



North Harbor Diesel and Yacht Service in Anacortes, Wash., uses a self-propelled hydraulic trailer to move boats from the water to its repair yard, which is 1,875 feet away.

Selecting the proper yard equipment is a complex decision

Choosing the right equipment takes time and skill

BY DAVE ALLEN

For marinas, boatyards, and marine-related businesses that service and repair boats, choosing the proper piece of yard hauling equipment is a complex decision.

A self-powered hydraulic trailer, a sling-type lift, and a towed trailer are all viable options, but which one is best for a specific operation? Before the marina, boatyard, and service center can decide on the proper boat hauling equipment, it must answer many questions.

Hopefully by answering these questions, the business can make sound decisions that result in a growing business that creates a more efficient and cost effective operation, while at the same time better utilizing personnel and facilities, as well as other valuable resources.

Considerations

There's little doubt the most prominent factor in any equipment buying

decision involves finances. For marine-related businesses, the question to ask is whether this piece of equipment makes sense financially. Will it achieve the expected return on a substantial investment?

To get a sound business answer to this important question requires "putting pencil to paper." Here are just a few questions one should answer before making a final equipment decision.

Has your business model changed?

It is well known that the value of waterfront property has increased to the point where land-based marinas and repair facilities are not only feasible, but also necessary. To accomplish this, it stands to reason these businesses must utilize new technology to move large boats quickly to storage yards (dry marinas) and repair facilities that might be located well away from the water.

A good example of this type of operation on the west coast is North Harbor Diesel and Yacht Service in Anacortes, Wash. Owner Howard

Bean has two "sold-out" land-based storage yards, as well as a repair operation with 50 employees.

Commenting on this business operation, Bean says, "I've seen the need for dry storage of larger boats for years. These yards allow my customers to keep their boats out of the water for the winter, which leads to additional business in repairs during the slow winter period." He is now looking for additional real estate to satisfy an ever-growing need.

To lift boats out of the water and to the dry storage facility, North Harbor Diesel uses two self-propelled hydraulic trailers manufactured by KMI Sea-Lift. North Harbor's repair yard is 1,875 feet from the water, and it is able to move four to five boats per hour with the Sea-Lift.

Bean says, "We have two Sea-Lifts that utilize a boat ramp that will pick up varied hull types quickly and get them to our yard faster than any other type of machine I know about. Another huge factor is we only handle the boat once."

Will the addition of a new machine increase business?

This is not so much a question, as a major reason behind this major capital expenditure. This is not only a substantial investment on the business's part, but also a long-term commitment to one's customers. Quite possibly, a new lift system will give the business a boost by enabling it to handle larger boats and varied hull shapes.

Once the decision has been made to purchase a boat hauler, it is equally important to make current and prospective customers aware of the latest and greatest piece of equipment available. The business must promote and market this new equipment and its new found capabilities. To help businesses accomplish this, they might ask the manufacturer to assist with cooperative advertising, which will benefit them as much as it does the marine businesses.

How important is the cost of the equipment?

Obviously, cost has to be a major factor in the decision-making process, but it is not the only factor. One should also look at the versatility of the machine,



This aerial view of North Harbor Diesel and Yacht Service in Anacortes, Wash., shows the sold-out storage yard for yachts and the repair service operation.

the number of boats per hour it is capable of moving, and the safety of its operation. It is simple math. If one machine is capable of moving four to five times more boats per hour than another machine, the costs per haul tends to drop significantly. When costs drop, profits rise.

Will the marina/boatyard need to change its infrastructure?

Will a finger-pier be required to be built or will a multi-purpose boat ramp be the best solution? Once this is decided, it is important to think of the cost of each and be sure to include what steps will be necessary to satisfy EPA rules and the permitting process.

After extensive research, Ben Nissen, general manager of Sooper's Hole, Tortola, BVI, recently purchased a new 45-ton model KMI Sea-Lift. Nissen says, "I was looking for a system that could maneuver in a tight yard configuration with my existing multi-purpose boat ramp and buildings. I looked at the price comparison of purchasing up to two different pieces of equipment, but the Sea-Lift did the job and was all that I needed."

Will weather influence the buying decision?

When will the next hurricane hit? Is it necessary to move all the boats in the marina out of the water for the winter months as is done in the Great Lakes and east coast? These are critical questions that marinas need to answer before moving forward with the buying decision. Marinas must certainly be able to move a large number of boats

quickly when a critical situation arises, but how quickly and at what price?

What about terrain?

Certain types of boat-moving equipment are capable of operating with only slight changes in elevation, while others are only affected a little bit by terrain. Certain hydraulic trailers have the ability to adjust the vessel they are moving from port to starboard and bow to stern. This allows for exceptional agility over varying road conditions.

What hull types will one be moving?

Sooper's Hole manager Ben Nissen, wanted to have one machine that had the flexibility and maneuverability to quickly launch and haul catamarans, mono-hulls, and sailboats. Another operator might have the requirement to haul large fishing boats, as well as pleasure boats. Businesses need to consider the machine's versatility.

What about maintenance costs?

How can a machine costing hundreds of thousands of dollars save money for a business? One consideration is the lack of down time because of mechanical or maintenance issues. Newer machines come equipped with built-in modems allowing the factory to monitor most of machine's systems for irregularities and remotely solve most problems. A piece of capital equipment that is working hard, operating more hours, and producing more income is certainly saving money for the marina owner.

Will this addition allow the marina or boatyard to make better

use of its facilities?

Space optimization is an important issue for any marina or boatyard that does repairs and storage. Which piece of equipment will allow the marina/boatyard to get the most boats safely into the smallest possible area? There are self-powered hydraulic trailers that will allow for up to one-third more boats in the same space as old boat transport systems and do it quicker and safer. Bean says, "I can have boats moved in and out of our buildings for painting and repair work during bad weather using just the Sea-Lift. There is no need to transfer from one type of machine to another. The height and width are restricted by the size of the boat, not the machine."

Summary

In summary, the days of providing a place to simply moor boats has long past, and a modern boat moving system is the keystone to modernization.

Choosing a boat hauling system is a complex decision requiring marinas, boatyards, and other marine-related businesses to undertake a thorough examination and review of operations.

Tough questions have to be asked and answered. The list of questions addressed above assist businesses. Remember, there is no such thing as a dumb question. ⚓

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