

What Will We Do?—Inside the Mind of Unfished Harry and Mary

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Abstract: Although fishing has been around for thousands of years, many people in today's civilized world have little concept of how or why to fish. For those of us in the industry, finding ways to answer the most basic questions about fishing and reduce or remove barriers to fishing has long since eluded us. Why go fishing? What makes fishing fun? Is fishing safe? How do I fish? Where do I fish? How much does it cost? What do I do with the fish when I catch it? In order to create new anglers/customers/license holders, we must address how to provide answers to these and other questions posed by non-anglers. These factors and barriers, along with practical recommendations, will be discussed.

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Storm Manufacturing Company has been in business for 33 years, and I've seen more than a few changes in my 13 years in the recreational fishing industry. It is obvious to nearly everyone in the industry that there are major challenges ahead. Although we are in the middle of some massive changes in how fishing tackle is distributed, I am very positive about the future possibilities of growth within our industry over the next 15 to 20 years.

United States population statistics show that there is an age wave of 90 million "baby boomers" (persons born between 1946 and 1964) moving through life. On 1 January 1996, the first of the baby boomers began to turn 50. The rough estimate is that a baby boomer will reach age 50 every 8 seconds for the next 17 years. The fishing industry should see good business and benefits because these boomers will be at the height of their earning power with increasing amounts of time on their hands due to early retirement, many with grandchildren looking for something to do and open to hobbies that are not too physically demanding. Fishing could (and should) be one of their top choices.

However, in the long term, most of us realize that if this great industry is to continue and flourish, we'll have to not only attract many of those boomers to the sport, but also bring in new, younger anglers. All of us who make our living in the fishing industry need to be thinking about the barriers to fishing and how we can take them down.

I am going to take a different approach toward marketing and focus on the fact that good marketers must know their customers and potential customers. I have borrowed the idea for my speech from Lee Strobel's book entitled *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary*. Strobel was an award-winning journalist for the Chicago Tribune and a died-in-the-wool atheist. He became a born-again Christian through the ministry at Willow Creek Community Church, near Chicago. Willow Creek is one of the most influential churches in the world and has had a great influence on my own life and thoughts. This book is an in-depth study of the factors and thoughts which go through the mind of a "non-believer." It identifies key factors which evangelical Christians ought to understand before sharing their religious beliefs with unbelievers.

I challenge you to hang with me for just a few minutes and look for parallels between "unbelievers" in the spiritual sense and "unbelievers" in fishing, otherwise known as non-anglers.

Strobel wrote "So often, we as Christians, especially church leaders, become so immersed in the Christian subculture that we lose touch with unbelievers. And when we lose those connections, we forget how unbelievers think. As a result, sometimes our personal evangelism and corporate evangelistic efforts miss the target. Often church leaders have a great desire to reach the unbelievers of their community, but because they don't understand Unchurched Harry and Mary, they do things that inadvertently chase away the very people they want to attract. Their motives are right, but their methods are inappropriate and ineffective. In this book, I try to help church leaders peek into the thinking processes of unchurched people so they'll understand how to attract them and present the Gospel to them in ways they'll understand."

Our focus today is not on spiritual issues, but on the long term survival of the fishing industry. People understanding that my intentions are not to downplay the importance of either, but to use the spiritual parallel as a challenge to examine whether we really understand how a non-angler thinks.

I propose to you that those of us in the fishing industry have become so immersed in the fishing subculture that we have lost touch with non-anglers. I propose that we do not really understand "Unfished Harry and Mary," and that we must try and peek into the thinking processes of unfished people. My challenge is for you and I to get down to basics and get inside the mind of Unfished Harry and Mary.

I would like to thank my father, Gary Storm, one of the 2 founders of Storm Lures, for his guidance.

Basic Questions

Let's look at just a few of the questions that may be in the minds of non-anglers. I confess that none of this is probably new or unique thinking. Most of it comes from brainstorming about these topics during our staff meetings at Storm Lures.

Non-anglers have questions about the rationale for fishing. Why should I fish? Is it fun? What makes it fun? There are questions of time. However much does it take? There are social, safety, and access issues. Who do I fish with and where do I go? Do

we need permission? What are the hours? Is fishing safe for me and my children? What do I do if someone gets hooked? What about spiders and snakes, chiggers and mosquitoes? Can I safely drop my kids off at the local pond?

Equipment needs and costs are a concern. What do I need to go fishing? Do I need a boat and thousands of dollars worth of equipment? Can I borrow equipment until I find out if I like to fish?

It is almost depressing to think about the amount of education it requires to turn a non-angler into a productive fisherperson. The prospective angler must decide what to fish for, where and when to go, the rods, reels, line, lures and bait, trying knots, casting, hooking, playing and landing a fish, then unhooking it. What about fishing licenses and those complicated regulations? Can I eat the fish I catch? Are they safe? After I catch the fish, how do I clean, prepare, and cook them?

What keeps people from fishing? There are what I call "enemies to fishing." These are things that either keep people out of our sport or cause them to quit. Many of these relate to the basics questions noted above, such as education, safety, cost, and access. But others relate directly to having had bad experiences with fishing. There may have been a lack of positive fishing experiences as a youth. The focus may have been only on catching fish, a "success = fish" philosophy. Focusing on only 1 species together with a lack of success may have given a negative impression.

Unrealistic expectations of success are often generated by the media. "I just don't catch fish like the famous fishing personalities do on TV," "I bought this magic product but we don't catch fish like they do on the infomercial," "You've got to have a high dollar boat and motor and thousands of dollars worth of fishing tackle just to go fishing."

There is also a perception that all fish are unhealthy, poisoned, or toxic and should not be eaten. Media coverage of water pollution and related health advisories perpetuate this.

Other enemies to fishing include family issues such as single-parent households or working moms or dads with little time to take their kids fishing and a lack of knowledge about where to go and how to do it. Career pursuits often leave little family time for fishing as do increasingly busy schedules among family members. Increased demands on the non-angler's time come from career, school (homework, club involvement), electronics (television, the Internet, video games), and other activities such as dance and ballet lessons, gymnastics, music, and Martial arts. Individual sports such as golf and tennis offer easy access, group dynamics, image and prestige, media exposure, and community support and funding. Hunting is a competing sport that takes some time away from fishing although angler/hunter demographics are often the same. Organized team sports such as soccer, softball, basketball, football, bowling, etc., offer easy access and are locally supported. And finally, people can also participate in sports through vicarious means without leaving their homes via television (ESPN, ESPN2, TNN, network sports programming, etc.)

Animal rights issues are also a growing threat. There are beliefs that fishing hurts the fish in the same way humans experience pain. Many people have a problem with the "catch and release" philosophy and the term "sportfishing" for the same reasons.

Why take Action in the first place? We have the motive of self-preservation as an industry. We also have strong beliefs that it is good for people to spend time outdoors with family and friends. Fishing promotes good stewardship of natural resources that affect humanity's future. We must educate the public about conservation principles.

Here are some practical tips which can be used to find time to fish yourself and to encourage fishing in others. First, find personal peace and balance in your life. Re-examine your won commitment to family time. Stay married and raise your own kids. Take your kids and your friend's kids fishing. Take a single parent's kids fishing. Take somebody fishing and start the fishing process "one by one." Second, focus on the total outdoors experience, on more than just catching fish, especially chasing just one species. Use the time to talk about life, laugh at the inevitably frustrating situations, enjoy nature, point out wildlife, breathe fresh air, take in the wonder of the great outdoors, and count your blessings. Use selective harvest to teach non-anglers the value of the resource and its tangible rewards.

Organize or participate in a local fishing event geared toward new or non-anglers. If everyone did this, there would be over 500 different events held next year, influencing thousands of new anglers. Contact local fishing tackle manufacturers, outdoor writers, fishing magazines, schools, Boy/Girl Scouts, etc. for help in improving or creating new fisheries in your area. To answer the "What will we do? challenge," focus on creating more access for metropolitan fishing opportunities, using species that are easy to catch and can be eaten. Share the fun and educational information via state fishing centers and state-wide media. Get creative!

Ideas for Action

I propose the following "Ideas for Action" (Table 1). Let me mention just a few of these. Every state should have a "fishing experience showcase" with hands-on demonstrations which can expose large numbers of children to the sport. Agencies should also improve press relations, develop overlooked sites to provide new fishing opportunities, work with private landowners and industry to improve existing fisheries, and get more children involved through group activities. Start thinking as to whether your projects, your promotions, and your resources are being developed with the non-angler in mind. Get creative.

One approach we at Storm Lures have taken to attract new anglers to our products uses music videos. We started this with one of our most unique lures, the Chug Bug™, a lure that will really catch fish. We bought the rights to Roger Miller's song "Chug-a-Lug, Chug-a-Lug" and re-wrote the lyrics to put together a unique music video. It runs on VCRs in many stores on the endcaps of aisles where there is a lot of *non-angler traffic, exposing newcomers to our product and the sport.*

These are the kind of thinking "outside the box" ideas that we all must be coming up with to show our sport as fun, modern, upbeat, and easy for a newcomer to get into.

Table 1. Ideas for action.**State agency projects:**

1. "Fishing experience showcase" in each state with a focus on fish and wildlife education and conservation, ecology, hands-on experience and excitement. Funded through Wallop-Breaux excise taxes, private donations, large corporate matching gifts. Aimed toward school children, especially destination field trips. Include: testing ponds (bait, bluegill/catfish, bass), theater/meeting room, snack bar, see-through aquariums (feeding demonstration), smaller aquariums with baitfish, crayfish, insects, etc. Examples: Will Kirkpatrick's Fishing Schools, Broadus, Texas (409-584-3177); Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center, Athens, Texas (903-676-BASS).

2. Press relations—Beef up press relations area to provide weekly outdoor-oriented press releases to all state newspapers. Promote conservation "good news" (success stories), fishing/hunting information including how to, when to, where to, and why do it information. Fishing tackle manufacturers do this but information is frequently viewed as self serving. State agency releases would be viewed as "citizen serving" and welcomed by outdoor writers. Should be mailed to other state's press relations departments so agencies can share each other's ideas.

Use of State land:

1. Work with departments of transportation concerning use of large interchange, highway areas for developing fishing ponds, increasing access.
2. Make available lists and maps of places to go (particularly in metro areas).
3. Identify and improve ponds and lakes within major cities.
4. Develop new "kid's ponds" in all major cities where only kids can fish (perhaps catch and release only).
5. Develop new fisheries such as the saugeye at Lake Thunderbird, Oklahoma.
6. Develop nature centers within school districts, possibly next to schools with enough land area.

Use of State fish:

1. Work with land and real estate developers to provide advice, planning, and fish, so that large developments can include lakes and ponds.
2. Work with existing inner city ponds, lakes, streams to develop viable fisheries—using catchable species such as bluegill, catfish, etc.
3. Work with private industry to improve failing lakes near largest metro areas.
4. Work with private landowners to stock watershed lakes. Offer incentives if they open lakes for public access. List these places in books, brochures, on the Internet or via 800/900 number where anglers can call and locate fishing areas.
5. Focus more on fish that can be eaten—walleye, saugeye, sauger, catfish, sunfish.
6. New fish hatcheries: Develop partnerships between industry, local fishing tackle dealers and manufacturers, and state agencies to build nursery ponds for stocking lakes such as the one at Lake Thunderbird, Oklahoma (G. Summers, Okla. Dep. Wildl. Conserv., pers. commun.).

Improvement of Current fisheries:

1. Target high population areas and focus on catchable and consumable species.
2. Get schools, community, and private industry involved in improving fish habitat.
3. Increase number of access points to public waters for bank fishermen.
4. Strongly enforce major penalties for poachers.

Recruitment:

1. Take your kids fishing. Take their friends fishing. Take your neighbor's kids fishing. Take the Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts fishing. Take the Big Brother/Big Sister kids fishing. Take the sports teams fishing.
2. Help develop school "fishing club" program—education, conversation projects, tournaments, etc.