

# RINKER BOATS CUSTOMER FORUM CASE STUDY



RINKER  
MODELS ABOUT DEALERS EVENTS OWNERS APPAREL NEWS BROCHURES/DVD SHOPPING TOOLS

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- Steve Rosenberg, Rinker Boats

## Highlights

Rinker uses a customer community to drive customer engagement.

The old community platform was clunky and customers were fleeing to independent forums.

Vanilla provided a stable and modern solution that drove a dramatic increase in customer engagement levels.

"In our first three months using Vanilla, we have seen more engagement than we had in the previous 3 years"

Rinker is a privately held boat manufacturer based in Indiana that has been making boats for over 50 years.

## Background

Early on, Rinker realized the importance of the web as a way to engage customers. They created a very popular online owners club that offered members discounts and services. The club included an online forum, but the software was now old and cumbersome compared to what people expected on the modern web. In early 2013, Steve Rosenberg, Rinker Boats Chief Content Officer was tasked to take a hard look at "what Rinker owners needed and re-evaluate the situation".

## The Need

As Steve started to study how his customers interacted online, he noticed that his customers were discussing his brand in many places, including enthusiast boating forums. "Our customers were very active on independent forums. This forum had its share of technical problems too. We needed to give our customers a secure stable forum to get that traffic onto our own domain." The Rinker team, after careful thought, decided it needed to revamp their owners club and connect to the larger boater community as well.

As Steve put it "If someone buys a

container of bleach, it's a consumer product. When people buy Rinker boats, it's part of their personality. They are not boat owners, but boaters. It's part of a lifestyle. Owning a Rinker is part of an identity. Sharing with others engaged in the lifestyle is very rewarding for them. The highs and lows, the joy of boating with others is something unique. We wanted a place where boaters could connect".

They began an exhaustive vendor search with a criteria list for their new community. They wanted something simple to use, but also something stable that would increase community participation. They needed a platform that would be easy to moderate and spam was also a big concern. Also important to the Rinker team was to make sure to choose software where boat owners could share information with one another and also communicate with Rinker support staff and with dealers. The search led Steve and the Rinker team to Vanilla Forums.

## The Result

Vanilla Forums began the migration for Rinker Boats in mid-2013. "There was some concern as we were moving from another vendor, but the process between

starting the migration to the first iteration of the site was fast and effortless. In the end, the migration was easier than one could imagine, with great communication from the Vanilla team all the way through the process."

Six months into using Vanilla Forums Steve and his team are really pleased with the product: "Well, first the signup process is simple and easy. The ability to share images is great. So is the ability to comment and engage--as opposed to a one sided conversation in a post. Best of all is the user interface, it's so simple and intuitive for everyone."

Vanilla Forums has also made Steve's daily job easier: "As an administrator of the site, the reporting is second to none. It's gives me a great daily snapshot of what's working and what's not. We can refine our messaging on the fly. I also appreciate the ability to engage with customers at a granular level. All of it is beyond the value of what I am able to measure".

Steve also found Vanilla Forums to be an important tool working alongside Rinker's Social Media presence: "Having a forum you can rely on is quite a different touch point, than social media. By owning the platform where the discussions are happening, we get the benefits of SEO as well as being able to respond directly to customer service issues. Last but not least, having a forum is more permanent, more direct and more engaging for everyone."

As for Rinker's goal of engagement, Steve has been pleasantly surprised: "In our first three months using Vanilla, we have seen more engagement and page views than we had in the previous 3 years with the previous vendor. We don't just attribute this to the Vanilla software but also the guidance and best practices they shared with us. It has been a tremendous success and we are so grateful we made the switch. I just wish we had done it sooner. I would encourage anyone else considering a similar change to do it sooner rather than later."

