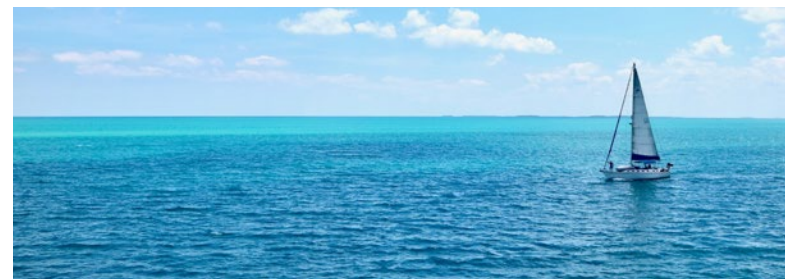


# The State of Marine Booking

▶ **2026  
Boater  
Behavior  
Report**



# Why marine businesses lose customers before they ever reach the dock

**ASK A MARINA MANAGER** how the season went and you will hear about the weekends. The Fourth of July when every slip was booked by Thursday. The Saturday in August when three pontoon reservations never showed and the phone rang the whole time anyway. Operators carry a detailed picture of their own business in their heads. What almost none of them have is a picture of everyone else's.

This report is an attempt to build that picture by combining two sources that have not been put side by side before: reservation data from more than a million marina and boat-rental bookings on Storable's platforms, and a September 2026 survey of 650 boaters, people who rented a boat or kept one at a marina in the past year.

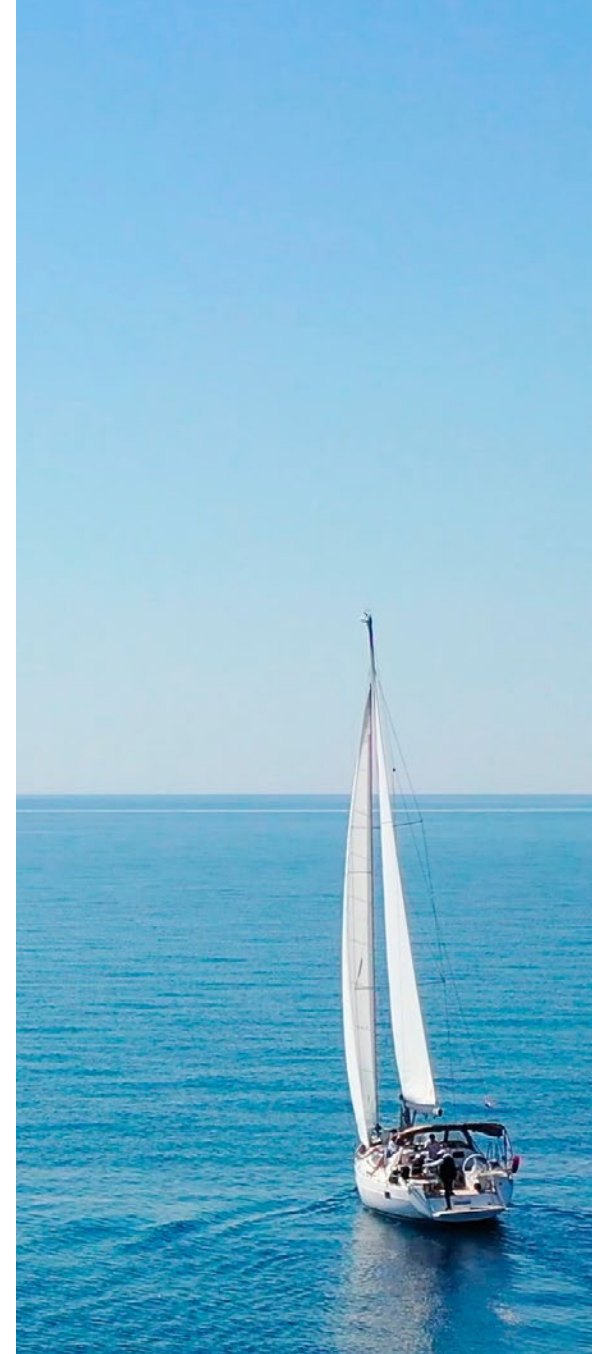


There is plenty of demand in this market. The problem is how much of it marine businesses fail to convert. **More than half of boaters gave up on a booking in the past year because they could not reach anyone or could not finish the transaction online.** Nearly one in five bookings that do get made is later cancelled, and the ones that hold are the ones where the customer committed something at the moment they booked.

Most of those losses come from things operators can actually change.

#### KEY FINDINGS

| Boaters who gave up on a booking in the past year because they couldn't reach anyone or complete it online        | <b>56%</b>            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Boaters who leave for a competitor after one unanswered call                                                      | <b>45%</b>            |
| Boaters who have chosen one business over another because it was easier to book, pay, or communicate online       | <b>66%</b>            |
| Cancellation rate for reservations paid up front vs. reservations that deferred payment                           | <b>9.2% vs. 18.2%</b> |
| Boaters willing to pay a deposit or the full amount at the time of booking                                        | <b>74%</b>            |
| Boaters who say a credit toward a future visit would make them more likely to rebook after a weather cancellation | <b>86%</b>            |
| Boaters who say a credit toward a future visit would make them more likely to rebook after a weather cancellation | <b>13%</b>            |



# The boater in 2026

Boating households are more affluent than the broader outdoor-recreation population. Among boaters, **39% report household income of \$100,000** or more, against 17% of respondents who camped but did not boat. These are customers with options, and they use them.

Renters and marina customers also behave differently enough that operators should not treat them as the same customer.

## ► Renters

**481 RESPONDENTS, MEDIAN AGE 43**

Episodic, short-notice, and digitally impatient. **61% booked their most recent trip within two weeks of the date**, and 33% inside a week. 69% made that booking online, either on the operator's own website (37%) or through a third-party platform (33%).

## ► Marina and dry-storage customers

**295 RESPONDENTS, MEDIAN AGE 50**

Older, more affluent (47% report \$100,000 or more), and relationship-driven. They plan a little further ahead and are far more likely to transact in person: **20% made their most recent booking as a walk-up**, nearly double the rate among renters.



## What each customer cares about

The differences show up quickly when you ask what each group actually cares about beyond availability, location, and price.

### KEY FACTORS

|                          | RENTERS | MARINA CUSTOMERS |
|--------------------------|---------|------------------|
| Cleanliness              | 66%     | 67%              |
| Facilities               | 57%     | 69%              |
| Ratings and reviews      | 57%     | 60%              |
| Activities               | 48%     | 43%              |
| Discounts or upgrades    | 38%     | 30%              |
| Cancellation policy      | 22%     | 23%              |
| Well-known business name | 14%     | 16%              |

Facilities carry twelve points more weight with marina customers than with renters, which makes sense for someone buying a season rather than an afternoon. Renters respond more to discounts and upgrades. For both groups, **recent ratings and reviews matter far more than a well-known business name.**

# The booking gap

56% of boaters gave up on a booking in the past twelve months because they could not reach anyone or could not complete the transaction online. 33% did it once, 20% did it two or three times, and 3% did it more than three times. Nearly a quarter of all boaters walked away from a booking at least twice in a single year.

These were customers trying to book who never completed the transaction.

The rate holds across both segments, 60% among renters and 57% among marina customers, and it captures only completed abandonment. It does not count the bookings that eventually went through after a delay, a second call, or a workaround.



## Why boaters walk away

**78% of boaters** name at least one specific thing that has caused them to abandon a booking, and among those who do, the average is more than two. Nearly every item on the list is a process or software problem, and none of them is the price of the boat, the slip, or the service.

### REASON FOR ABANDONING A BOOKING

| Surprise fees at checkout                                            | <b>36%</b> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| The time slot I wanted was taken and I wasn't offered an alternative | <b>36%</b> |
| No response to an inquiry                                            | <b>27%</b> |
| Couldn't see real-time availability                                  | <b>19%</b> |
| Had to call instead of booking online                                | <b>19%</b> |
| Couldn't compare rates or understand the price                       | <b>16%</b> |
| Site was hard to use on my phone                                     | <b>15%</b> |
| Confusing cancellation policy                                        | <b>11%</b> |
| Had to create an account                                             | <b>6%</b>  |
| None of these                                                        | <b>22%</b> |

The two biggest causes are tied: **SURPRISE FEES AT CHECKOUT** and a **TIME SLOT THAT WAS UNAVAILABLE WITH NO ALTERNATIVE OFFERED**. In both cases, the customer was already trying to buy. One loses them at checkout. The other loses them because the system cannot offer another day, vessel, or slip.

**No response to an inquiry is arguably the more significant finding.** At 27%, it cost more bookings than a poor mobile experience, an inability to compare rates, or a forced phone call. Most of the industry conversation is about booking interfaces. Response time is costing at least as many bookings.

The price complaints are also revealing. Boaters did not abandon bookings because the rate was too high. They abandoned them because the number changed at checkout or because they could not work out what the number was.

Operators are losing bookings over pricing clarity, not necessarily pricing itself.



# The cost of being unreachable

We asked boaters to imagine calling a marina or rental business during business hours, getting no answer, and finding no way to book online.

Most customers do not wait around.

## NEXT ACTION AFTER AN UNANSWERED CALL

| Search for a business where I can book online instead | 28%      |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| Try calling the same place again later                | 23%      |
| Call the next business on my list                     | 17%      |
| Leave a voicemail and wait for a call back            | 14%      |
| Send an email and wait                                | 10%      |
| Show up in person                                     | 8%       |
| Give up on the trip entirely                          | under 1% |



Only 23% try the same business again. 45% leave outright, either to a competitor who takes online bookings or to the next name on the list. Another 24% leave a voicemail or send an email, putting the burden on the business to win the booking back. Renters are the least patient: 31% immediately search for an operator they can book online.

Almost nobody gives up on the trip entirely. Most of the lost bookings go somewhere else.

A third of bookings happen outside business hours, on weekday evenings or weekends. Those bookings need to be able to complete without anyone at the desk.

Two-thirds of boaters have already chosen one business over another specifically because it was easier to book, pay, or communicate online, and 71% of renters have. 49% have both walked away from a booking over friction and switched providers for digital ease in the same twelve months.



# Cancellations are the industry's quiet revenue leak

Getting the booking is only part of the problem. Keeping it is the next one.

Across more than 1.2 million reservations, between 15% and 18% of marine bookings end in cancellation. On the marina side the rate is 17.9%. For an operator with a compressed summer season, that is a meaningful amount of inventory to lose.

Some of that is weather, and it would be strange to write a report about boat cancellations without saying so. Among boaters who have ever cancelled a booking, weather was the single most common reason, cited by 46%.

No software fixes a storm. However, the cancellation data does not look like a weather-only problem.

Marina cancellations do not cluster near the arrival date, where a forecast would drive them. They spread almost evenly across the whole booking window: roughly a quarter on the day of arrival, a quarter in the week before, a quarter eight to thirty days out, and the rest further back. Weather can account for the ones close in. It cannot account for a slip released six weeks before anyone could have read a radar.

Boaters also tend to try to save the trip when weather hits. Among the 75% who have had a booked trip ruined by weather, 48% rescheduled rather than walking away. Another 17% went anyway. 28% cancelled and got a refund, and 8% cancelled and lost their money.



# What makes a booking stick

It would be easy to assume that the earlier someone books, the more committed they are. That is true for rentals, but not necessarily for marina bookings.

**In rentals, the longest-lead reservations are among the most reliable.** A houseboat booked six weeks out behaves like a planned vacation, and those bookings hold.

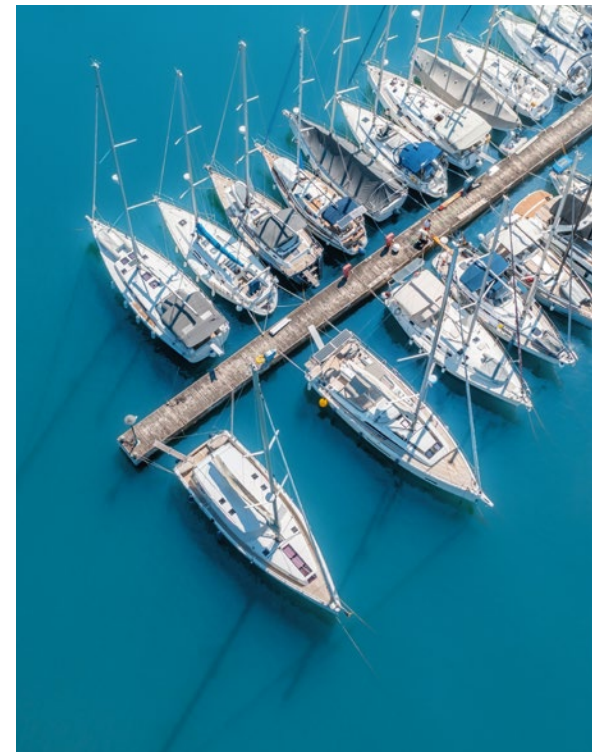
**On the marina side, long lead times often mean the reverse.** Slips reserved in February for a July weekend get second-guessed as the date approaches, and a share of them quietly disappear.

Reservations that collected payment up front cancelled at 9.2%. Reservations that deferred payment cancelled at 18.2%. The value of the cancelled bookings was nearly identical in both groups, which makes it unlikely that price alone explains the difference.

The survey also suggests customers are comfortable with that arrangement. Asked what they are prepared to pay at the time of booking, 74% said a deposit or the full amount. **A deposit alone was the most common answer at 44%**, and 31% said they would pay in full. Only 6% want to pay nothing until they arrive. The pattern is the same for renters and marina customers.

Operators can collect a deposit without asking customers to accept something unusual.

For an operator running a thousand bookings a season, the difference between an 18% and a 9% cancellation rate is ninety reservations, and in this business those ninety land in the months that pay for the year.



## A refund does not have to be the default

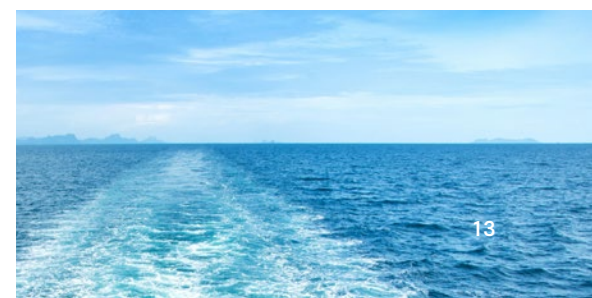
Weather cancellations call for a different tool than a deposit, since nobody wants to be the marina that kept a family's money because it rained.

The default response is often a refund. That sends the money back out the door and may end the customer relationship with it. **The alternative is a rain check:** a single-use, time-limited credit issued when a weather cancellation comes in. The revenue stays in the business, the boater has a reason to come back, and the expiration date gives them a reason to rebook while the season is still underway.

We tested that idea directly. 86% of boaters said a credit toward a future visit would make them more likely to rebook with the same business rather than going elsewhere. 46% said much more likely. Only 12% said it would make no difference.

Roughly a third of weather-disrupted bookings currently end in a refund or a forfeit. Yet the overwhelming majority of boaters say a future credit would make them more likely to stay with the same business.

Boaters are also feeling cost pressure. 64% have changed their behavior because of it: 26% shopped for a cheaper slip or rental, 25% boated fewer days, 21% moved to a less expensive provider. At the same time, **52% say they would absorb a rate increase of 5% or more at a business they already prefer.**



# How boaters find you now

Boaters are finding marine businesses in a lot of different places now. No channel accounts for even a third of bookings.

## HOW BOATERS FOUND THEIR MOST RECENT BOOKING

| Google or another search engine        | 25% |
|----------------------------------------|-----|
| Recommendation from friends or family  | 23% |
| A booking website or app               | 15% |
| I'd been there before                  | 14% |
| AI assistant (ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude) | 13% |
| Social media                           | 7%  |
| Map app                                | 2%  |

**Only 14% simply returned to a business they had used before.** Everyone else found the operator through search, recommendations, booking platforms, AI or another channel.

## AI is already sending bookings

**13% of boaters found their most recent booking through an AI assistant**, nearly the share arriving through booking platforms and twice the share arriving through social media. 57% have used an AI assistant to plan a trip, and 46% found it useful.

Asked whether they would let an AI assistant choose a business and complete a reservation for them, 74% said yes in some form: 26% for any trip, 21% for a simple or inexpensive one, and 27% only with approval before it booked. 27% refused outright.

**Boaters are much more comfortable using AI for low-risk tasks than for payments**, cancellations or emergencies. 68% are comfortable letting an AI check availability and 60% would let it answer a billing question. Comfort falls for booking a reservation (52%), changing or cancelling one (49%), taking a payment (47%), and handling an emergency (42%).



Boaters want AI for lookup, availability, and routine questions. They want a person, or their own approval, anywhere money or safety is involved.

That pattern matches what Storable found in a separate national survey of 1,000 US adults in July 2026. There, 60% said they would not let AI handle their money without a person involved, and 54% said the thing they most want from a company using AI is a human who can step in when needed. Two other findings from that study are worth an operator's attention. 44% of Americans have used AI during an interaction with a company without the company knowing, so some of the customers reaching a marina through an assistant will not announce it. And 48% said a single bad AI experience would send their business elsewhere, with most of them blaming the company that deployed it rather than the technology. The standard for getting this right is higher than the standard for getting it done.

Operators do not need an elaborate AI strategy to respond to this. **A growing share of customers will arrive through an assistant, and that assistant can only find and book a marina whose availability and pricing live somewhere it can read.**

A marina that takes reservations by phone is invisible to that customer. The same live availability and online booking systems that capture after-hours customers today will also make a business easier for AI assistants to find and transact with.



# What this means for marine operators

The opportunity for operators is fairly straightforward: fewer missed inquiries, easier booking, more commitment at checkout and better follow-up after cancellations.

Capture the booking when the customer is ready, not when someone is at the desk.

**56% of boaters have abandoned a booking they wanted to make, and 45% leave after a single unanswered call.** Live availability, booking that completes without a phone call, and an automatic offer of the next-best option when the first choice is gone address the largest documented causes of lost bookings.

Do not let an inquiry disappear. No response to an inquiry was cited by 27% of boaters as a reason they abandoned a booking, outranking every interface complaint in this study. Solving that may have less to do with adding staff than with making sure every inquiry lands somewhere visible: **one queue for inbound messages, an automatic acknowledgement, and a record of what is still open.**

Ask for a commitment at booking, and give weather-disrupted customers a reason to come back. Reservations paid up front cancel at half the rate, and 74% of boaters say they are willing to pay something when they book. **When weather intervenes, 86% say a future credit would make them more likely to rebook with the same business.**

Follow the deferred service work. **12% of boaters, and 15% of marina customers, have put off maintenance they know their boat needs.** That is work already sitting inside many operators' customer lists. A service history tied to the vessel and a follow-up the customer can accept without a phone call give the operator a way to bring some of it back onto the schedule.

None of this is particularly sophisticated. **Customers already expect these things when they book hotels, flights, restaurants and other experiences.** Marine businesses that make the same things routine have fewer chances to lose the customer before they ever show up.

A companion operator playbook, with specific recommendations for each finding in this report, is available for download at [info.storablemarine.com/TheBookingGap](https://info.storablemarine.com/TheBookingGap).





### ► **About the data**

This report draws on two sources. The first is aggregated, anonymized reservation data from more than 1.2 million marina and boat-rental bookings on Storable Marine's platforms, Molo and Rentals. The second is a survey of 1,183 US adults fielded through Pollfish in August and September 2026. All survey figures in this report reflect the 650 respondents who rented a boat or kept one at a marina in the past 12 months.

### ► **About Storable Marine**

At Storable, we're redefining property management for specialty real estate. Tailored for the marine industry, Storable Marine empowers marinas, boat clubs and rental operations with the industry's most comprehensive technology platform.