walk arounds, and boating lifestyle videos.

This year's seminar schedule offered a wide variety of know-how, inspiration and education for seasoned and new boaters. Total seminar attendance surpassed **19,000** over the show run, with an average attendance of 200-300 attendees per seminar, some seeing as many as 500 attendees.

"The success of the Virtual Toronto Boat Show has re-energized exhibitors and consumers to a whole new way of connecting with each other, and reinforced how resilient our industry can be in the face of adversity," says Waddell. "We're thrilled with the success of the virtual show this year, and look forward to being able to welcome visitors back to our in-person show next year. Our plan is to incorporate the virtual platform toward a hybrid model for 2022."

### **Save the date for the 2022 Toronto International Boat Show, January 21 to 30.**

#### Exhibitor Quotes:

- *"Overall, I have to applaud the Toronto Boat Show team for putting this together. Unlike other shows similar in size, the Boat Show broke the boundaries and found a way to connect manufacturers, dealers, industry vendors to consumers. Without a doubt, we sold from this show! My team and I felt the quality of clients was much better. Those who found us were genuinely interested in buying."* – Jean-Luc Lemire, Energy Powersports
- *"Participating in a virtual show is kind of like a blind date: We didn't know what to expect. Well, it worked great. We had many new customers contact us and many purchases were made in terms of boats and accessories for both stores. For a virtual show, it exceeded our expectations for many of the boats and retail items. It's worth a second date!"* - Morten Fogh, Fogh Marine and Fogh Boat Supplies
- *"Like every year the Toronto Boat Show has been great for serving us new leads to the dealership and often new boaters. It was really important for us to be a part of the virtual show for multiple reasons; even though we have a reduced inventory, it was very clear that for a lot of people looking to buy a boat, it is a process that takes course over multiple years. We also are truly appreciative of how important the show is to our business to provide us access to buyers in what otherwise would be our off season."* – Jay Poole, Buckeye Marine
- *"Overall, the first Virtual Boat Show was a good experience. We offered and promoted connecting by Zoom Meeting, but found the majority of our customers preferred to email or use the online chat, or simply call us by phone. New learnings for all."* – Rick Hickson, R & J Machine

#### **ABOUT THE TORONTO INTERNATIONAL BOAT SHOW:**

The Toronto International Boat Show is owned and produced by Canadian Boat Shows. In generating more than \$354 million in economic impact to the region, it is the Largest Indoor Boat Show in North America. More boats are purchased at the Toronto International Boat Show than at any other place or event in Canada. About 43% of Canadians (12.4 million people) participate in boating and 20% (6 million) own a boat. Direct revenues across Canada's core recreational boating industry total nearly \$5 billion per year, and directly employ approximately 45,000 Canadians. (NMMA Canada – The Economic Impact of Recreational Boating in Canada).

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