SCUBA DIVING INDUSTRY

APRIL 2024
PUBLISHED BY WILLIAM CLINE | CLINE GROUP

PHOTO PRO

STEPHEN FRINK TAKES US ON FIVE DECADES OF SHOOTING MEMORIES

TRAINING

LONG COURSES, LOCAL EVENTS, SAFETY MARGINS



RETAILING

MANAGING DATA, HOW TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS, ECO PRO ADVICE

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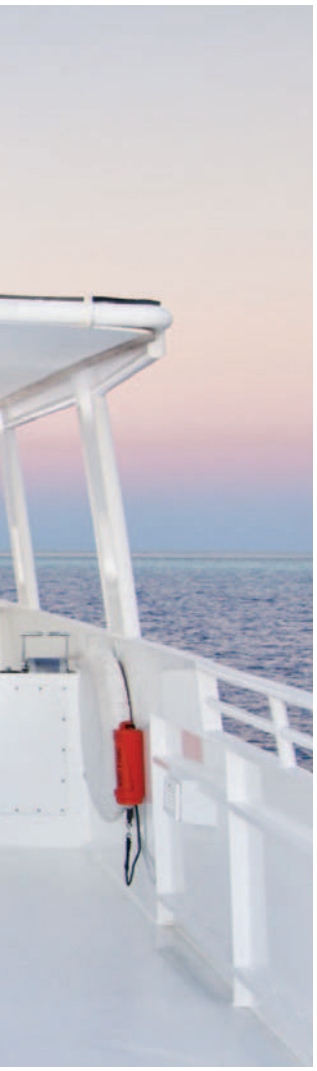


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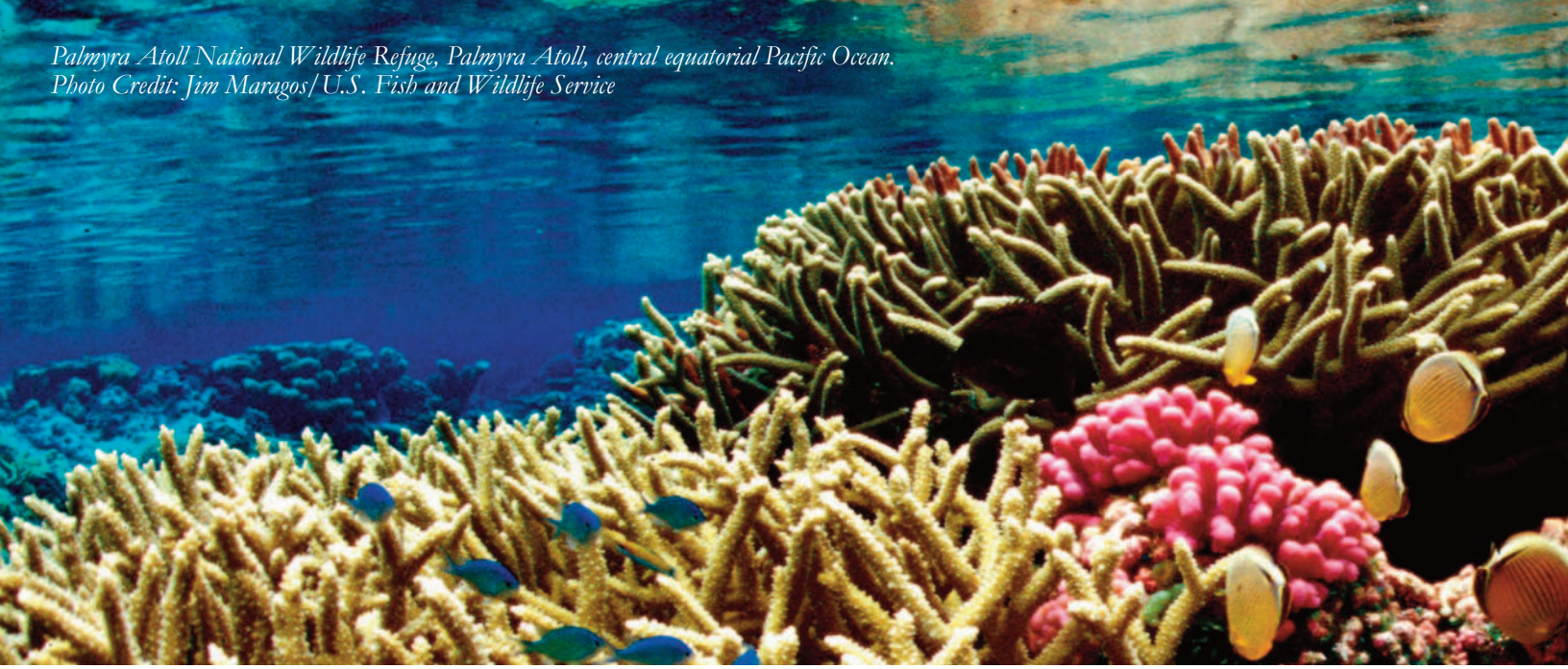
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FROM THE PUBLISHER



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE VS AUTHENTIC INTELLIGENCE

AI is everywhere, from Facebook to our smartphones and it's beginning to infiltrate every aspect of our lives, in most of the modern world. The integration of AI into diving is just starting; as I write this, I suspect many companies are exploring how to incorporate AI into their dive computers, cameras, training programs, POS software, and other yet-to-be-conceived applications.

But what do I mean by 'authentic intelligence'? I use this term to refer to the human experience and factor. At a recent dive show, I observed a training agency offering a 'virtual dive experience' using a VR headset. Aside from the novelty, it raises the question: do such virtual experiences effectively inspire new divers? Scott Daley, the former marketing director of Body Glove, believed that getting someone to take their 'first breath' underwater could convert a large percentage of people into diving enthusiasts.

This exemplifies 'authentic intelligence' in diving—the necessity of human connection for the sport to flourish. A true pioneer, John Thet, CEO of the ADEX, recently concluded his Singapore dive show, which attracted over 45,000 attendees in four days, gaining significant global and mainstream media exposure for scuba diving. Dive shows play a crucial role because they enable us to connect with divers and generate significant public relations benefits for our industry. Mark Young is another innovator whose dive show is scheduled June 1-2 in Los Angeles, CA. If you are a retailer or professional on the West coast of the USA, make plans to attend the show and encourage your customers to do the same. It's a great experience and opportunity to connect with others in our industry.

Dive retailers, the primary reason we publish this magazine, represents the ultimate 'authentic intelligence' for our industry. Retailers are the hub of local diving activity, and we are honored to feature articles from six different shop owners in this issue. This magazine is driven by the industry, and I am thrilled about the high-quality content our contributors have produced. It offers thought-provoking articles on unique issues and concepts that are pivotal to our industry.

If you are a manufacturer, sales rep, tourism board, resort or liveaboard, I encourage you to review your advertising budgets and consider supporting our industry through advertising in our next issue. Join and engage in our industry's ongoing conversation.



William Cline, Publisher

visit the scuba show LA

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William Cline, Publisher & Ad Sales
Patricia Cline, Art & Executive Editor
Amber Wagenknecht, Copy Editor
Neal Watson, Sr., Editor-at-Large
Contributors:
Alex Brylske, Ph.D., Eco Pro/Environment
Cathryn Castle Garcia, Customer Retention
Jeff Cinciripino, Scuba Shack, Rocky Hill, CT
William Cline, Cline Group
Terry Cummins, Ph.D., Australia/Oceania
Stephen Frink, Photo Pro
Pat Hammer, Dive Right Scuba, Chicago, IL
Scott Jones, Dive newswire
Tom Leaird, Tom Leaird's Scuba, Muncie, IN
Peter Letts, Abyss Scuba Diving, Sydney, Australia
Dan Orr, Safety/Health/Legislative/Legal
Richard Thomas, International Scuba, Dallas, TX

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PHOTO PRO

The Passion of Underwater Photography – A Business Plan?

– Text and Photography by Stephen Frink


author circa 1978

The pivotal fork in the path of my career in underwater photography happened over Spring Break in 1978. A buddy of mine from the old swim team days in Illinois was working as a treasure salvor in Key Largo. That's back when they were still finding silver on the wrecks of the 1733 Fleet Spanish treasure ships lost in a hurricane off the Upper Keys.

We did some recreational dives off Key Largo, which was pretty spectacular at the time, but that's not exactly what drove my epiphany. I saw all these dive boats every day out on the reef and in the days pre-Google I tried to find out how many divers came to Key Largo for John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park. Someone said "a million." Well, in retrospect I doubt that was even remotely true, but I was working in a photo lab in Denver at the time so I knew how to process E-6 slide film and thought this might be a way to monetize Key Largo underwater photo enthusiasts. The way I saw it … if there are a million divers, 25% of them should be underwater photographers, 250,000. Of those 250,000 photographers half of them probably shoot slide film, 125,000. Of those 125,000 probably half of them would bring their slide film to me to process, 62,500. If I made $6.00 each on 62,500, that would be $375,000 at a time where I was making little more than minimum wage working in a darkroom. Of course, I didn't do the rest of the math, the part that said I had to process and mount 171 rolls of film for each of the 365 days of the year and also pay for the chemicals and slide mounts. But, it didn't matter anyway because my numbers were ridiculously wrong. However, I was always more right-brained than left-brained and when Ocean Divers agreed to rent me a small part of their dive shop to process film and rent underwater cameras I was committed, moving to Key Largo by November that same year.



Not having much to lose is a good motivation for any entrepreneurial plan, at least at the beginning. As time went on I had to be pretty nimble to embrace the trends that allowed me to continue to make a living. The Mile Markers (we are talking about the Florida Keys, after all) in underwater photography that became a fit for me, beyond camera rentals and film processing, included working for dive magazines as a photojournalist and then repurposing the photos I took on location for the burgeoning stock photography market. Underwater photography was more of a novelty then, and there were fewer who could be depended upon to deliver photos on demand for advertising clients. I shot catalogs for the big dive brands, including Dacor, Seaquest, US Divers, and Scubapro. Other large consumer brands and travel destinations would use underwater models now and then, which led to shoots for Victoria's Secret, Florida Keys, Cayman Islands, Alcan Aluminum (scuba tanks), Jantzen swimwear, Club Med, Kodak … even Vantage cigarettes. Remember the "Vantage, the taste of success" campaign? My assignment was the treasure diver in front of the wreck of the Rhone with gold chains draped on his arms underwater. Yes, we all knew the Rhone was not the right ship or the right era for such an illustration; but hey, we were selling dreams, not reality.



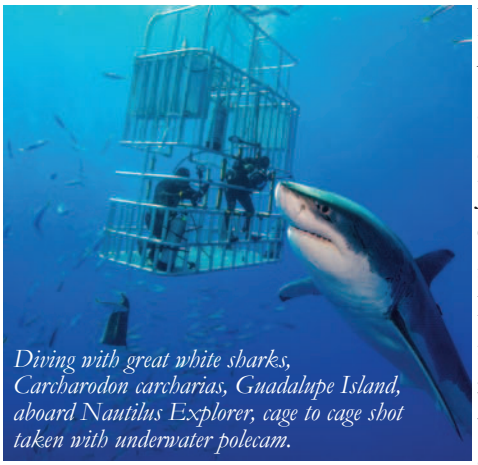
Selling underwater cameras and housings was a key-

stone of my career for a while also, and for a couple of decades I was the USA distributor for an Austrian housing manufacturer, Seacam. Because those things worked then, doesn't mean they'd work now. My primary emphasis today is being the publisher of *Alert Diver Magazine* for Divers Alert Network and leading photo tours and instructional events for my dive travel company, WaterHouse Tours.



Eastman Kodak contracted Stephen Frink to provide an Ektachrome 35mm slide (it had to have been taken on a Kodak slide film) that would then be enlarged to provide the world's largest color transparency, the famous Kodak Colorama in New York's Grand Central Terminal.

Which is just as well, as the market for camera rentals crashed when people started to buy their own Nikonos cameras and Ikelite housings, and film processing cratered with the advent of digital photography. Stock photography became a race to the bottom (where it resides today) as underwater photography became more accessible with better equipment and easier digital workflow to process and upload images to the stock photo agencies. The art directors I worked with on the scuba campaigns either retired or moved up the corporate chain, and the ever-younger (relative to me) art directors coming in had their own peers to book on their assignment shoots. For stock photography with ever-increasing supply came proportionally smaller demand, and insultingly low license fees. At a certain point the work of keywording the images (they can't sell online if there are viable keywords embedded in the IPTC field to allow the search engine to deliver them to the photo buyer) was no longer commensurate with the monthly commission checks. For a sense of scale, from a time when Getty Images paid me $10,000 a month I now see sales of $2,000 per year. Of course, I worked at it then, and these are just residual sales from images still retained in the system. Still, the trendline is accurate.



Diving with great white sharks, Carcharodon carcharias, Guadalupe Island, aboard Nautilus Explorer, cage to cage shot taken with underwater polecam.

If I sound curmudgeonly, I'm not complaining. Really. Things should be expected to change over 4 decades, and it has been interesting to observe. Remember, I emphasized how important it is to stay nimble? You can't change market trends, so you might as well adapt.

Which leads me to today and the state of underwater photography as it pertains to dive retail. There was a second epiphany that occurred to me on a great white shark trip to Guadalupe in 2008. It was our first night at anchor after the 20-hour crossing from San Diego and the cruise director was briefing us for our shark dives the next day. There were 26 of us in the salon when he asked "How many of you are underwater photographers?." Twenty-six hands went up, maybe more than that as those super-enthused raised both hands! Hmmm. I thought I knew most of the shooters in the dive industry at the time, but OK, there was clearly going to be a lot of pressure on cage-time. The next morning, I checked out the camera table. There were two large DSLR housings with strobes, and all the rest were a combination of Ikelite-housed point-and-shoot cameras, a few remaining Nikonos cameras, several SeaLife amphibious digital rigs, and even someone who had cobbled together a way to take his iPhone underwater. Which, at the time was very clever because the iPhone was only introduced a year earlier in June of 2007. Each of these divers was just as motivated to get a picture of a great white shark as I was and their cage time was just as valuable to them as it was to me. That was the tectonic shift in underwater photography. They could now post their images to their social media! Facebook began in 2004. Digital pictures and Facebook, meant that underwater photography was forever changed at that moment of confluence.

What has all that meant to dive retail? I think only good. People are excited to travel. They get some reward, even if it is only the dopamine coursing through their brains as they see "likes" appear on their social media feeds for particularly significant images. For the









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dive retailer that offers organized travel, it is a huge boon. If you choose the right destinations there is consensual validation out in the ether that suggests your clients should travel with you to experience. Of course, to truly optimize that travel they have to be certified divers, but some destinations or targeted dive sites within those destinations may require advanced certifications. That too falls to the dive retailer to provide. They have the opportunity to sell new gear, offer enhanced certifications, and keep their client-base engaged in why we became divers to begin with. This is obvious to all industry-insiders reading this. You know it better than I do. But, if you haven't already jumped into social media as a means to promote your dive travel, you inevitably will.



Scubapro catalog 2014, shot on location in Bimini, Bahamas

Back in the day, when I was still involved with photo retail, I found a synergy in the three legs of my personal tripod. Leg one was teaching underwater photography, which likely involved running Advanced Imaging seminars in my home waters of Key Largo or at land-based resorts in the Caribbean and Bahamas. Leg two was providing the underwater photo gear that they needed to advance their underwater imaging potential. Leg three was providing the dive travel opportunities with whole boat charters on liveaboards in the most attractive photo-ops on the planet.

The best dive retailers will have already figured a way to leverage underwater photography into their business plans. They likely have wholesale relationships with SeaLife and Ikelite to sell equipment in their shops. They will be able to educate their divers about how important a good wetsuit is to staying warm while waiting for the yellow-headed jawfish to emerge from his burrow for that underwater macro shot. They'll know which regulators breathe easiest for the weird contortions underwater photographers might get into inside a wreck. They'll know which BCs will float them on the surface best while holding a heavy underwater housing and waiting for the chase boat to pick them up. They'll know which fins are best for swimming in a current yet be easily maneuverable around fragile corals. They will have staff eager and qualified to teach underwater photography. And, they will have mature dive travel programs in place to keep their divers enthused and growing. Those are all quantifiable revenue generators that pertain to underwater photography.



The opening spread for a Victoria's Secret swim catalog 2001 with supermodel Paulina Porizkova. As an aside, she was not a water person, and reluctant to even put her face in the water. Which was fine, because my assignment was to shoot over/unders on a sandbar in the Exumas, Bahamas

The more abstract and nebulous advantage of underwater photography comes from social media. The wider net of knowledge that is cast regarding dive travel, and specifically what the photo opportunities might be, often comes from posts by influencers. Don't underestimate the value of a "like" though. If you study classical conditioning you'll find the behavior hardest to extinguish is the one reinforced intermittently. If we're the rats, the pellets that lead us through the maze of airports, hotels and dive boats to a world of dive opportunities, to an ever-increasing extent, come from social media.

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BUSINESS EDU

How to Get Your Business Growing, Part One: Getting SMART About Success

– by Cathryn Castle Garcia, Owner C2G2 Productions, The Azores

Cathryn Castle Garcia is a veteran scuba industry member, writer and co-owner of C2G2 Productions, a multimedia company specializing in underwater and wildlife film production and book publishing. She and her husband, Capt. Gui Garcia, also work as superyacht crew and are renovating their oceanfront home on Faial Island in The Azores as a luxury retreat for divers.



No matter what type of scuba program you offer, I'll bet it includes, "Plan the dive/dive the plan." But are you actively planning to succeed in business? You've no doubt heard some version of this equation: poor planning = poor performance. In simple terms, you must plan for success; you must set achievable goals and create a plan for holding yourself and your employees accountable.

This begins with a thoughtful, comprehensive look at how your business has performed recently. We just finished the first quarter of this year and hopefully you filed your tax return on time, so this stuff should be fresh in your mind. Still, while an annual income statement or profit-and-loss report is an important document for measuring your business's success, it's an overview. It's the "what" but it won't reveal the "why" and doesn't fully identify the "how."

Did you set goals for the previous year? If yes, have a copy handy of your goal sheet so you can refer to it and see how things turned out. If you didn't set goals, that's okay for now. You still want to conduct this review, because you can't manage what you don't measure.

> **"Writing down your goals helps save them to your brain's hard-drive. It's part of what helps us move from thought to intent to action."**

Let's start with certification numbers. How many entry-level certs, advanced, specialties and so on, did you conduct? Is this number higher or lower than the previous year? Make notes about this to discuss with managers and staff later. Next, look at retail sales totals. Your accounting software likely allows you to do a variety of searches – by manufacturer, type of product or service, total units sold, etc. Run the numbers on every income producing category of your business, and then every expense category, too. Pay attention to "peaks and valleys" in your previous year's productivity, noting things like the season or time of year, promotions or events you sponsored, staff changes, good or bad weather, etc. Be the impartial observer. This is not an exercise in identifying failure or placing blame, but rather an objective view of how your business performed. You're playing detective, not judge and jury.

Invite employees to provide input on past performance and how your team can move the needle towards increased productivity – and profit. I know some owners balk at sharing financials with employees. If this is you, consider reframing the conversation in percentages instead of numbers, or perhaps share financials only with key management staff. It makes good sense to include them in conversations about ways to improve. After all, your workforce is vital to the success of your business.

Scripting Your Success: Now that you've pored over the P&L statement and gotten feedback from staffers on where they think the business slayed or slacked in the last quarter or year, it's time to write out a progress plan for the remaining year ahead. And by "write out" I mean literally writing it out. Here's why. Loads of research has been done on goal setting, and it seems the act of writing out your goals on paper makes you 40 percent more likely to achieve them than if you just mulled them around in your head. There are a number of reasons why this is true. Researcher Mark Murphy explains the neuroscience of it, saying, "Writing things down happens on two levels: external storage and encoding. External storage is easy to explain; you're storing the information contained in your goal in a location (e.g. a piece of paper) that is very easy to access and review at any time." He points out that you're likely to remember something that's printed out and posted where you can see it every day.

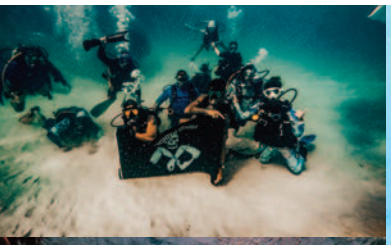
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BUSINESS EDU continued

The deeper phenomenon here is encoding, which Murphy describes as, "the biological process by which the things we perceive travel to our brain's hippocampus where they're analyzed. From there, decisions are made about what gets stored in our long-term memory." In other words, writing down your goals helps save them to your brain's hard-drive. It's part of what helps us move from thought to intent to action.



Getting SMART About Goal Setting: A proven goal-setting method in wide use by productivity experts since the early 1980s employs the acronym SMART, which stands for Specific, Measurable, Attainable/Assignable/Awardable, Realistic and Time-related. Here's an overview:

Specific. Start by identifying clear, specific goals with as much detail as possible. You can't list "Make more money" as a goal and expect it to work.

Measurable. Include dates, amounts and desired quotas. For instance, a measurable goal might be to enroll 10 new scuba students a month, or reach a certain dollar amount in retail sales, or fill a trip within 30 days.

Attainable/Assignable/Awardable. Avoid "pie in the sky" productivity goals, because they'll undermine your efforts. Instead, establishing challenging-yet-reachable goals can motivate your staffers to up their game. Assigning specific tasks to individual employees or teams helps them stay focused and accountable. Speaking of challenging, I'm adding a third 'A' here, which is Awardable. I'm suggesting you incentivize assigned goals by creating an award for staffers who reach/exceed established targets. Before you balk, I get it – the argument that "I already pay my employees to work here, why should I 'reward' them for doing the thing I'm paying them to do" is valid. Except challenges and contests are proven to motivate employees and foster improved morale, which bumps your bottom line up while fostering a fun, lively workplace. It's a carrot/stick thing. If you want to succeed, consider using more carrots, fewer sticks.

Relevant. All goals should help move your business in the direction you want it to proceed. When planning, it's good to ask yourself, "Does this support our mission?"

Time-related. Successful businesses schedule their success. I know this sounds trite, but it's true. Here's where you create and stick to a working calendar. Reach beyond a daily/weekly "to do" list and set goals for the entire year, and beyond. Every class, trip, sales event or promotion needs a start/status update/to be completed date on the calendar. In ink. Make a habit of checking the calendar daily and incorporate calendar check-ins into your daily and weekly staff meetings. This only takes a couple of minutes each day and it will go a long way toward keeping your business on track to meet your goals.

The SMART planning method works no matter if you've got dozens of employees or if your entire workforce could road trip in a Smart car. I hope you'll consider adopting it and adapting it to suit your business's needs. In the next installment of this series, we'll incorporate the SMART planning method to grow your business.

contact Cathryn



RETAILING

The Tip of the Spear – The Local Dive Shop

– by Jeff Cinciripino, Owner of Scuba Shack, Rocky Hill, CT

Jeff is a PADI Master Instructor with 20 years experience, training divers at all levels. Jeff is the author of "Scuba Shack Weekly" - his dive shop's blog. He is also host of a bi-weekly podcast "Scuba Shack Radio" now in its 6th season. Jeff is an accomplished writer and the author of "Your Next Dive - My Adventures in Scuba Diving" published in 2022. Jeff is founder/president of Scuba Educational Alliance of Connecticut – a non-profit fostering a new generation of ocean stewards through diving education. Jeff also serves on the DEMA Board of Directors.



Perhaps you have heard the term 'The Tip of the Spear'. This term is normally used when speaking about certain military units. The tip of the spear refers to a person or a group that is the first to do something difficult or dangerous. For the military, these are the first groups who enter a battle. We can also define the tip of the spear as those on the front lines. When we look at the scuba industry today, we can see how the local dive shop is the tip of the spear.

> **"With so much choice available in the scuba market today across training agencies, equipment providers and travel destinations, the small local dive shop must also make choices that sharpens the tip of their spear."**

As we are well aware, the local dive shop is the primary interface between those who are looking to become divers and divers that span the spectrum from entry level to dive professional. These customers come to the dive shop for training, equipment purchases, gear service, and dive travel. As a vanguard in the dive industry, the local dive shop must be sharp in all phases of their operation. Having a fragmented, dull tip of your spear can be detrimental to business health and sustainability. Let's take a look at some ways to ensure you stay sharp as a spearhead for the scuba world.

It may be stating the obvious but first impressions are lasting impressions and they shouldn't stop there. As you engage with new and existing customers, the local dive shop needs to ensure that they present a positive, clean and inviting environment all the time. A clean, neat and tidy retail, classroom and repair center goes a long way in gaining and keeping your customers confidence. This goes beyond just the physical impression of the brick and mortar store. You must also ensure that you maintain your digital footprint as well. All too often, we engage with businesses who have failed to maintain their website or social media channels. Their digital world is outdated thus dulling their point. Time needs to be allocated routinely for honing these internal elements of your physical and digital environment.

These internal aspects should be addressed and are most definitely within your control. Some may be easier to handle than others. Then there are external forces that can dull your spear. Fragmentation in the scuba industry is an external element that cannot be ignored. We see this fragmentation across training agencies, manufacturers, distributors, and travel destinations. While choice and competition are necessary, too much of a good thing can be problematic when trying to maintain focus. Additionally, too much choice can overwhelm not only the prospective diver, it can be challenging to both the new and experienced diver.

Starting with training, we only need to do a quick internet search for "scuba training agencies" to be flooded with a considerable list of names and acronyms for the various organizations. Why so many agencies and why pick a specific agency? That is a fair question. Many of the agencies promote some level of differentiator. Some may claim to be the largest and most recognizable,



Student divers preparing for their open water dives

while others may claim to be the oldest, while others may indicate that they are the most innovative. All however should subscribe to the World Recreational Scuba Training Council's standards. As a small local dive shop, you can affiliate with any number of the agencies. You have to decide if offering training from different organizations is keeping your spear sharp or are you injecting some ambiguity in the minds of your customers. If you offer certifications from multiple agencies, you must be prepared to articulate the reason and provide the proper guidance to prospective divers. Equally, if you are exclusive to a single training agency, you must also clearly indicate why you made that selection.


Conducting local diving at a state park

Just like training agencies, there are a large number of scuba equipment providers. The big names will offer all the major parts of the scuba kit plus most of the accessories needed to be a fully equipped diver. Others offer specific products like dive lights or exposure protection. There are others that are somewhere in the middle that offer certain products across a narrower spectrum of the rig. It is understandable that each of these providers look to maximize their sales with the local dive shop. Buying levels and incentives are the enticements to get you to purchase more of their line. This fragmentation of equipment providers can prove a challenge to the local dive shop. Here is where tough decisions need to be made to ensure you stay focused. Do you go all in with a single vendor or do you go with what you consider best in class across the broad spectrum of manufactures? Selecting specific brands and models across the wide array of gear can be challenging but also rewarding. You need to choose gear that provides a clear direction to your customer with a compelling reason for your choice. Having everything for everyone across all the major vendors might work for very large retailers but will definitely present an overwhelming challenge for the local dive shop. Choose wisely.

One only has to browse the exhibit floor of the DEMA Show to understand how big dive travel has become. The travel destination exhibits occupy a considerable amount of the show floor. All corners of the globe are represented and they offer unique scuba diving experiences. Special dive packages abound. The dive magazines are filled with advertisements to exotic locations to far flung parts of the globe. As a diver, I want to visit them all. As a business owner of a small local dive shop, I have to think about the ability to sell the trip to our clientele. Here again, the choices are many but the reality might be limited. Do your divers value the diversity of dive trips offered or are they more inclined to travel to familiar destinations? While we as individuals might want to go to many different destinations, you may have to make the choice to narrow your dive travel opportunities to those places that meet your customer's needs. One of the major considerations in keeping your travel spear focused is to also consider the accessibility of the destination. Many times, clients may want to book your trip only to find it challenging to obtain reasonable travel options both in time and cost to get there.

Being on the front lines and being the tip of the spear for the scuba industry is quite challenging yet it can also be very rewarding. You are rewarded when you see the big smile on the faces of the new diver when they finish their open water course. You are also rewarded when you deliver that new regulator and buoyancy compensator to the diver making an investment in the sport. You are rewarded when your customers tell you about the great experience they had on your last dive trip and how they can't wait for the next one. With so much choice available in the scuba market today across training agencies, equipment providers and travel destinations, the small local dive shop must also make choices that sharpens the tip of their spear.

email Jeff

We need your help! Cline's 1st Quarter 2024 Global Dive Survey is out and we need everyone's participation! The results are sent **free of charge** to our Scuba Diving Industry subscribers, as well as published in the May 2024 issue! Scan or click the QR code to take this very quick 3 minute survey!




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SAFETY

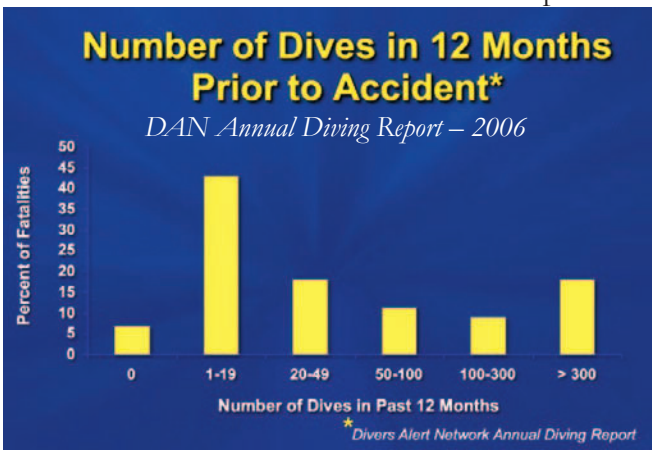
The Normalization of Deviance: The Danger of Taking Shortcuts

– by Dan Orr, President, Dan Orr Consulting



"Every shortcut has a price... usually greater than any reward."

During my over 50 years as a diving professional and 23 years working at Divers Alert Network (DAN), I have read and reviewed many diving accident reports involving divers from all over the diving world. Understanding what turned an enjoyable recreational dive into a tragedy is an important step in learning how to avoid the same fate. To quote Eleanor Roosevelt, "Learn from the mistakes of others. You can't live long enough to make them all yourself." Many case reports detail a series of actions and habitual behaviors, which appear so far beyond comprehension that they defy our definition of "diver error."



In 2008, Dr. Petar Denoble at DAN, reviewed nearly 1,000 diver fatalities. Part of his research identified triggering events that initiated a cascade of circumstances transforming an otherwise enjoyable dive into a fatality (Denoble, P., et al, "Causes of Recreational Diving Fatalities" UHM 2008, Vol. 35, No.6). Those triggering events were:

- Out of Breathing Gas 41%
- Entrapment 21%
- Equipment Problems 15%
- Rough Water 10%
- Trauma 6%
- Buoyancy 4%
- Inappropriate Gas 3%

Looking at this data, you can see that over 60% of the identified triggering events (Out of Breathing Gas, Equipment Problems, Buoyancy and Inappropriate Gas) were either directly or indirectly related to equipment preparation and use. Before going any further, let me comment on one of the triggering events, "Equipment Problems."

From my review of the circumstances surrounding diving fatalities, I believe that "Equipment Problems" is more likely to be "Problems with Equipment." In other words, user error rather than a flaw in the equipment design. In 2012, Divers Alert Network along with PADI and American Academy of Underwater Sciences (AAUS), sponsored Rebreather Forum 3.0. One of the Forum's Consensus Positions was, "The Forum acknowledged the overwhelming evidence demonstrating the efficacy of checklists in preventing errors . . ." Even though the Forum's focus was on rebreather diving, the use of a checklist applies to all forms of diving. Using a checklist and a consistent pre-dive ritual can increase the likelihood of identifying and correcting errors before diving. The problem seems to be that divers, even some with extensive diving experience, may decide to take short cuts or deviate from standard safety procedures due to some sense of time pressure, complacency or just feeling that standard procedures may not apply to them.

DAN's Annual Diving Report has interesting data regarding experience levels for diving fatalities. One graph (above) shows the number of over water dives a diver has done within the 12 months preceding a dive with a fatal outcome. In the graph, you will see two distinct spikes in the number of fatalities. One spike involves divers with fewer than 20 over water dives. This spike in the number of fatalities might be explained by the fact that these divers have limited experience in over water diving, and their skills may not be sufficient to appropriately deal with a crisis underwater. Another spike in the same graph shows an increased number of fatalities with divers that have made more than 300 over water dives in the months preceding a diving fatality. It may seem incredulous that divers with that much recent experience would get themselves in a situation where something occurred that initiated a series of events from which they could not recover.

One possible explanation for a high number of fatalities

among very experienced divers could be that they may have routinely deviated from standard safety procedures so frequently that these deviations became "normalized" because in all previous instances nothing negative occurred reinforcing the use of these shortcuts. Even then, the question that should come to mind is how can trained, equipped, and experienced divers, with more than 300 individual diving experiences in the 12 months preceding their death in a diving accident, get themselves into a situation where their skills, abilities and equipment were not sufficient for them to survive an underwater diving emergency?

Reading through the details of many of these "accidents" found in the annual DAN Diving Accident Reports, causes you to naturally reflect on your own diving experiences and makes you realize that this could happen to you, just as it has happened to a number of highly trained, experienced and apparently qualified divers.



Pre-dive equipment review

Clearly, any of the divers found in the DAN annual Diving Reports were fully capable of following proper diving procedures and had done so on many previous over water dives. When giving seminars on diver safety, one concept that is always brought up is "complacency" as one possible contributing factor in diving accidents. This is certainly true in many cases, but there may be another explanation, "normalization of deviance." Normalization of deviance, in this case, means that certified and qualified scuba divers may have become so accustomed to a conscious deviation from standard diving and safety procedures that they no longer consider these deviations as being a departure from the norm. Divers grow more accustomed to the deviation from standard procedures the more frequently they use them. To others, the deviation from a standard procedure would be seen as incorrect but to the diver, and possibly even others they regularly dive with, the incorrect procedure might seem like a normal part of the diver's diving skills or procedures. When a deviation is made and the outcome is successful without any negative consequences, it subliminally reinforces the use of that deviation. In other words, the diver may experience a subconscious reward for doing the wrong thing because it worked.

The term "normalization of deviance" was coined by sociologist and Columbia University professor Dr. Diane Vaughn in her book, *The Challenger Launch Decision*. She detailed the decisions made by NASA that led to the Space Shuttle Challenger explosion in 1986. There had been problems with the "O" rings in the solid rocket boosters on previous launches without incident. Therefore, it became "normal operating procedure" to make launch "Go" decisions with identified issues with the "O" rings. NASA, unfortunately, did not learn from the Challenger disaster and fell victim to it again when the Space Shuttle Columbia disintegrated when the heat shield failed upon re-entry in 2003. Apparently, there had been heat shield issues during previous re-entries without serious incident, again, leading to issues with the heat shield being considered within "normal" operating parameters.

In order to learn from these space flight tragedies and other, more recent, catastrophic incidents within the diving world, we should fully understand the dangers from deviations from safe operating procedures when they become "normalized." The first step in avoiding "normalization of deviance" is awareness. In diving safety, we discuss the concept of "situational awareness." Situational awareness is where we are constantly monitoring those things going on as we prepare for a dive, during the dive and afterwards. This includes the pre-dive period as our diving companions are preparing and configuring their equipment. During the dive as we monitor our depth, bottom time, breathing gas consumption and anytime changes occur that could increase our risk during a dive. Post-dive as we observe our diving companions looking for signs of issues that could have been the result of the dive. When we identify anything that could negatively impact our diving experience, our knowledge and skills should alert us to take some sort of action.

There are many factors which may increase the likelihood of normalization of deviance. For example, there are

divers, even those with lots of experience, who often develop shortcuts or neglect proper procedures, including those steps found on accepted checklists from training programs, or even those considered as standard safety procedures. The justification for conscious rule breaking often comes where the rule or standard is perceived as ineffectual. In charter boat or liveaboard diving, time pressure may be an issue that would seem to justify skipping a few steps that may be considered inconsequential. Saving a few minutes in preparation may seem to be the right thing to do when others are waiting for you but would seem less important when things go terribly wrong once in the water. Divers may also learn a deviation without actually realizing it. Diver training only covers part of what a diver needs to know to dive, especially in some of the more challenging diving situations. Some divers will adopt modifications from other, apparently more experienced divers that have worked for them in similar situations. They may do this without questioning or completely evaluating these modifications in procedures. And, finally, diving in a culture that permits mistakes to go uncorrected. There is a popular saying nowadays, "See something, say something." This philosophy may certainly have value in terms of accident prevention. Diving companions may be afraid to speak up when they see something about a pre-dive preparation or even a diving skill that deviates from proper procedures or techniques. Even though we are certainly not our brother's keeper, we do have an obligation to our diving companions to help identify if something just doesn't seem right and thus, preventing an accident. There is no problem with simply asking questions about something that is different than what we expect or different than what we've seen before. In fact, it is a way we may learn. You may have actually discovered a new and better way of doing something or you may have brought an error to the attention of a fellow diver, possibly preventing an unfortunate situation from occurring. One caution, however: never take anything at face value when it comes to diving or safety. Evaluate anything that is different from what you know or think to be correct and ask others with more experience or expertise.

"There is a popular saying nowadays, "See something, say something."This philosophy may certainly have value in terms of accident prevention."

Resisting the tendency to deviate from proper procedures or techniques that were developed to keep our sport and divers safe requires a willingness from every diver to always follow the skills, techniques and procedures that they were taught and are accepted as standard safety procedures. One approach to combatting deviations from safe diving procedures is to develop and maintain a culture of diving safety. A safety culture is the enduring value and priority placed on safety by every diver at every level. All divers must commit to personal responsibility for safety; preserve, enhance, and communicate safety concerns as soon as they are identified; actively learn from past mistakes and the mistakes of others and apply safe behaviors based upon lessons learned. Anything less than a full commitment to a safety culture would allow deviations from proper procedures or techniques to become part of normal operating procedure that will, possibly, lead to a tragic outcome from what should be a truly wonderful diving experience.

In order to address accidents in the use of closed-circuit rebreathers (CCRs), as mentioned previously, the technical diving community came together in 2012 at Rebreather Forum 3.0 and developed a series of recommendations to improve CCR safety including the use of checklists. The use of a checklist to reduce the likelihood that some critical aspect of pre-dive preparation is not missed should be an essential part of every diver's repertoire. Unfortunately, diving accident data and post-accident diver interviews show that checklists may still not be considered part of many diver's safety procedures. The lack of checklist use could, in many cases, have possibly prevented a tragedy but, not using a checklist was considered, by many, normal operating procedure. While checklists should be considered a standard part of every diver's preparatory procedure, I would also suggest combining the use of a checklist with a consistent pre-dive ritual for equipment preparation. Getting into a strict routine will certainly help prevent equipment configuration and preparation errors.

Whether we are diving with friends, family, or others enjoying the same sport and dive site, we all want to enjoy the wonders of diving without ending up as a

same adventure, same experience, great safety

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Divo is designed with a clear purpose, to increase safety without affecting the way of diving. Divo is an add-on product, built into the inflator unit, the unit is easy to install and maintain, does not add any new product details, hoses, mounting brackets, etc.

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- In addition, Divo will reduce the number of accidents with a cardiovascular background, such as heart attacks, strokes, epileptic seizures, etc. incidents that are far from being directly linked to a fatal outcome, but the person becomes incapacitated and has no ability to rise to the surface.

- Divo inflates the BCD exponentially, a diver can easily correct the process by resetting the device to avoid rapid ascents.

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SAFETY continued

DAN statistic. We can all agree that a diving fatality is terrible for the sport, the industry and the loved ones that are left behind. Taking short cuts as a regular practice where these changes become "normalized" can certainly compromise our safety and the safety of our diving companions and risk taking away our most precious gift, life.

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email Dan Orr

BUSINESS EDU

Master Your Data to Enhance Your Divers' Experience

– by Peter Letts, owner of Abyss Scuba Diving, Sydney, Australia



Abyss Scuba Diving, nearly twenty years ago, navigated the challenging waters of Sydney's competitive dive market. Despite offering exceptional underwater experiences and top-tier training, standing out amidst numerous options posed a significant challenge. A pivotal shift occurred following a crucial trip to DEMA, where seminars on data utilization illuminated a promising path forward. This strategic transformation served as more than just a lifeline; it propelled Abyss Scuba Diving into a phase of rapid growth.

Dive centers are uniquely privileged to possess a database that would provoke envy in most businesses. Our customers entrust us with their information, allowing us to track their ongoing diver training, diving pursuits, and equipment acquisitions. This wealth of data not only strengthens our connection with customers but also empowers us to deliver unforgettable diving experiences tailored to their preferences. Additionally, it enables us to effortlessly recollect and celebrate special dive occasions, creating enduring memories that will be cherished forever.

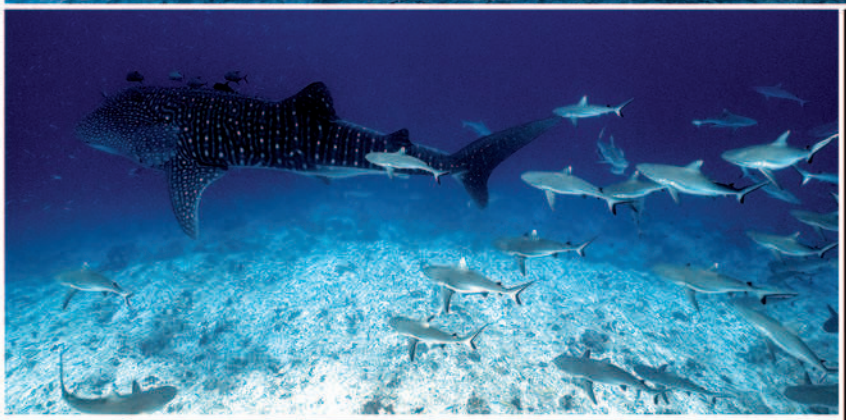
> **"Dive centers are uniquely privileged to possess a database that would provoke envy in most businesses."**

Our Valuable Information Repository: Similar to the exhilaration of encountering a magnificent whale shark or witnessing the graceful glide of a manta ray during a dive, the hidden treasures concealed within the heart of every dive center are waiting to be discovered. Within our meticulously curated database, lies a world not just of mundane names and statistics, but a vibrant tapestry woven with the intricate threads of your divers' underwater adventures, diving preferences, and aspirations. Let me share with you a secret - this treasure trove remains largely unexplored by many dive centers, ready to reveal its wonders to those bold enough to explore its profound depths and unlock its mysteries.

The Magic of Personal Touch: The significance of personal connections cannot be underestimated. It goes beyond simply sending a generic newsletter; it entails crafting messages that deeply resonate with each individual diver. Whether it involves sending heartfelt birthday wishes or extending a sincere invitation to explore their dream diving spot, the goal is to ensure every diver feels genuinely valued. Picture reaching out to a customer with a personalized message like, "Hello [Name], we recall your passion for exploring wreck sites, and guess what? We're planning an unforgettable trip to [Dream Wreck Site] that we're sure you'll enjoy!" This is more than just marketing; it's about nurturing authentic, meaningful relationships. It's about demonstrating to your customers that you recognize them as unique individuals with varied interests and preferences, and that you appreciate them wholeheartedly. Building these connections creates a lasting bond that transcends mere transactions. By fostering such relationships, businesses can cultivate loyalty and trust that stand the test of time.

Abyss Scuba Diving's Voyage into Data: For more than 24 years, Abyss Scuba Diving has been a guiding light for underwater enthusiasts, leading over 50,000 divers









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through mesmerizing depths. Our community thrives with around 3,500 active divers who share our profound passion.

In the past 3 months, our emails have resonated with 6,000 divers, whether through personalized touches or captivating newsletter content. Using the cutting-edge EVE Dive Management Software, we carefully create and send out over 120 tailored messages daily to meet the unique needs of our divers. Our automated system efficiently dispatches an average of 70 targeted emails each day, demonstrating our commitment to engaging with customers personally.

Our main goal is clear: to offer bespoke guidance on courses, equipment choices, and exclusive diving opportunities, all delivered with a personal touch that resonates within our community. We are committed to keeping divers involved, ensuring they are consistently reminded of our presence and encouraged to explore the underwater world. In today's fast-paced environment, divers, like everyone else, may overlook the joys of diving without regular prompts. Our mission is to ensure that diving remains a cherished activity, not a distant memory.

> **"Whether it involves sending heartfelt birthday wishes or extending a sincere invitation to explore their dream diving spot, the goal is to ensure every diver feels genuinely valued."**

Although we are not experts in data analytics, navigating through vast pools of information can sometimes seem as daunting as the vast Pacific Ocean itself. The crucial first step involves diving into the depths. For our team, this meant immersing ourselves in data segmentation to gain a deeper understanding and establish stronger connections with each diver.

By leveraging Artificial Intelligence (AI), Dive Centers can customize email content to resonate better with recipients, boosting engagement and conversion rates. A/B testing helps refine messaging based on data insights, ensuring optimal performance. Embracing modern technology allows Dive Centers to automate processes, personalize emails at scale, and enhance communication strategies effectively.

Software Solutions to Mine Your Database Effectively: Embarking on this exciting journey requires careful consideration when selecting the right tools for your dive center. Explore a range of software solutions tailored specifically for dive centers such as EVE Diving Software, DiveShop360, DiveShopManager (DSM), Salesforce, HubSpot, and Zoho CRM. These platforms offer a variety of features to streamline your operations, including in-depth data analytics, advanced marketing automation capabilities, and tools for enhancing customer engagement. By leveraging these software solutions, you can take your dive center to new heights and ensure a seamless and efficient operation.

Cultivating a Sea of Data Enthusiasts: Creating a culture within dive centers that deeply values every piece of information, understanding its significance in enriching your diving experience, is fundamentally crucial. From the heartfelt welcomes that set the tone to the expertise that guides each step of the way, it's paramount for every team member to play a role in enhancing the adventure. The underlying ethos should be centered around not only accumulating but also actively sharing insights to ensure that every dive becomes a truly unforgettable and enlightening experience. The journey of exploring data has unveiled new horizons and underscored the profound importance of community cohesion and tailored, personalized experiences. Embracing bespoke adventures and the meaningful connections they cultivate stands as a cornerstone. Anticipating eagerly the forthcoming opportunities to connect, engage, and embark on exploration alongside each and every individual.

Join the Adventure: For those who are enthusiastic about learning or getting involved, there is a wealth of resources waiting to be explored. Whether you are diving into the intricate technology behind our personalized communications or are keen to share your innovative ideas, rest assured that we are all ears, ready to listen. The most fulfilling journeys are those shared with others by your side.

Here's to embarking on more thrilling adventures, making new discoveries, and forming data-driven connections. Let's keep delving into the mysteries of this magnificent blue planet, both its enchanting surface and the wonders hidden beneath, all while maintaining a sense of curiosity and camaraderie.

email Peter

RETAILING

The Big Event – Harnessing The Power of Local Events for Your Dive Community

– by Richard Thomas, Owner of International Scuba, Dallas, TX

Rich is a PADI Course Director and owner of two dive retail facilities, one in Frisco and the other in Dallas TX. Rich also serves on the DEMA Board of Directors.



Scuba diving holds a unique allure, drawing a diverse community of enthusiasts from across the globe. Regardless of location, the excitement of exploring the underwater world unites us all. For passionate divers, few obstacles deter them from pursuing their love for the sport. Once captivated by its allure, enthusiasts dedicate themselves wholeheartedly, often reshaping their lives to accommodate their newfound passion. This might entail shifting priorities, pursuing careers in the dive industry, or relocating closer to the ocean.

I've heard tales from seasoned sales representatives and shop owners recounting the golden days when eager students would eagerly purchase complete kits and training before ever taking their first dive. Stories of busy tent sales, attracting hundreds of divers and generating substantial revenues, evoke nostalgia for a bygone era. However, it's evident that times have grown more challenging for the average shop owner, with fierce competition from online retailers, other outdoor activities, and the perceived decline of scuba diving's popularity.



In my efforts to invigorate the diving community, I've recognized our secret weapon: the scuba event. These gatherings, whether grand or intimate, offer divers the opportunity to immerse themselves in the thrill of the scuba lifestyle. Amidst the hustle of our industry, we often overlook how many envy our adventurous way of life. I've had professionals express their willingness to trade places after a weekend of diving—a testament to the allure of our world.

Undoubtedly, your shop hosts events, perhaps a happy hour or cozy pizza nights. Scuba divers are inherently social beings, evident in our tendency to spend vacations alongside fellow divers. My challenge to you is to think beyond the ordinary, to create an event that encapsulates the essence of diving. I'm not suggesting extravagant spending; rather, I propose something more profound—collaboration. Our divers crave connections with like-minded individuals, the chance to meet new enthusiasts, and explore new horizons.

While collaboration may seem difficult, the rewards are immense. Your divers are indifferent to inter-shop rivalries; their focus is on fostering camaraderie within the diving community. By facilitating these connections, you not only enhance their diving experience but also rejuvenate your own enthusiasm for the sport.

Allow me to share my own journey. As a retired musician who enjoys bringing people together, I often host gatherings, inviting local dive shops to join us. While some shops declined, citing concerns or indifference, others embraced the opportunity. Over time, these collaborations evolved into something transformative. Each shop brought its strengths to the table, enriching the experience for all involved. What began as a casual gathering blossomed into an annual Ice Diving Festival, uniting shops from across the country under a shared passion.

I found that everyone enjoys giving back to the dive community. But as your event grows, the amount of work to be successful grows with it. Working with others to put on a great event makes it much more possible and multiplies the fun of any event. Your divers will see that you are collaborating with others and everyone likes to see their shop plays well with others. The success of our little festival underscores the power of collaboration and community. By meeting the desires of our divers, we are helping to create the scuba lifestyle! It's a testament to the resilience and spirit of the diving community, a reminder that we're stronger together.

I invite you to share your experiences and insights. What unique events have resonated with your community? Let's explore the untapped potential of The Big Event together and uncover strategies for growing our community!

email Rich

NON-PROFITS

Ralph Erickson Educational Foundation (REEF): Building Legacies for Generations

– by Patrick Hammer, PADI CD-4325



As a co-founder of PADI and a friend to many, Ralph Erickson was widely respected and loved in the diving community. His wife Karen, Ralph's daughter Karina, my wife Sherry and I wanted to preserve Ralph's legacy. Together, we established the Ralph Erickson Educational Foundation (REEF). Ralph believed everyone should have the opportunity to become a PADI Instructor, and he worked with them to realize this dream. During our instructor courses in Mexico, we often encountered individuals who wanted to enroll but had little to no money. Ralph would welcome them and tell them to pay us when they could. On our subsequent trips, the new instructors would approach Ralph at the hotel with huge smiles and hand him the money they owed. He was well-known at Racine Quarry in Wisconsin, where he would teach instructor specialties and allow payment later. Incredibly, I am quite sure he always got paid.



Pat & Karen teaching In Nassau, Bahamas

The four of us formed REEF and decided to support divemasters looking to enter the industry but faced financial problems. The foundation approves the PADI IDC and IE for groups rather than individuals. We believe we get more bang for our buck this way. We have trained instructors on many islands across the Caribbean, with the largest number at Stuart Coves in the Bahamas. These programs are conducted with little to no cost to the candidates. We love teaching these program because the candidates' joy upon passing the IE is overwhelming. They run over to us with huge smiles and hug us tightly, expressing their gratitude for the new life and career we've helped them achieve. This response is incredibly fulfilling for us, akin to the excitement of a new diver completing their fourth dive—their enthusiasm is truly out of this world.

You may wonder how we do this and raise the money. We do host some fundraisers, but most of the capital is raised from donations, particularly from those who have worked with us or were trained by Ralph. Fundraising today is more challenging than it was years ago. However, we conduct auctions through our website and sell items on Facebook Marketplace. Our best fundraising often occurs at local dive store events or at scuba/Travel shows. Of course, directly asking for a donation never hurts, especially from divers who knew Ralph personally. Additionally, when we are in an area conducting a program, we accept divers into the class that can afford to pay, and they simply donate to the foundation.

Our board, which includes Karen and Karina Erickson along with Sherry and myself, must approve all programs and fundraising ideas. We're always on the lookout for new ways to raise money and find locations to offer training. When we have enough money to conduct a program, we start looking for a place that needs instructors and have a few divemasters (DMs) that cannot afford the Instructor Development Course (IDC) and Instructor Examination (IE). This is where we come in. When contacted, we start some interviews to see if the DM qualifies. We contact PADI to get approval for the program and then we get staff together. Karen and I usually oversee and conduct the IDC. In larger programs, Sherry and Karina also serve as staff instructors and provide additional support. However, we are always open to having others volunteer and assist with the program. Importantly, none of the funds raised are used to pay any staff or volunteers. This aligns with Ralph's values so, we all volunteer our time.

Ralph Erickson and John Cronin founded PADI, and I honestly believe that without these two, diving wouldn't be where it is today. Their love and appreciation for the aquatic world inspired many. They each had unique strengths—John in business and Ralph in training. This combination created a strong partnership that helped PADI become "the way the world learns to dive." Through our foundation we are striving to keep that

NON-PROFITS continued

memory going and support our industry. Looking back at all the instructors we've helped, we are doing just that. Currently, we are looking for places to hold another PADI IDC and looking for candidates who need training. We're also continually working to raise funds to keep Ralph's memory alive.

We keep costs down by not advertising but we have a website (www.reefoundation.org) and use Facebook. You can contact us directly at Patrick Hammer by clicking or scanning the QR code.

email Pat



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ECO PRO

It's the Play, Not the Actors: Education and Coral Reef Ecology

– by Alex Brylske, Ph.D., President, Ocean Education International, LLC



As a passionate educator, I've devoted much of my life to teaching marine science and conservation. And to me, the most rewarding feedback I can receive from a diver is when they tell me, "I'll never again view a coral reef in the same way!" This statement represents a profound shift; a transformation from the superficial 'look at the pretty fish' level to a deep appreciation of the extraordinary experience of diving on a coral reef. However, there's a gap in our industry's professional development process. It doesn't equip instructors with the tools to orchestrate this transformation, leading to a missed opportunity for both divers and marine conservation. I'm not blaming instructors, but I do believe there's a need to improve how they are trained.

> **"Think of it this way: Ecology is the play, and the living creatures are the actors."**

The entry ticket into the professional ranks of the diving industry is typically a scuba instructor certification. This makes sense because the entire business depends on, first, someone becoming a qualified scuba diver. In earning this instructor credential, significant time and effort is placed on acquiring a wide knowledge base and extensive skill set. From equipment mechanics to physics and physiology, instructor candidates spend hours learning about all these subjects. However, little emphasis is placed on the environment. This seems an odd omission, given that the environment is, ultimately, why people seek to dive. The result is that both divers and those who train them are generally ill-prepared to convey what the underwater experience is all about. And this is not an opinion; it's based on hard data. A 2023 survey, "Sustainability in the Diving Industry," sponsored by In-Depth magazine, the Business of Diving Institute, and DAN Europe, found that only 23% of scuba divers said they had been "well or very well prepared to understand the environment in which they were to dive." Worse yet, only 11% of dive professionals said their "instructor training had prepared them well or very well regarding aquatic environments."

> **"Inspire your customers to become advocates for the environment and help reverse the decline of our degrading ocean resources."**

So, barring any fundamental change in the professional development process, how can instructors better convey the underwater experience to their charges in a way that both informs and inspires?

Since almost all human knowledge is now accessible online, filling the holes in one's knowledge gap is no longer a problem. But knowledge alone isn't enough. Simply knowing the names of the creatures that call the underwater world home is not synonymous with understanding the environment in which they live. While having an encyclopedic mastery of names may be useful, it does not imply any understanding of how the environment functions. One way I try to emphasize this with my students is to reiterate continually that a full appreciation of what happens in any ecosystem is based on understanding how that system functions—its ecology—not just the organisms that occupy it. Think of it this way: Ecology is the play, and the living creatures are the actors. Yes, it's good to know some of the actors, but a deep understanding requires knowing the play — how exactly the actors interact. This is especially true regarding coral reefs because of the vast differences between the "actors" in various parts of the world. (The Indo-Pacific has ten times the coral diversity and at least six times the fish diversity of the Caribbean.) Still, regardless of where you end up in the coral reef world, the play is essentially the same; only the actors change. This illustrates an important but overlooked concept in conveying a memorable message to divers: Emphasize function over form. Divers can learn "Who's Who" from any guidebook; on the reef, your job should be to explain the how and why.

Yet even possessing expert-level knowledge does not necessarily ensure success at creating meaningful customer experiences. Even many dive professionals with formal marine and environmental science degrees don't hit the mark. The reason is that knowledge alone isn't enough. The key to success is interacting with the cus-

tomer as an interpreter rather than an educator. While a more in-depth examination of this distinction is beyond the scope of this article, one way to begin changing your mindset from merely an educator to an interpreter is to recognize that meaningful experiences happen when you relate stories, not just facts! This is precisely why novels can be far more effective as learning tools than textbooks. They speak not just to the head but to the heart.

While the goal is to communicate meaningful and inspiring messages about the environment, the question is, inspired to do what? Hopefully, it's to inspire your customers to become advocates for the environment and help reverse the decline of our degrading ocean resources. Doing your job more effectively should be a true win-win situation—happier customers and a better world.

NOTE: For an in-depth discussion on how dive professionals can transition from educators to interpreters, see Dr. Brylske's article "Plugging the Hole in the Scuba Industry: The Critical Difference Between Satisfied and Enthusiastic Customers" click or scan this QR code.

References:

Darcy Kieran, Scubanomics "Survey Results: Sustainability in The Scuba Diving Industry."

TRAINING

Our Take on Training New Divers: A Seven Week Course

– by Tom Leaird, owner of Tom Leaird's Underwater Service, Muncie, IN



First, my background. I became a diver with Yscuba in 1961 and an instructor in 1969. From that I became involved in the Y program including Chairman of the Advisory Committee and writing much of the YMCA Scuba materials. In March 2008, YUSA called to inform me of the decision to put the program in "sunset" with an offer to give me the program. I accepted just because that program had been called the "the conscience of the scuba industry." I couldn't let it die. With the help of others, I started Scuba Educators International in October 2008.

I start with this beginning because as Scuba Educators International (SEI), we have continued the Yscuba concept of a full education, and skills with courses to teach new divers. To date, our group of local instructors since 1969, with both Yscuba and SEI, have certified over 10,000 divers in the Muncie, Indiana area.

With the current SEI Open Water Diver program, our Standards and Procedures manual calls for the traditional Open Water course to be 32-hours of class and pool time plus open water training. The minimum for open water is 24 hours. My group of instructors are currently using a 28-hour course. We feel new students need to know the concepts of a full education and have the skills to effectively and safely dive with a buddy once certified. It might be interesting to know, about half our new students come back for more training including various advanced, specialty, and leadership courses. These programs are more profitable and help sell more gear and other services.

In addition to the course minimums, we want the program to be fun, and an enjoyable experience that sets the student up for a new lifestyle. When I have interns or advanced divers helping during a pool session around halfway through the pool portion, I often ask, "are these students ready for open water training?" The normal answer is "absolutely not." Of course, a few students excel and could be taken to open water at that time. If I asked the students who are having fun and are challenged with all those exercises, I think they would want more also. I also often receive comments in the locker room during the last session like, "this has been fun - we want more."

To date, from the Yscuba background and now with SEI, we have used instructor-led academics. Many other scuba training agencies are using e-learning for the academic portion of the courses. As we head into this new realm, the term "blended learning" will help us utilize both the instructor and the quality of presentation from the electronic presentations. The ultimate goal is a full understanding of our complex recreational activity transmitted to our students. We do not see much mod-

ification in the pool or confined water portion.

I also want our graduating students to tell others about the exciting experiences they have had. Around 80% of our new prospective students come from contact with a previous student. A diver who has not had a good experience certainly will not want to recommend the whole scuba thing to a friend.

Using PowerPoint presentations in the classroom gives us an opportunity to include both the concepts of desired scuba learning, and also, show many photos of divers having fun enjoying many locations and the sights they will see once certified. It just has to be FUN. The final "transfer of knowledge" (exam) passing score is 80%. Our average score on the 90-question test is 88% - always counselled to 100% understanding. At this writing, we have 36 students in four local courses going. The open water training will occur normally over a weekend doing four scuba and one skin dive during two days. Locally, in Indiana, in a rock quarry, students still enjoy the dives even though the temperature may not be the most ideal, while they play with the friendly fish.



New Divers at Philips Outdoor Center

The use of e-learning, for the academic portion of a scuba course, is becoming popular among training agencies and will be the wave in the future. However, even though we feel academics are important, a well-designed and fun pool program is what makes the diver. In handling all that equipment, there are dozens of small tricks to make it easier and more fun. That cannot be accomplished during a two or three-hour pool session. Sure, many of those tricks will be learned during their lifetime of diving.

The pool or confined water sessions begin with skin diving and swimming plus the beginning of mask and snorkel clearing and in the second session breathing on scuba plus breathing without a mask. Yes, every session on scuba includes an exercise where students are asked to do something while not using their mask. At the halfway point, the evening's exercise includes buddy-breathing games. With the pandemic in mind, we do not share the mouthpiece, but tie the primary and octopus together requiring the essence of buddy sharing a single second stage regulator. I say it's just like baseball where the batter warms up with two or three bats. If you can accomplish buddy breathing while working on a project, breathing on a single regulator is easy. With the games approach, the session not only is fun, but we see a huge increase in skill accomplishment.

During the seven-week course (2-hours in class, 2-hours in pool each session) students will have assembled and disassembled their scuba set at least six times. They will not need a divemaster's assistance on a subsequent dive boat excursion in the tropics. We do, of course, know students will have anxiety on the first boat dive but will be able to dive safely with a buddy enjoying our underwater world. Our objective is for dive operators to recognize the superior training these divers have received from their instructor.

I believe that the hour-long 'resort course' often offered in tropical destinations can sometimes deter newcomers due to the challenges with ear clearing, buoyancy control, general apprehension, among others. Consequently, they may not pursue further scuba diving training and could share their negative experiences with potential students. While a positive experience can be uplifting, a negative one tends to have the opposite effect, leading to comments like 'I tried it once but hated it'.

Once certified, our student's c-card includes a statement "DIVE EXPERIENCE OR REFRESHER EXPECTED ANNUALLY."

A past student who hasn't been diving in a year or two – or longer, really needs a refresher for both safety and enjoyment. We offer a pool refresher for those who are headed on a vacation that will include diving. After that two-hour experience in the pool, the first dive at a resort will not be in survival mode, but an enjoyable and fun dive. I try to make those refreshers easy at low cost. We charge only $25 for the scuba refresher including any needed gear. All with the intent of keeping scuba fun. Remember, your new diver is the best marketer for more students in the next class.

email Tom

BUSINESS EDU

Is It Time To Clean-Up Scuba Diver Research Databases?

– by Terry Cummins, OAM, Ph.D., CEO, Terrence Cummins International Business Coaching & Consultancy
Terrence (Terry) Cummins is a prominent figure in the global dive community. He is a diver, photographer, writer, and educator and has been a senior executive of diver training agencies. He currently sits on several Australian government (State and Federal) NGOs and business advisory committees relating to diving, occupational health and safety, tourism and is a specialist in dive business sustainability. Terry has a long list of prestigious awards and accomplishments, including an Order of Australia Medal for his contribution to scuba diving.



In my last article for Scuba Diving Industry Magazine, I vetted one of my pet hates; that the dive industry is full of 'factoids'. You may recall a factoid can be viewed as snippets of facts and/or inconsequential pieces of information that are discussed so often that they are considered to be true although there is little real evidence or data that can validate them. In our case, this phenomenon arises from 'the real fact' that there is very little meaningful data readily available to us of where we lie in the overall scheme of business enterprise. The aim of this commentary is to raise awareness of the key challenges dive businesses have when attempting to gain access and clarity from the industry's databases, the need to exercise caution and the subsequent dangers of arriving at biased conclusions.

> **"Never has it been so important to acquire accurate data to address the implications of long-term sustainability of the scuba industry and it's respective businesses."**

So firstly what is wrong with scuba diver databases? So, let's look at a few of the major issues:

1. Various forms of scuba diving: As we all should know, 'scuba' is an acronym for 'self-contained underwater breathing apparatus' and it comes in many forms. So when doing research it is initially important to distinguish between those using scuba such as the military, commercial, scientific, and recreational scuba divers. Moreover, in the dive tourism context there are various forms of scuba utilized. For example, this may include the use of conventional scuba, SNUBA, and several forms of scuba incorporating a helmet. Some datasets do not distinguish between any of these various forms. Additionally, some datasets mix scuba divers with the much larger population of snorkelers and the growing population of freedivers, especially when it comes to total certification data published by training agencies.

2. Not all divers are the same: While there are issues associated with obtaining data from any of the abovementioned types of scuba diving, recreational scuba diving academic research is more likely to be focused on demographics, sociocultural characteristics, travel motivations and how these factors contribute to the competitiveness between various stakeholders and dive destinations. These studies, and the number of courses offered by the training agencies (e.g. over water, advanced, rescue, night diver, wreck, deep, ice, etc.), illustrates the unique characteristics of different scuba diving sectors. Therefore, we must clearly identify what sector of scuba diving we are studying and possibly avoid the use of cumulative data that may combine all forms of diving under a single category. That is, training agencies commonly include in their cumulative certification totals all divers from freediving, entry level scuba, through to instructor trainers. This in turn may lead to inflated interpretations of the size of specific diving segments and introduces phantom demand (i.e. unrealistic demand for products and services).

Meanwhile, there is a significant number of tourists undertaking; 'introductory diving', 'resort courses', 'try dives,' 'discover scuba diving', etc. In some resort areas such as in Cairns Australia, there is anecdotal evidence that over 120,000 individuals participate in these experience programs annually and that these participants far out-number those either doing certification courses and/or those undertaking diving as a certified diver in the area. It is therefore reasonable to assume a clearer understanding is required of the role experience programs play in the data mix since it is a no-brainer that this sector would have totally different needs to say what some of us call 'main-stream scuba customers'.

Furthermore, confusion is added when researchers attempt to distinguish between those seeking experience dives and certified divers since the training agency; Confédération Mondiale des Activités Subaquatiques (CMAS) labels their entry-level certification course; "Introductory Scuba Experience Training Programme." This program comprises additional training and in-water experience elements to that are found under the same name in other training agencies experience programs. Therefore, we should be aware of the challenges associated with combining data from different training agencies, especially where the same name is used for totally different programs.

> "The aim of this article is to raise awareness of the key challenges dive businesses have when attempting to gain access and clarity from the industry's research databases."

3. Double counting: Researchers must note, in training agency databases the same diver is commonly counted multiple times, over multiple years as individuals could have possibly completed several higher levels of training (i.e. continuing education courses) after initial certification. The inability to identify individuals within data to address double counting further illustrates the issues associated with using cumulative totals to establish insights to a wide range of dive sectors and populations. This double counting can again lead to the creation of a phantom demand identified earlier.

Similarly, when attempting to identify the total number of diving professionals, dive centers and resorts globally or regionally from training agency databases or lists of affiliates, you should be aware that some individuals and professional entities are members of multiple training agencies. Additionally, since some training agency courses have common minimum standards, some facilities issue a certification card from more than one training agency to a diver for completing a single course. This practice in turn inflates and distorts certification data.

4. Single source data: Nevertheless, Dimmock and I (2013) have referenced certification figures released by PADI as a possible insight to diver populations since it may be all that we have available. Still, the potential exists for questionable conclusion to be drawn from such references, since regardless of their perceived overall size, the use of a single data source fails to address the comparative advantage or significant presence some smaller agencies may have within a particular interest sector. There are approximately 160 training agencies active across the globe and some may have larger market shares in particular nations, regions or within training categories than they have overall while others specialize in different types of diving. For example, apart from the mainstream training agencies there are approximately 18 training agencies that specialize in certifying divers in technical diving and 17 that certify various levels of cave diving.

Dive Equipment and Marketing Association collects certification data from willing contributors however there are other US-based training agencies that have chosen not to contribute. While the DEMA data reveals some insight to certification figures and some demographics across the US and its states, the data is by no means a full reflection of the entire US population of divers and has little application internationally.

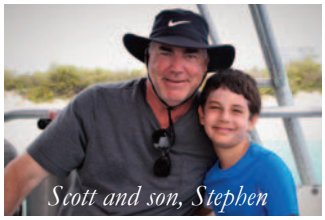
Nevertheless, this does not stop agencies such as PADI claiming to be the "The Way The World Learns to Dive" and which subsequently attracts researchers to utilize the relative narrow window of data PADI provides to the public on their website. Additionally, the Cline Group Advertising, Marketing and Consulting data is heavily US eccentric, but certainly not by design. For example, Cline's Quarterly Survey Results are often skewed to North America respondents with only a handful of contributors from elsewhere. While this data may be useful in identifying trends in the US context, for it to be useful elsewhere a larger number of respondents would need to be engaged from within the broader global dive industry community and I encourage the reader to contribute if they do not already.

5. Restricted data: Much of the industry's databases are restricted, are only available to select members of a diver training agency, clients of equipment suppliers, their respective industry associations or to those who have provided a strong case for access to more detailed

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Top Press Releases From April 2024

– by Scott Jones, President, Dive Newswire Press Service


Scott and son, Stephen

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Margo Peyton Named 2024 Inductee into the International Scuba Diving Hall of Fame

Margo Peyton, renowned for initiating Kids Sea Camp in 2000, was nominated for induction into the International Scuba Diving Hall of Fame on March 22nd at Beneath the Sea in New Jersey.

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DEMA and Scuba Training Organizations Write to Legislators For Support of the DIVE BOAT Act

On April 15, DEMA joined with leading scuba training organizations NAUI, PADI, SDI, and SEI, and sent a letter urging Congress to support the DIVE BOAT Act



"I've Looked At Life From Both Sides Now!" – Industry Leader Dan Orr Reflects on 60 Years in the Dive Industry

I was asked "If I knew then what I know now, would I have done anything differently in my career as a diving educator and safety advocate?"



Mermaid Dreams – Introducing Youngsters to the Underwater World

PADI Mermaid Instructor Kristin Janise runs a Mermaid Swim School at the Silverton Aquarium in Las Vegas. Is this a gateway activity for kids to scuba?

information. A reasonable explanation for dive industry participants, either minimizing the release of business activity levels or decline to release any data at all, is based on the fear it may aid a competitor's investigations into market opportunities or there is the potential for conflict to develop in business-to-business (B2B) relationships with existing clients if data releases were used to identify business potentials for others operating, or wishing to operate, in the same sector with similar products and services. In other cases, it may be to avoid a company from looking smaller than they wish to be perceived. This creates a crucial challenge for those interested in gaining insights to specific business activity levels whether they may be interested in how many scuba regulators are sold globally annually or how many certifications were awarded in a specific area/region/country.



6. Big data: A further frustration is that data available from sources such as the US-based National Sporting Goods Association (www.nsga.org), Sports and Fitness Industry Association (www.SFIA.org), Outdoor Industry Association (www.outdoorindustry.org), travel industry statistics (www.poweroftravel.org/statistics), similar organizations outside the USA, often incorporate the scuba diving industry business activity amongst broader categories. Additionally, and as discussed earlier, some of these databases do not necessarily contain the business activity of all participants in a particular sector.

7. Drop-out rate: There are further barriers to addressing scuba diving populations resulting from the 'drop-out rate' or periods of 'time-out', especially during child-rearing years. While these databases do not exist, these phenomena significantly impact the usefulness of cumulative certification data. This may again lead to, and/or create that phantom demand for services associated products, services, and travel.

8. Stakeholder surveys: Market research surveys and analysis conducted internally by stakeholders may be questionable since such investigations may not have been constructed using acceptable research protocols, may contain undisclosed bias/limitations of the data and/or the subsequent analysis is unable to satisfy the rigorous scrutiny as expected and commonly required in the academic world. This may include 'social desirability bias's (i.e. respondents answering questions in a manner that will be viewed favorably by others).

But wait there is more...

When it comes to objectively evaluating the quality of destinations and dive sites, commonly rather subjective criteria is used to arrive at conclusions which may foster the development of more factoids. For example, the wreck of the Yongala off the Queensland, Australian coast is listed by one author as the top dive site in the entire South Pacific. However, can this, and similar claims of "best", "leading", etc., be justified, given the tens of thousands of choices available, the idiosyncrasies and various experience levels of individual divers to make value judgements. That is not to mention the availability of meaningful data and objective criteria that would validate the statement. And what would that data be based on (e.g. number of fish species, visibility, visitation numbers, etc.)?

Never has it been so important to acquire accurate data to address the implications of long-term sustainability of the scuba industry and it's respective businesses. While this commentary advises to exercise caution when utilizing dive industry databases, it also stimulates a collective call for stakeholders to release more meaningful data that may, in turn, contribute to a clearer understanding of our respective endeavors and challenges (current and future) and support strategic planning efforts. Additionally, this may assist in creating new opportunities; develop potentials to co-create experiences, spark degrees of cooperation and collaboration between stakeholders and generally promote the development of the scuba sector.

email Terry

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