



REPORT ON ATLANTIC AREA MARINE LEISURE SECTOR CONFERENCE – THE DYNAMICS OF BUSINESS INNOVATION

The international marine leisure conference was held at the National Maritime Museum Cornwall, Falmouth, on October 12th and 13th 2010.

It brought together European partners from the European funded NEA2 (Nautisme Espace Atlantique) project and marine leisure businesses from the Atlantic coastal areas. Speakers from each region were invited to deliver presentations, in the spirit of collaboration and the sharing of expertise, knowledge and best practices.

The high-calibre line-up of marine experts gave insightful and inspirational talks on the subjects of innovation, sustainability and partnerships, while drawing on their experiences and sharing the keys to their success. Plus, they demonstrated how this can help businesses prosper and remain competitive in the current difficult economic climate.

The conference won considerable praise by those who attended. It was organised by Cornwall Development Company and Cornwall Marine Network on behalf of Cornwall Council and was part-financed by European Regional Development Funds, from the Interreg IVb Transnational Cooperation Atlantic Areas Fund, Cornwall Council and participating organisations.

Some 100 delegates heard how the marine leisure sector is worth an estimated £295million to the Cornish economy. They were then presented with a series of motivational talks.

Anne-Marie Hodemon, of the Regional Council of Brittany, stressed the importance of the marine leisure industry for all the regions' economies and how working together on a common objective can help create jobs and prosperity. She said: "Innovation is a necessity to keep abreast of challenges we face today. I really hope we are going to work together in finding ways to be innovative."

Conrad Humphreys, triple round-the world yachtsman and sports event manager from Plymouth, demonstrated the importance of understanding what makes people tick, the seamless sharing of knowledge and of grasping core team values in order to innovate, inspire and engage. He stressed that for a winning formula it is vital to "examine every element of a campaign", to "push people harder than they think they can go" and to "make the feeling of success habitual".



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Ken Wittamore, Cornish marine technologist and director of Triskel Marine, gave creative examples of how innovative is used to find strategic maritime solutions. He told the audience: "Innovation is the key to our future. It allows us to expand the market even further and be more competitive and sustainable in the global market."

Tanguy Le Bihan, French naval architect, explained the creative thinking behind his innovative electric E3H boat called Remora. The eco-friendly design emits no noise and is extremely efficient for marina work. His Remora was also moored alongside the Maritime Museum for the duration of the conference for delegates to experience.

Nigel Irens, racing multihull design pioneer from Devon, described the innovation behind his designs and how these have adapted to changing market trends. He suggested collaborative ideas to support boat builders, for example how to improve the supply chain of parts that small boat builders cannot make themselves.

Fernando Merino, Portuguese textile engineer, gave a futuristic insight into the development of modern textiles, how the fashion industry feeds into trends for marine textiles, and how innovation is pivotal to this process.

Bob Davies, international business consultant and Chartered Institute of Marketing director, summed up the first morning's presentations with an analysis of the power of market intelligence and how to make the customers' needs central to all innovative business planning.

Chris Hines MBE, Cornish environmental pioneer and driver of positive change, kicked off the second morning's presentations with a motivating talk on how to engage the public to make a difference. He encompassed a range of inspiring examples such as from his work as founder and director for Surfers Against Sewage and as sustainability director for the Eden Project . He said: "Once you go up the public agenda, you go up the political agenda." And he stressed the importance of "collaboration and getting together for the common good" and to "be unrealistic and have a dream and think 'yes, I can do that'".

Howard Davey, Devon environmental protection, management and business consultant, gave an insightful talk on how to be innovative to maintain a competitive edge in the global surfboard market. He gave specific examples of lessons learned from his work with Cornish surf blanks producer Homeblown. Homeblown uses innovative foam technology while placing the environmental impact of its products as one of its primary considerations.



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Jeff Sacréé, managing director of Gecko Head Gear which manufactures and designs helmets for the marine environment, showed first-hand from his personal experience the stamina and perseverance often required to be a successful innovator. In 1994, he developed a light-weight, heat retaining helmet for himself to prevent surfers "ice-cream headaches", and the Gecko Headgear story began. Today clients of his innovative models include the RNLI, British and overseas military and police, Red Cross and Greenpeace.

James Wharram, Cornish award-winning designer and pioneer of early catamaran sailing, captivated the conference audience with experiences drawn from his 56 years of innovation in sailing, designing and as a marine archaeologist. He explained how the recent wishes of the UK's Classic Boat magazine matched those of a man on a remote Pacific Island, leading to the design of his 27ft Amatasi catamaran, which won him Classic Boat competition's first prize. The acclaimed designer, who has sold more than 10,000 boat designs in his career, offered some reassurance to marine businesses on the current economic crisis saying: " During my 56 years of sailing and designing I have experienced two financial crises that affected yacht building, in 1973 and in 1992. Compared to previous blips, the present financial crisis in Britain and other European countries, is likely to be a disaster for the way yacht building has developed as an 'industry' in the last 20 years. However, with man's background of watercraft usage going back tens of thousands of years, I suggest that modern humans have an innate affinity / desire / instinct to get out on the water in boats. Therefore there will always be a wish of people to own a watercraft."

Jean-Michel Gagné, off the Brittany marinas association APPB, demonstrated innovative ways in optimising marina capacity which are currently adopted in France. For example 24hr card controlled access to slipway marinas and a unique boat-lift system for dry-stack storage operations.

Massimo Chiodo, of K-Marina in Spain, drew on his extensive international experience to talk about innovative developments in the global marina market. This included leading products such as The Palm in Dubai.

In addition to the motivating talks, delegates attended interactive workshops each afternoon on raising finance, delivered by **Oxford Innovation**, and market intelligence, delivered by the **Chartered Institute of Marketing**. And Falmouth boatyards **Pendennis** and **Rustler** laid on fascinating tours and demonstrations about the innovative techniques behind their designs and builds.



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Feedback and testimonials:

- Of the 24 feedback forms received 23 were either very or totally satisfied with the conference
- Descriptions about the conference included "sophisticated and informative", "high quality", "superbly conducted and organised", "beneficial", "interesting", "pitched at right level", "very well organised", "very good", "gaining a network opportunity", "chance to see the bigger picture", "exceeded expectations", "wealth of talent and positivity", "quality of speakers fantastic", "opportunity to meet speakers was excellent", "well done Cornwall, you did a fantastic job".

Constructive comments included:

- Perhaps ideas for a specific piece of work involving working together and proposals for follow-on actions
- Would have been good to send a full programme of timings and talks ahead of the event
- The final programme could have been sent out earlier. It was so professionally designed, businesses might have taken more notice of the conference a lot more and put it in their diaries earlier on.
- The initial booking information did not list speakers/topics for the two days, which made it difficult to decide on booking requirements
- Would have preferred on-line booking
- Times changed from 10am-3pm to 9am-4/5pm
- If people had received more info about the conference in advance perhaps more would have attended. A shame more press and potential delegates did not attend such a great conference.
- The lighting in the lecture theatre was poor. Often the speakers were in darkness
- For small companies and one-man-bands two days was a big chunk of time to have out of the office. It would be quite nice to have single day events as well as these bigger ones. It would work better for me.
- Surfing and sailing were the two prominent sports. Maybe other watersports would have been good.
- The museum's parking facilities are unsuitable, with only 3hrs parking tickets available. I had to miss one lecture while messing about re-parking my car. Also expensive, £6/day (we left at 2.30pm).