



Sharpe Houseboats Is Making Waves and Building Dreams Using Internet Technology and Design

Name: Sharpe Houseboats

Internet:
www.sharpehouseboat.com

Products/Services:
House Boats/Recreation

Location:
Somerset /Pulaski County

Leadership: Jim Sharpe, Founder; and J. Christopher Sharpe Girdler, Principal

Employees: 90

Founded: 1997

Reach: International

Innovative Insight:
"Dedication to exceptional quality and service has helped make Sharpe the name people have come to recognize as the leader in the marketplace."

Advice for Growing Companies: *"Branding is a key component to success. The Sharpe family spent more than 50 years building up a tradition of building houseboats associated with their family name."*

Way Internet Has Made You More Competitive :
"The Internet has put Sharpe Houseboats on the map across the globe. The Company has sold its product throughout the U.S., and to customers in Brazil and the United Arab Emirates."

Ways to Continue to Attract Best Workers: *"Provide a good working environment that will keep workers satisfied."*

SOMERSET, Ky. — J. Christopher Sharpe Girdler, a principal with Somerset-based Sharpe Houseboats, says everything at this seven-year-old firm is based on one key ingredient: customer satisfaction.

Keeping customers satisfied with world-class houseboats has been the mission of the Sharpe family for more than 50 years, and after a brief hiatus from the business after patriarch Jim Sharpe sold his interest in another Somerset houseboat manufacturer in 1996, the family is back at it full blast. They currently employ about 90 people, using state-of-the-art technology in the production of luxury houseboats.

Girdler notes that every boat built at Sharpe Houseboats starts with a standard package of equipment that provides the customer outstanding value on the front end. But if you look at the list of amenities that come with every boat, you understand right away the dimension of customer satisfaction that the Sharpe family has dedicated itself.

Sharpe typically manufactures 60 boats annually, and it can take from three months to eight months to receive a completed boat. Prices for a Sharpe houseboat range from \$250,000 to \$950,000. The company's top-of-the-line product called Four Miles Out features five bedrooms, two-and-a-half bathrooms, an interior staircase and a full-size bar. Today's real-life floating mansions' come equipped with hot tubs, trash compactors, built-in barbecues, flat-screen TVs--and sometimes even helipads.

In mid-2003, Sharpe Houseboats redesigned its web site, providing customers from across the globe the opportunity to learn about the firm, see what boats are currently available and even allowing potential customers to "design" their dream boat.

Cumberland Creative Design helped develop Sharpe's site, providing an interactive cost-effective way to promote the business. Sharpe customers have the ability to use an audio/visual presentation to tour the plant and preview floor plans, select from a variety of equipment packages, preview new and previously owned houseboats and find out what other customers are saying about Sharpe Houseboats.

"We are international," Girdler noted, adding that in recent years the company has sold boats to a sultan in the United Arab Emirates and delivered a boat to a government official on the Amazon River in Brazil. "We are out there, everywhere, marketing our products, showing people what we're all about and letting them know that we are the best at what we do."

According to Girdler, one of the biggest houseboat destinations in the U.S. is Lake Cumberland, Kentucky with 65,000 acres and 1,250 miles of shoreline. In fact, many folks are surprised to learn that Kentucky is the houseboat capitol of the world. There are more houseboats built in Kentucky than anywhere else. About 80 percent of all houseboats made in America are made in south-central Kentucky, most within a few miles of Lake Cumberland's shores.

Added Girdler, "the lure of the lake and the pleasure of houseboating renews the spirit and allows one to get in touch again with nature, family and friends. At Sharpe we have always said a happy customer is going to be the best salesperson in the marketplace. This is why we go beyond the limits to satisfy all of our houseboat customers before and after the sale. Our approach is simple – "Dream it, we'll build it and deliver it."

About KY 120:

In the fast-pace world of technology-driven business, it should be recognized that best practices can be studied and emulated. As a part of the [connectkentucky](#) initiative, CITE is profiling business initiatives in each of Kentucky's 120 counties to identify lessons learned on the path toward successful and sustainable innovation.