

CASE STUDY



 ZIMMERMAN MARINE

Zimmerman Marine's Service-First Mindset Enhances Customer Support, Pushes Technology Boundaries



Since its founding in 1981, Zimmerman Marine has grown from a small yard on Mobjack Bay, Virginia to one of the top boat service providers in the Mid-Atlantic. With six locations across four states, this employee-owned services company specializes in maintenance, repairs and refits on sail and power cruising boats of all makes (wood, fiberglass, aluminum, and steel) and sizes from 16' to 100'.

Founder Steve Zimmerman reflected on the challenges associated with building this multi-state service model—an effort that began in earnest in the early 2000s. “Service is our primary focus. To do that, we needed to be able provide a seamless Customer Experience—which required an operational shift to more technology enabled systems.”

Over the years, Zimmerman Marine had invested in several different marine focused software solutions, with limited success. Few systems, according to Zimmerman, were built to handle both the operational and financial aspects of boat yard operations—and even fewer were equipped for multiple locations.

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Founder, Zimmerman Marine

Kathryn Perry, Executive Vice President with Zimmerman Marine, agreed. She is involved in all aspects of business operations, with overall responsibility for database, finances, Human Resources, and works to implement strategies that help facilitate efficiency across all locations.

“When I first started,” Perry recalled, “we were using one software for operations and another system to interface with accounting and bookkeeping. It was cumbersome and couldn’t accommodate our vision for growth. We needed a central database and a more connected platform.”

Flexibility to Expand

In 2012, with an eye on connectivity, Steve and his team once again evaluated top marine platforms in search of a better solution. He knew of PierVantage, as at the time, there were only a handful of solutions for the marine market. Theoretically, the platform seemed to check most of the boxes for managing critical service data across multiple locations. In this case, theory matched reality.

“They [PierVantage] are so tuned into boat yard operations as well as the financial side of this kind of business,” Steve explained. “They make it work.”

Purpose-built for boat yard applications, PierVantage incorporates a range of features including work management, invoicing and inventory management as well as accounting and reporting capabilities.

Implementing the system across multiple locations was straightforward as well, and gave the Zimmerman Marine team confidence in the potential long-term viability of the solution. “Right from the start, the PierVantage team helped us get started and listened to our feedback and ideas for improvement,” Perry said.

As Zimmerman Marine has continued to expand to new boat yards, Perry also appreciated PierVantage team’s business insight. “They’ve been right there to help us as we’ve gone from three yards to now six in multiple states. For instance, when we move to a new state, PierVantage is there to help with details such as sales tax requirements.”

But it is the seamless connections to the independent service yards that remains the strength of the platform.

Shared Experiences

With PierVantage, all of the day-to-day activities at each of the yards related to work orders, invoices, parts purchasing and inventory management as well as all of the associated financial data are captured within this one system.

“That’s been huge for us,” Perry added. The platform provides managers and admin with the all the tools for efficient work order, inventory management, from creation of purchase orders to closing out a job. And I have everything I need to provide the financial picture.”

Zimmerman reinforces the importance of the Customer Experience. “The customer database tied to our work orders and inventory management is key to our service model.”

Now, a customer heading along the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) might stop in Zimmerman Marine’s Charleston yard with a problem. If parts are not available, the service team might fix critical systems and then have parts shipped to the Deltaville yard, the next stop on the customer’s route.

Zimmerman added, “It’s the same work order in the same system—the customer knows the costs and we know the service history, no matter what yard is doing the work.”

Nearly each one of the 90 employees, from yard managers to administrators to crew, at Zimmerman Marine access PierVantage daily, helping keep everyone on the same page and focused on the customer.

Now Zimmerman is working with PierVantage to push the platform capabilities into unknown waters.

Next Gen Connections

Operationally, there are two critical pieces of information that every successful boat yard must address to be successful: cost and schedule.

“PierVantage does a great job of helping us with the first, but with the second, schedule is a bit trickier,” Zimmerman explained. Scheduling is the nemesis for all boatyards as the boat business is highly customized and unpredictable, which makes it difficult to standardize service.

For this, Zimmerman refers to the famous quote by General Dwight Eisenhower: “Plans are useless and planning is indispensable.”



“I tell my managers that it’s the process of creating the schedule that’s important,” Zimmerman confirmed. “That approach brings up possible challenges, such as the availability of resources, to the forefront for discussion.”

But Zimmerman is also looking to drive greater scheduling accuracy—and PierVantage is a big part of that process. One way that Zimmerman Marine is looking to improve the process is data mining and data analytics. Zimmerman said, “We’ve got many years of knowledge from multiple locations on many boats in our system. We should be able to learn from past history about how long it takes to repair any specific system.”

For instance, he noted, fin stabilizer seals seems like a fairly straightforward repair, which should be a repeatable service task. But when he pulled all of the years of fin stabilizer seal repair data from PierVantage, he found that some boats took

4 hours and others 48 hours. A deeper dive showed that the longer repairs were typically caused by additional issues, such as corrosion to other nearby parts.

Zimmerman added, “But, like Eisenhower said, the planning or in this case the timeline development, is still indispensable because we can provide a time range, and offer ideas about potential complicating factors.”

Zimmerman Marine is also working with PierVantage to introduce some industry-first scheduling capabilities that would connect the marine software with a work management platform such as Monday.com.

“If we can make this work, it would blow the doors off everything else in the market, because for the first time, we would have an effective scheduling tool,” he said.

The latest efforts to advance marine management software to incorporate more accurate scheduling is one of the reasons that Zimmerman Marine has stayed with PierVantage for the last decade. Zimmerman concluded, “I appreciate that they’re willing to work with us to meet our specific needs and how they stand behind their product. Just as importantly, they make an effort to continuously improve the product and welcome feedback. I know we couldn’t function without it. It’s embedded in every aspect of our operation.”

Zimmerman Marine’s Multi-State Service Model

- Charleston, South Carolina
- Deltaville, Virginia
- Herrington Harbor, Maryland
- Holden Beach, North Carolina
- Mathews, Virginia
- Oriental, North Carolina



131 Continental Drive • Suite 409 • Newark, DE 19713

877.267.7172 • www.PierVantage.com