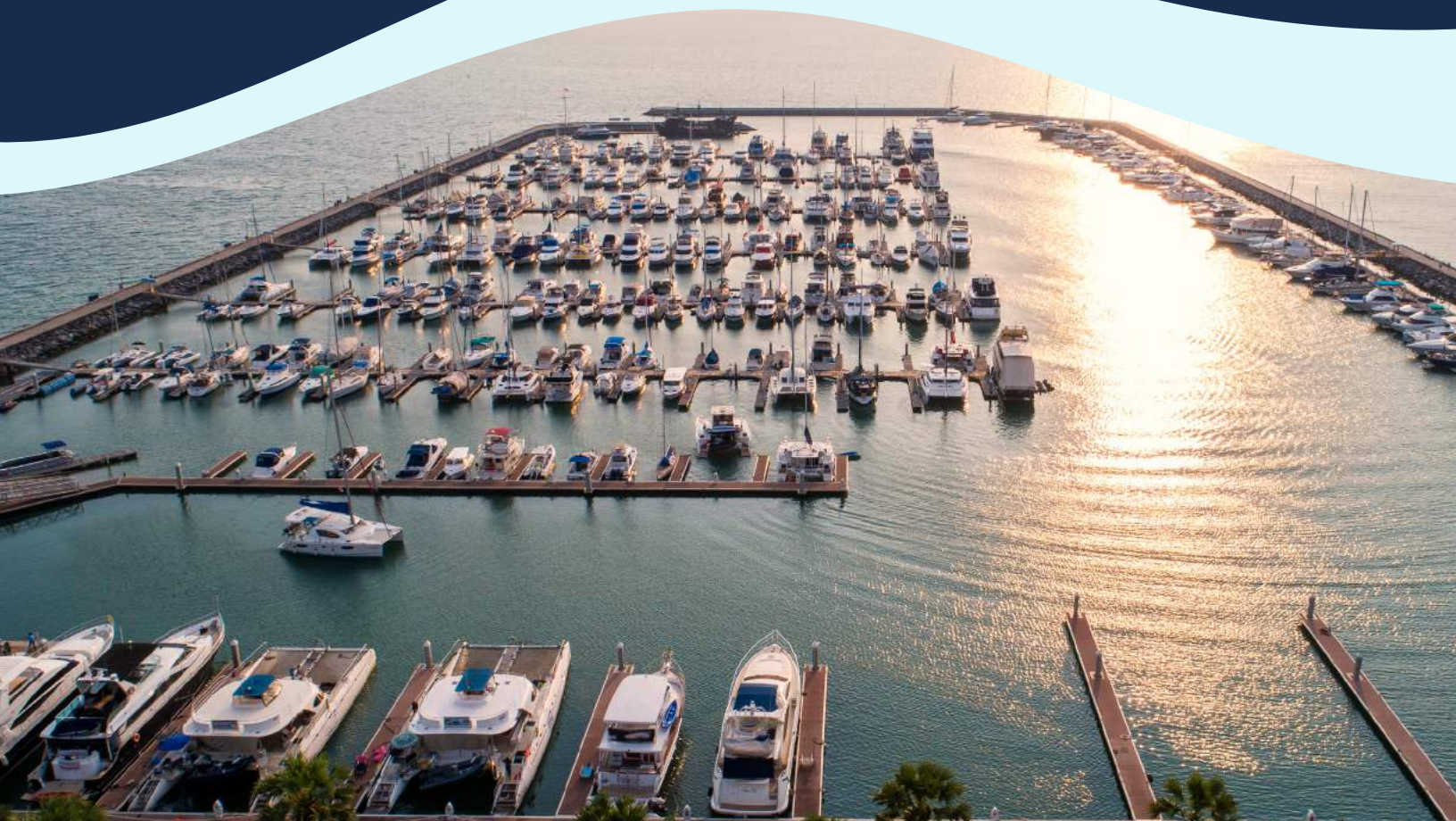# DOCKWA

# 5 Ways to **Modernize Your Marina**

## to Meet Boaters' Expectations

Learn how **modernizing your marina with technology** can help you meet boaters' changing expectations and operate more efficiently — without losing meaningful customer interactions.

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## Introduction

# Boaters' expectations have changed

Marinas are experiencing a wave – and it's not the kind our industry usually handles. This wave is digital: Technology has entered the space.

Boaters are accustomed to using technology to simplify virtually every aspect of their lives. As a result, they're starting to expect those same digital conveniences from their boating experiences.

The [fastest growing segment of boat owners](#) is younger, more diverse, and highly educated. Many are young professionals who are used to using technology in nearly every facet of their lives. From booking a slip to finding monthly storage, boaters expect modern technology at the marinas they visit. They don't want to wait around on your dock to fill out paper forms by hand or trek to a marina office to pay for something.

**This guide will:**

- Help you understand how to meet modern boaters' expectations without sacrificing the human touch that makes your marina shine.

- Illustrate how technology can positively impact each step of a typical marina transaction — from booking to arrival to post-purchase follow-up.

- Highlight examples of cutting-edge companies that have adapted to changing buyer expectations by embracing technology.

# The 5 best ways to modernize your marina:

1. Offer online booking and inquiries

2. Use digital contracts and documentation

3. Accept digital payments with a point of sale (POS) platform

4. Streamline recurring billing

5. Use digital customer relationship management tools

# 1 Offer online bookings & inquiries

In other areas of their lives, boaters are used to the convenience and flexibility of technology. They rely on the internet to book hotels, reserve tables at restaurants, and make appointments. So if you're not offering a similar digital booking experience, you're leaving revenue on the table.

Many of your marina customers — particularly the younger generation of boaters — will discover your marina online. And most importantly, they'll be more likely to inquire or book with you if there's an **effortless, digital way to do so.**
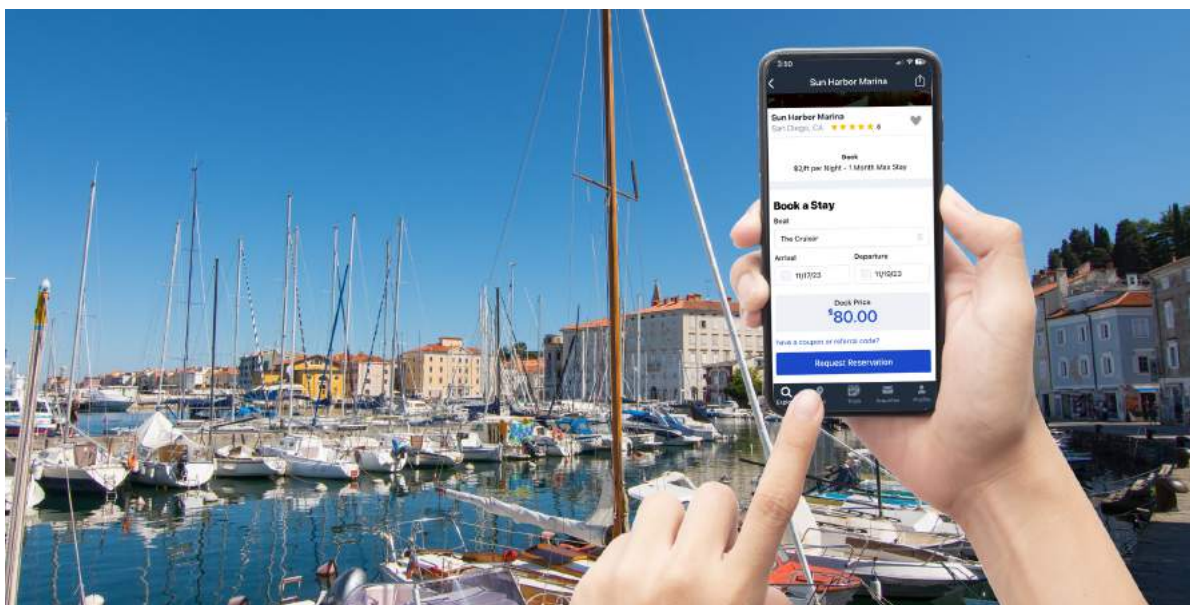
Boaters are sick of calling around, waiting on hold, and leaving voicemails just to get through to a marina and reserve a slip. What's more, roughly **45% of boaters** submit inquiries *outside of business hours*. So by empowering them to book at all hours of the day, you're increasing your chances of getting far more business.

**Bottom line:** If you aren't offering your prospects and customers a way to find your marina and reserve dockage online, you risk losing out on valuable business.

# Fact:

45% of boaters submit inquiries
outside of business hours.

# Example: OpenTable

OpenTable is a startup that empowers diners to make reservations at local restaurants. According to company founder Chuck Templeton, he was inspired to form the company after seeing his wife spend hours trying to book a table at a restaurant on the phone.

Notably, OpenTable focuses on providing value to both consumers and restaurants.

Diners worldwide get access to reserve a table at tons of different restaurants in their area, plus suggestions on new and popular options based on what other users are saying. They can book a table at a specific time and change or cancel their reservation from their phone or computer — all completely free of charge.

From the restaurant's perspective, OpenTable provides a single system to handle all steps of the process, from confirming their reservation by email to following up after they dine to request a review.

**For restaurant staff, accepting reservations online:**

- Reduces phone call volume.
- Eliminates back-and-forth communication if a diner has to reschedule or cancel.
- Increases reservation volume since the process is simple and digital.

# How to adopt online bookings & inquiries

If you want to start simple, begin by adding a reservation or inquiry form to your website to collect all the information and documents needed. That way, you can assess availability and confirm the reservation quickly. Make sure all form data is stored in a central location to streamline the process.

Eventually, your goal should be to transition to a more powerful digital platform that allows prospects to book a slip or mooring directly from their phone or computer.

**Look for a system that allows you to:**

- Manage reservations from anywhere.
- Communicate with customers digitally.
- Centralize information like insurance, payment details, and boater preferences.

# How to keep it human

Many marina owners hesitate to adopt online booking because they feel it eliminates that human touch. But allowing digital booking doesn't have to come at the cost of customer service or relationship building.

As a marina owner, you've already communicated with boaters for years. Digital tools won't interrupt that – if anything, they'll enhance it. For example, adopting a platform that allows you to message boaters digitally means you can actually enjoy *more* one-on-one conversations with customers, and you can respond to their inquiries or questions faster.

## **2** Use digital contracts & documentation

Once boaters complete the booking process, the next step is to collect contracts and signatures.

**Traditional methods involve:**

- Printing paper contracts.
- Mailing them to each customer.
- Making each customer fill out and sign the contract by hand.
- Forcing customers to mail contracts back to you or return them in-person.

But technology has simplified the process of collecting documents and signing contracts for both parties.



Not only are digital documents and e-signature options convenient for customers, but they also allow your team to complete a critical step in the purchasing process with almost zero manual effort. With e-signature tools, there's no need to wait for customers to stop by your marina office or expect them to sign and mail documents.

# Example: McCloskey Motors

Digital contracts and e-signatures are particularly effective in industries that require a lot of paperwork. For example: the automotive industry.

McCloskey Motors is a family-owned car dealership based in Colorado Springs, Colorado. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020, the state of Colorado (like many others) ordered nonessential businesses to close. Car dealers could no longer make in-person sales, but they were allowed to sell online and arrange for delivery at service centers.

This order forced McCloskey to devise a solution quickly, or risk even more significant disruption to their business. After signing on with DocuSign — one of the leading digital document and e-signature providers — and adjusting their normal workflow, McCloskey Motors was able to take its entire purchasing process online.

After incorporating DocuSign into the car buying process, McCloskey shaved a full hour off each car sale. The time savings equaled roughly 350 hours of staff's time annually. It also made compliance with required state and legal ID checks much easier, thanks to its improved security measures.

What's more, McCloskey found that using digital signatures and verification methods made interactions with customers and prospects more personalized, not less.

# How to adopt digital contracts & e-signatures

It's never been easier to scan and digitize documents now that so many people have access to a powerful camera in their pocket. You can easily find apps that let you scan paper documents and turn them into image files or editable PDFs.
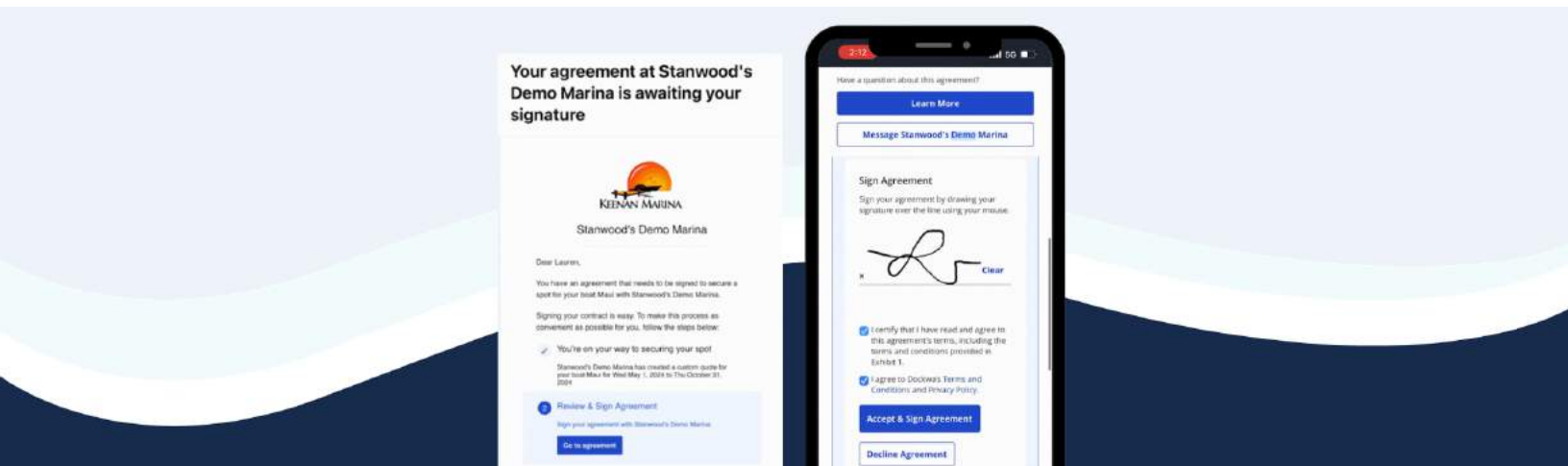


## Good

Simply turning your current contracts into digital documents is low-hanging fruit to start the process.

From there, setting up software like DocuSign is relatively easy to integrate into your current workflow.

## Best

Alternatively, you can further streamline your digital contract process by **adopting marina software** that helps you manage reservations, contract signatures, and payment processing in one place.

Using software designed specifically for marinas ensures that the tools work seamlessly for your unique business.

## How digital contracts strengthen customer relationships

Most boaters will be thrilled that you've switched to a digital process. In fact, 73% of boaters prefer to sign contracts and pay invoices digitally.

Of course, some more traditional boaters may wonder why you switched to digital contracts or e-signatures. But you can easily paint a picture of the many benefits going digital provides everyone.

**Remind your boaters that digital contracts:**

- Save them time.
- Require less work on their part to sign and return.
- Benefit the environment by cutting down on paper and envelopes.
- Prevent them from having to print out a contract on their own.
- Spare them a trip to the post office or your dock office.
- Allow them to pay digitally.

# Fact:

73% of boaters prefer to sign contracts and pay invoices digitally.

# **3** Accept digital payments with a point of sale (POS) platform

Once you've generated a contract and received the necessary documents, it's time to collect payment.

People today are used to paying with credit cards. Almost every other industry has this in place already – when was the last time you went to a store that didn't accept credit cards?

Notably, one study showed that credit card purchases accounted for 28% of all payments in 2021. And households with an income above six figures use credit cards at an even higher rate: more than one out of every three purchases.

And it's not just credit cards that modern boaters want to use. Digital payments are another method rapidly growing in popularity.

From coffee shops to movie theaters to clothing stores, businesses accept payment methods like Apple Pay and Google Pay to allow contactless payments from a customer's smartphone. In fact, data from Ohio University shows that 70% of American retail stores now accept Apple Pay, which uses NFC technology to allow customers to pay with a credit or debit card stored on their iPhones.

**Allowing customers to use credit cards and modern digital payment methods can help:**

- Boost your sales (boaters who don't carry cash or checks can't fuel up or shop at your ship store if you don't accept digital payments).
- Simplify your billing, invoicing, and accounting.
- Improve the customer experience.

## Example: Toast

**toast**

Toast is a digital technology platform for restaurants. The company was founded by three friends who spent a lot of time in bars, restaurants, and cafes. They observed that the wait time between a patron requesting a check and receiving it was often a point of friction in the dining experience.

So, they developed an easy POS solution for restaurant staff to almost instantly produce a patron's bill, and for patrons to pay their bills quickly.

**From one easy platform, waitstaff could quickly:**

- Enter a patron's order
- Pass it along to the back of house staff
- Produce a check on-demand
- Swipe the patron's credit card right from their table

This effortless process sparked a POS revolution in the restaurant industry. And not only did it make customers happy, but it saved time and hassle for restaurant staff, too!

# Fact:

Most consumers prefer digital payment methods.

# How to start accepting digital payments

At a minimum, you should be able to take credit cards from new and existing customers. Almost any business can start taking cards by signing up for a free or low-cost merchant account with a payment provider like Stripe or Square.

However, you may find it's often more convenient to have this function **included in a comprehensive marina management platform** that you can also use for marketing and operations purposes.

If you're already comfortable with credit card workflows, consider going a step further to accept digital payments. You can do so with free or inexpensive tools offered in modern point-of-sale (POS) systems.

# How digital POS payments strengthen customer relationships

The reality is that people have come to expect to use their phones or credit cards to send payments. Besides that, many boaters don't want to carry cash with them, particularly if they've got a busy itinerary with several locations.

Boaters will appreciate that they can quickly pick up last-minute items like ice, snacks, fishing supplies, or drinks without having to deal with cash or walk back to your marina's office to pay with a credit card. It will make them appreciate your efforts to provide a seamless, enjoyable experience.

# **4** Streamline recurring billing

Marina owners understand that while one-off transient customers are important and help support cash flow, the bread and butter of their business is **recurring monthly customers who pay for long-term rentals.** These customers typically sign a contract to pay the same amount each month to store their boats.

It's a great arrangement for everyone: Your customer gets the peace of mind of knowing their boat is safe, while you get predictable revenue you can depend on each month.

There's only one problem for marinas still using outdated technology: **collecting payment.**

Getting a customer to pay their balance every month isn't always easy if the customer isn't there in person.

**Many marinas still rely on traditional methods to collect payment for long-term storage:**

1. Send out an invoice or monthly statement in the mail
2. Wait for the customer to mail back a check.

Besides the unpredictability of sending important financial documents via snail mail, it can be difficult to get customers to mail a check to you every month, especially if they travel to new locations frequently.

The *good news* is that **modern boaters are very open to digital processes for recurring billing.** They don't mind keeping their credit card or bank account information on file for you to process automatically.

So it's a win-win: Boaters enjoy the convenience, and you save time.
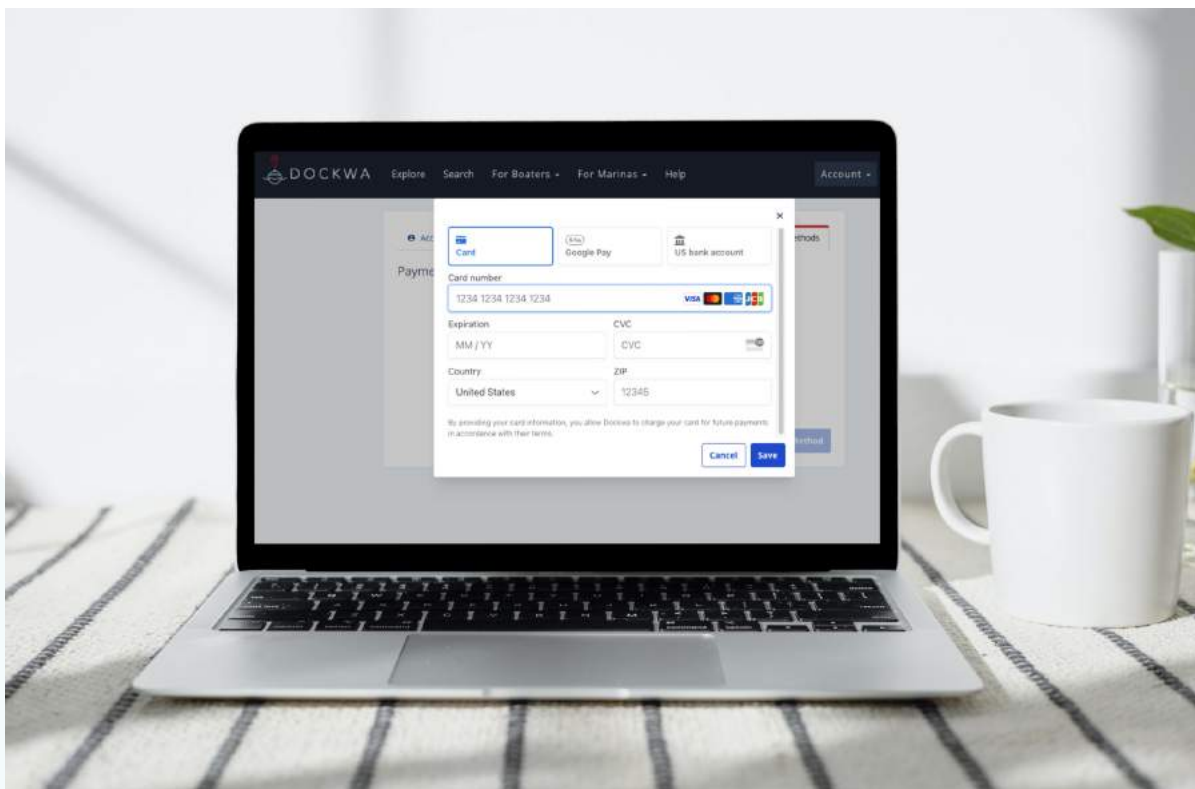


> **" Modern boaters are very open to digital processes for recurring billing.**

# Example: Netflix

Before Netflix became the subscription-based TV streaming mogul it is today, the company had actually already pioneered the subscription business model with its DVD rental service. After launching its monthly DVD rental subscription plan in September 1999, Netflix grew rapidly, going public less than three years later in May 2002.

Netflix's founders may not have known then, but their DVD mailing platform was priming an entire economy for the subscription-based business model boom.

After Netflix launched its digital streaming platform in 2007, other media companies quickly followed suit. Hulu, Apple TV, and Roku all launched in 2008.

Of course, the subscription-based TV streaming model couldn't have taken off without consumers buying into it. Customers had to be comfortable handing over their payment information and agreeing to automatic direct debits hitting their accounts every month.

Notably, consumers weren't just willing to do that — they were eager to, in exchange for the convenience of "setting and forgetting" and receiving their services without interruption.

# How to get started with recurring payment collection

If you haven't already looked into online payment systems, there are plenty of simple options for digitally processing payments from a bank.

Several businesses and consumers use popular apps like Venmo and CashApp for digital payments, and the Zelle payment protocol is supported natively by many of the largest bank franchises.

Start small by only accepting one or two forms of payment with these new protocols, and then update the process as time goes on. If it works well, you can adapt it to more transaction types within your business to speed up cash flow and reduce reliance on paper checks and mailed invoices.
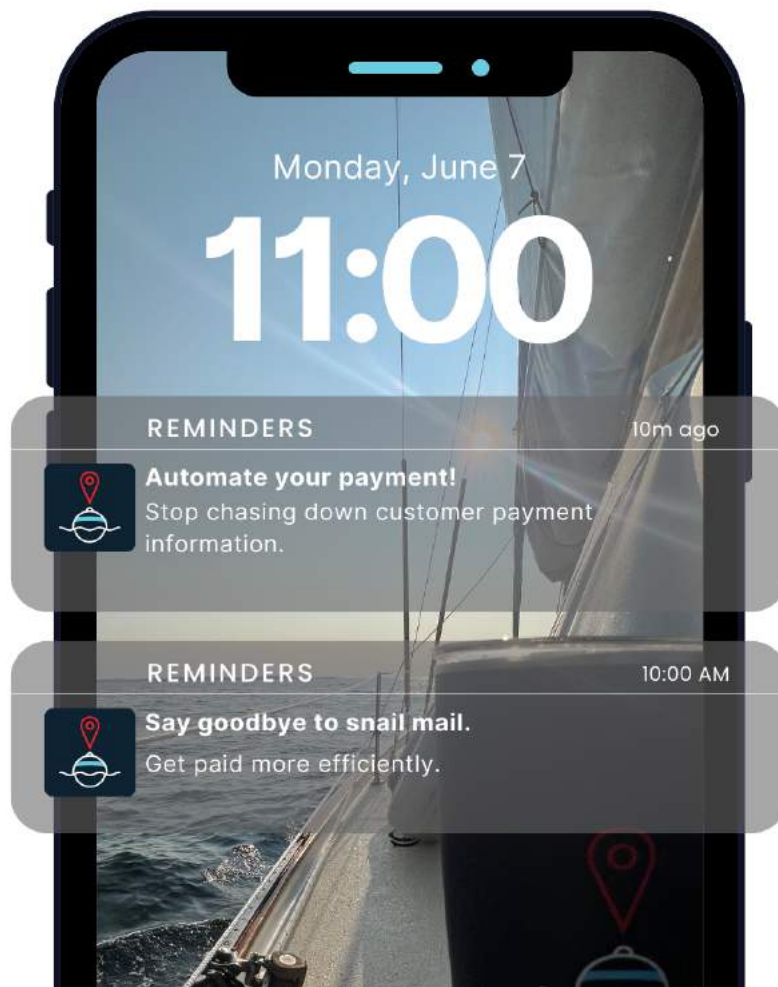
## 5 Use digital customer relationship management tools

Many of today's consumers – even in older demographics – are savvy with digital communication.

Millennials, one of the largest purchasing populations in the world right now, have a well-known aversion to phone calls. Though older generations are more comfortable with getting on the phone, one thing they all have in common is a **fondness for modern communication tools like text messaging and email.**

## Email for marketing

It's important to stay engaged with past, current, and prospective customers — and email is one of the best channels to reach them. Investing in a CRM (customer relationship management platform) with mass emailing tools is one of the most impactful ways to market your business and keep customers coming back.

Studies show email has an average ROI of $36 for every $1 invested. Another benefit of email is its universal reach. By 2026, we can expect 4.6 billion email users worldwide, with nearly $18 billion of revenue from email marketing by 2027.

One of the perks of marketing your marina via email is the association with popular recreational topics. In fact,  (which is particularly high when it comes to email marketing!).

## Digital messaging for customer inquiries

Beyond marketing your marina, digital customer relationship management tools can help you address inquiries, solve problems, and convert leads to customers faster.

Whether a new prospective customer has questions about mooring or a longtime customer has an issue with a recent account statement, everyone wants their issues resolved as quickly as possible.

Using a modern messaging system is a great way to make customers feel like you care about their needs, even if a real person on your team can't immediately be available to answer.
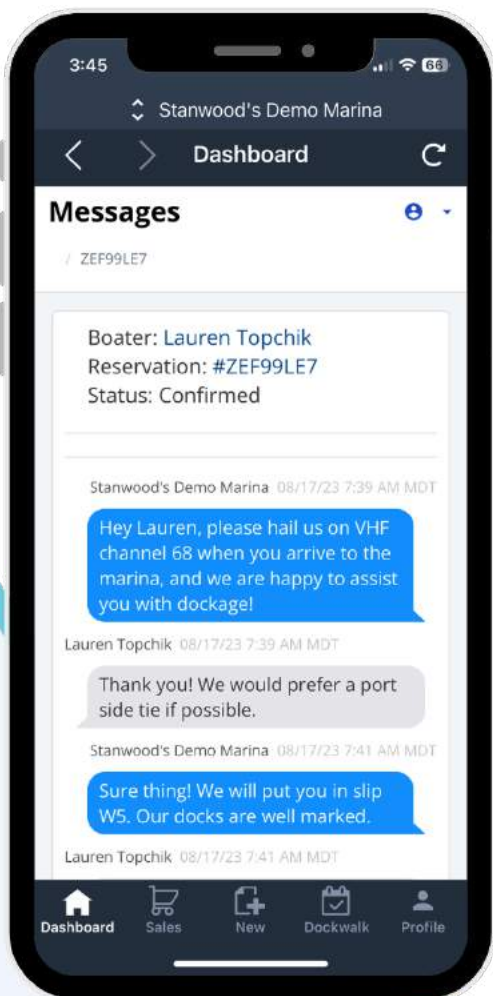
# Example: Washington House Inn

The Washington House Inn, opened in Cedarburg, WI in 1846, has become one of the most popular destinations for midwest visitors looking for small-town charm in a historic setting.

Although The Washington House was successful, innkeeper Wendy Porterfield was having trouble overseeing the upkeep of the historic building, managing a staff of 26, and handling the inn's marketing. So, Porterfield connected with a boutique marketing agency that helped them redesign their website and start using Mailchimp, a popular email marketing platform for small businesses.

**According to their agency, The Washington House Inn has experienced some significant success with email marketing:**

• In 7 years, their list has grown by 18,000 people

• Email marketing brings in over $30,000 annually in direct revenue

• Their average email open rate is 22.3%

## Fact:

Travel & and leisure emails have an industry-wide average open rate of **20.5%**

# How to get started with customer relationship management tools

If you aren't already offering it, email customer service is one of the least difficult ways to dive into more modern communication methods. Consider setting up a shared company inbox that you and a few trusted team members can access, helping to cut down on the response time to emailed inquiries.

From there, you can dive into email marketing – you might even decide to start a small-scale campaign sending out emails manually. However, you'll eventually want to switch to an email automation platform. Email marketing is a huge topic, but many great guides can help you get started.

And if you're looking for a digital boater messaging tool, consider choosing marina management software that has this kind of tool built-in.
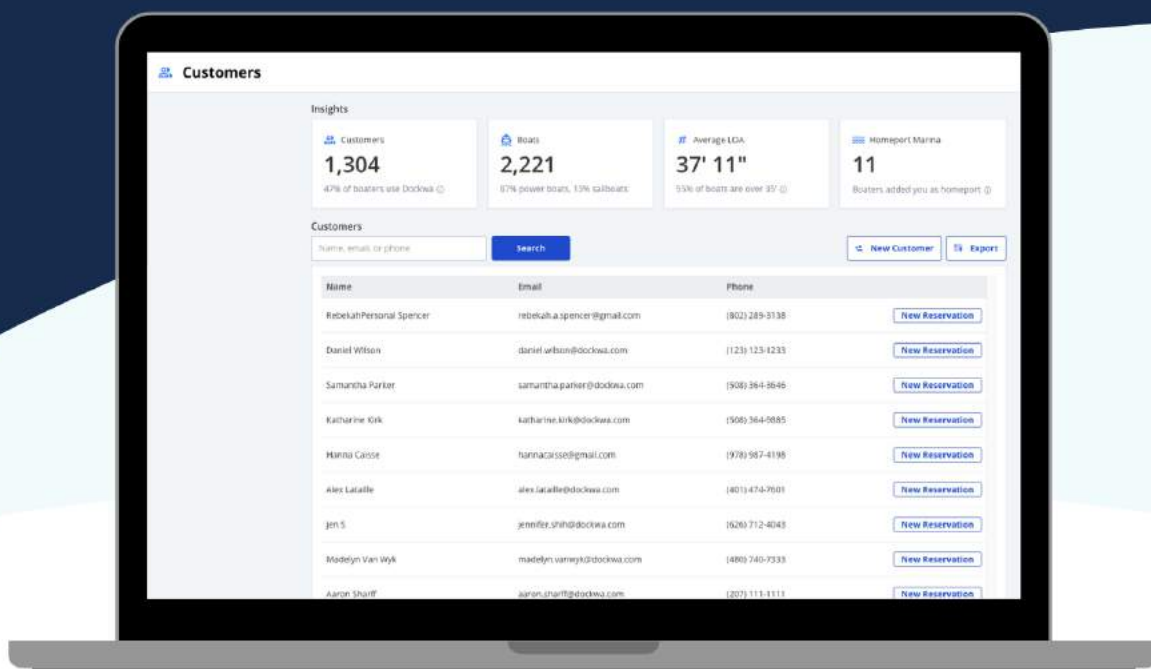
# Take your marina into the 21st century

Collectively, the marine industry has historically been slow to adopt technology. While other industries have been embracing technology for decades, marinas have only just started to recognize the benefits of tech-powered processes.

**But modernizing your marina with technology offers countless benefits to you and your customers:**

1.  **Streamlined operations.** Manual processes with pen and paper are a thing of the past. Digital platforms make it easier to oversee and automate your daily tasks.

2.  **Better customer experiences.** To bring in new customers and keep existing ones coming back, you have to deliver exceptional experiences. Boaters today expect the convenience of technology, so meet them where they're at.

3.  **Cost and time savings.** Simple swaps — like switching from paper to digital contracts and from whiteboard maps to digital space assignment tools — can save you time and money.

And remember: Technology isn't a replacement for human connection — it's a necessary supplement. Boaters want to hear from you via email and digital messages. They want technology to simplify the process of booking a slip and signing a contract.

Ultimately, all of these changes empower them to focus on what really
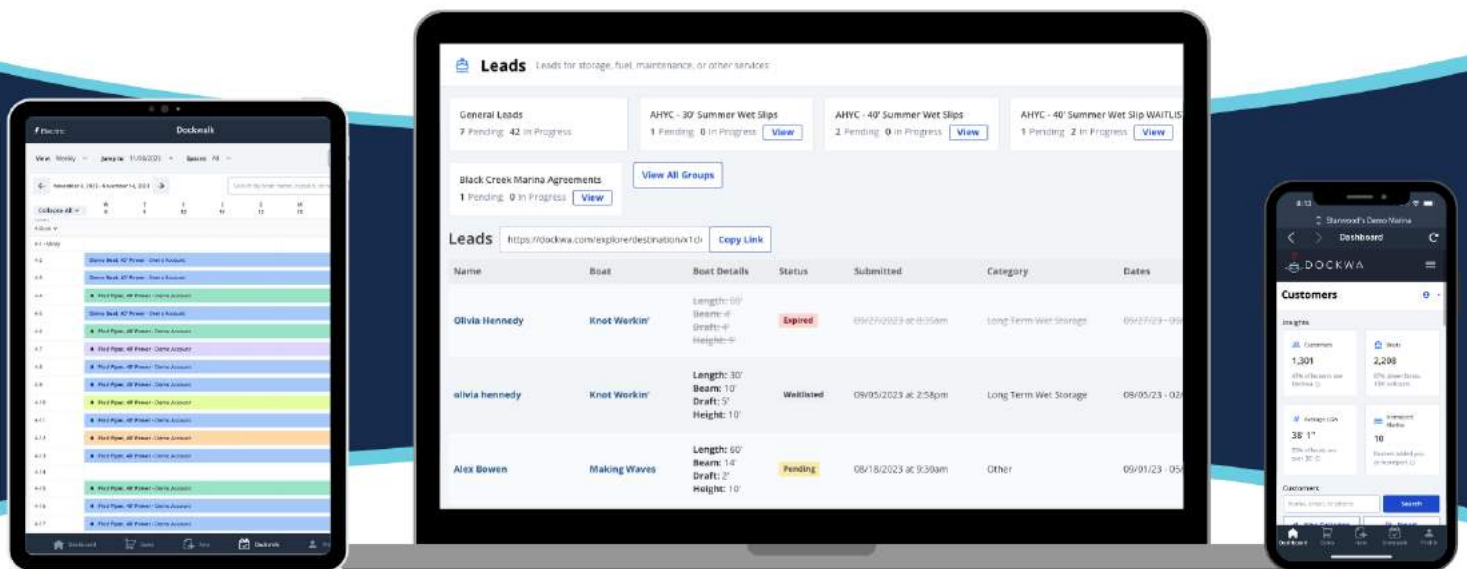


If you're ready to start implementing our suggestions on how to modernize your marina, Dockwa's marina management software is a great place to start.

**With Dockwa, you can:**

- Accept online inquiries and reservations
- Send digital contracts
- Process payments from anywhere
- Automate recurring billing
- Message boaters online
- Send automated and branded emails to customers

# About Dockwa

Dockwa is a digital platform that bridges the gap between marinas and boaters. It's the only marina management solution that simplifies operations while giving you access to a network of more than 300K boaters.

With Dockwa's powerful software, you'll enjoy marina management and marketing tools that help you grow your business and get more done in less time. For boaters, Dockwa is the gateway to new marinas, providing a convenient place to find and request slips, storage, fuel, service, and more. Join the Dockwa community of more than 2,000 marinas and 300,000 boaters nationwide today.

We'd love to chat with you further about your marina operations and marketing efforts.

**Take the first step by [listing your marina on Dockwa for free](#).**

**Learn more about Dockwa during a [demo of our complete marina management software.](#)**

Unlock your marina's full potential
**Book a demo at dockwa.com/demo**

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