

Home Sweet Home Page

The BoatUS.com site is a great example of how the Internet can help you to better enjoy boating. While some sites specialize in one or more subjects, this site covers most areas of interest to boaters, and the coverage is deep. It ranges from social to highly technical sections with a huge amount of content. Like other very thorough sites, you'll need to know how to use its tools to find what you want. Some tools take you directly to your intended destination. Each menu item is multilayered, opening up an entire array of other interesting options.

The drop-down menus on the home page are a gateway to what's probably more boating information than you'd ever imagined existing in one place. As you read this article, turn on your computer and take a look. For example, "News/Gov't Affairs" opens the door to hurricane reports, state laws and regulations, tax issues, *BoatU.S. Magazine*, and Consumer Affairs, which deals with protection for you as a boating consumer.

"Boater to Boater" is more of a social portal with general forums, and forums relating to specific interests such as particular boats. It also has exciting cruising blogs written by boaters traveling the country and around the world. This portal also brings you to informative videos that my wife Mel and I have shot as we travel the East Coast on our 53-foot motorsailer. Check it out if you want to see what it's like to cruise.

"Boat Buying," as the name suggests, helps you make wise choices in purchasing a boat. It dives into the nitty gritty of actually doing it, including matters such as surveys, insurance, docu-

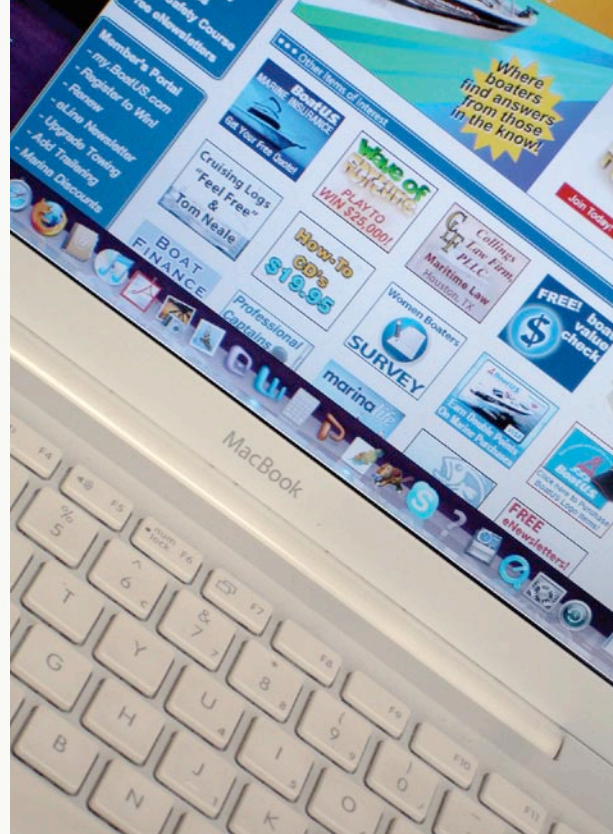
'Surfer beware' used to warn of phenomena such as sharks and dangerous pipelines...

mentation, loans, and boat-value checks with data from actual sales. "Boating Safety" brings you to EPIRB rentals, a boat-recall alert registry, free MMSI registry, and the years of invaluable experience found in *Seaworthy* newsmagazine, which specializes in causes of insurance claims and other safety issues. "Resource and References" leads to an extensive "Ask the Experts" service, Don Casey's numerous practical works, Chuck Husick answering your questions on electronics, a consumer-protection database, an archive of boat reviews, and do-it-yourself information.

Most of the site is open to everyone, as a public service to boaters. But BoatU.S. members have special sections and privileges on the site. While the general public can read the "Ask the Expert" answers, only members can ask questions. It's easy to access many of these membership privileges from the lower left-hand menu as well as other areas.

Members also have the awesome ability to build their own "My.BoatUS.com" site to meet their individual interests and needs. This can serve as your own special home page. You can choose its content from a huge pool of resources ranging from fun forums to financial information, and many boating feature sections. You can also position the subject areas on your home page. If you want weather reports to be at the top of your page, no problem. Or maybe you'd rather first see financial or world news or fishing news or tidal information. To put this resource to work for you, visit www.BoatUS.com.

Tom Neale and his family have lived aboard a series of boats named Chez Nous for 30 years. To read more from Tom, visit: www.BoatUS.com/cruising.



Expand Your Boating Social Life Online

Social networking web sites let you keep in touch with friends in far flung places, or join groups of individuals with similar interests. They combine the interaction of a discussion group with individual profiles — sort of a personal web page in miniature. While social networks such as Facebook, MySpace, and LinkedIn get the press coverage, there are several social networks just for boaters, offering the same services, but tailoring them to fit the nautical world.

■ **TheBoaters.com** — Create a profile for yourself or your boat, post photos, share news about upcoming events, locate others in your cruising area, watch boating videos, or join a group dedicated to your brand of boat; 62,000 members.

■ **GetReeled.com** — For everyone who wants to talk fishing, learn about fishing, brag about fishing, or just look at pictures of people fishing; about 5,000 members.

■ **Fishington.com** — Sponsored by the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation. Build your own profile and post photos, share your favorite fishing hole with others, or post the details of a great anchorage or fun spot for a raft-up. Links to local boating information, including an interactive map of boating facilities and ramps, bait and tackle retailers, rules and regs, all organized by state.

■ **SeaKnots.com** — Community of cruisers, member profiles, photos, and other media. An entertaining blog by Andrea, one of the co-founders; 2,000 members.

■ **SailMonster.com** — More than 1,000 sailors sharing info, wisecracks, and a healthy sense of humor, plus classified ads, business directory, auctions, and a travel search engine.

— **Michael Vatalaro**