

New Media Panel Offers Advice, Insight

“New Media Success Stories” was the topic addressed during the BWI annual meeting in Miami. “Our panel delivered a fact-filled overview for writers, editors, publishers and industry marketing managers interested in leveraging the growing influence of online platforms,” noted BWI President Kim Kavin, who served as moderator. Featured were three panelists who have harnessed the power and intrigue of Internet communications, and who shared their experiences and advice with attendees.

Ben Ellison, who works independently and writes the marine electronics daily blog online at www.panbo.com, reports readership of more than 50,000 unique visitors per month. He began as a participant on the site, then had an opportunity to take over management. Now his blog starts with writer’s notes or queries to get reader input, which he blends with his own perspective to create articles. Those that have depth are further developed into print pieces and filed with Ellison’s magazine clients. He muses that at some point, the best ideas may evolve into books.

The challenge of maintaining a successful blog is retaining and adding readers, Ellison says. About one-third of Panbo’s readers are regulars, and the balance come from search engines like Google. A journalist at heart, Ellison adds that promoting advertising on his site is not a high priority, but that he found it fairly



From left: Kim Kavin, blogger Ben Ellison, webzine publisher Glen Justice of MadMariner.com, and Ian Atkins of YachtWorld.com.

easy to get two magazines as main sponsors and several websites as link sponsors.

Glen Justice, a former *New York Times* staffer who created and edits www.MadMariner.com, has guided it to attract almost 300,000 unique visitors and about 1.5 million page views since its launch in June 2007. He picked the site name to reflect his jump from a secure job to a risky bet tied to his passion of boating. Justice calls the Internet “voodoo” and suggests there are few guaranteed routes to success, though there are plenty of people who say they can help others get there by taking their money. He does feel strongly that content needs to be fresh—he posts one new story each day—and as visual as possible, meaning copy supported by photos or videos.

For those wanting their own sites, Justice suggests starting with a blog and doing so earlier, flaws and all, rather than later,

thinking it will be perfect. Learn the lingo of the Internet, he adds, and don’t get hung up on keeping all the stories short. He regularly runs, and pays for, pieces that are 1,500-plus words. Also look at what works online, Justice says, by visiting sites like www.digg.com that rate stories and give insight into what readers want.

Ian Atkins, group general manager for www.YachtWorld.com and www.Boats.com, explained the former launched in 1995 has since grown to feature more than 115,000 paid listings, making it the largest collection of brokerage boats available via the Internet. He also offered that the sites are beefing-up editorial content to leverage the user-generated content, calling it a “killer combo.”

Having professionally generated content next to the boat listings and user-generated content, he says, makes the sites even more valuable.