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Biosketch:

An avid and passionate scuba diver, Michael is also a proven business leader and owner with extensive experience in digital marketing and interactive media. He has worked in key strategic, product development, and technical roles at media and advertising companies including ESPN, Conde Nast, Time Inc., TBWA/Chiat/Day, DraftFCB, Grey Healthcare, and others.

In 2006, Michael established Oceanblue Divers, a scuba diving club based in New York City that offers social events, group travel and training. One of the largest dive clubs in the U.S., Oceanblue includes over 1,500 members, with 11,000-plus Facebook fans. The club has hosted hundreds of events including fundraisers, happy hours featuring noted dive-world and ocean related speakers, and more than fifty trips to dive destinations worldwide.

In March 2013, Michael purchased Rex Dive Center in Norwalk, CT, a store with a twenty-year of serving divers in the New York City metropolitan southern Connecticut areas. Now located in Stamford in the heart of the downtown retail district, Oceanblue is reaching a whole new audience of millennials and others who live and work in the biggest and fastest growing city in southern Connecticut.

Michael earned his NAUI Scuba Diver certification in Turks and Caicos in 2002, and has been actively diving ever since. He has taught diving since earning his NAUI instructor certification in 2008, and most recently achieved his Instructor Trainer designation in 2012.

He has been serving on the NAUI board of directors since March of 2014, is the chairman of the Planning Committee, and also serves on the board of directors of one of the most noted, The Sea Turtle Conservancy, founded in 1959.

Position Statement:

The dive industry, and NAUI are at a crossroads. We have been facing a number of challenges, including decreased participation, and market and environmental challenges that put our sport at an existential juncture. How we meet these challenges in the near and longer term is key to the success of NAUI, and as a result, the dive industry at large.

In addition to the industry-wide challenges, we as NAUI are in an increasingly fierce and ever-changing competitive landscape. Our largest competitor was recently acquired by a large conglomerate with seemingly unlimited resources. The future of that company is uncertain, given the need to perform and bring a return on the investment. This will undoubtedly create upward pricing pressure, and likely bring opportunities to NAUI. We have to be positioned to take advantage of those opportunities.

This means we have to be more nimble and responsive to market needs than ever before, given a limited pool of resources and industry and competition.

In the years since I was elected in 2013, a number of key changes were made to standards and operationally at headquarters, and while much progress has been made, there is a lot still to be done. The board of directors is about to enter into a new phase of strategic planning like never before, initiated from the committee I am currently chairing, the Planning Committee. This strategic planning is where we will be looking at the industry and overall competitive landscape, and forge a path forward to bring NAUI into the future as the leader of dive training.

It has been my sincere honor to serve on the NAUI board of directors these last four years, and I am hopeful that with member support I can continue in this capacity, and help NAUI achieve continued and even greater success.

Answers to BoD Questions:

1. Once we understand what drives customers, it's much easier to sell them on the better way of doing dive training. As a dive store owner, I have to sell against the commoditized version of dive training every day. Our competitor's online training is at the heart of this commoditization, and we confront it all the time. An eLearning course and abbreviated training leads to ill-prepared divers, who often never dive more than once; they don't get to experience the sport in any meaningful way, let alone become instructors.

Growing NAUI membership starts with the basics, creating well-trained, divers, who are inspired to become instructors. The next big generation of divers, Millennials, are seeking experiences. They aren't necessarily interested in the shortest distance between two points, but they have a major training agency telling them that it's a good way of training. It's our job to tell them it's not, and sell them on the best way of achieving the experience they're after. If they enjoy their diving experiences once they complete training, they're infinitely more likely to be inspired to become instructors.

Our competitor's method is just a factory that produces one-time commodity divers. NAUI instructors know, good divers are nurtured, not created instantly. Our best means of combatting commoditization comes from understanding what drives customers, and sticking to the methodologies that we know work. If we do that, we might not create quite as many certification cards, but we will create divers who stick with the sport, become instructors, and put NAUI businesses on the path to success.

Regarding courses and programs, we need to focus on youth programs to get divers hooked early. This is really a marketing issue. Our two largest competitors have youth programs, and we need to do the same as we can get kids into the pool at eight years old to try scuba. By focusing on our core strengths and getting new divers started early, we can get them hooked early and encourage them to be divers for life.

2. As our voting numbers and attendance at NAUI sponsored events reflect, participation is not what it could and should be. I believe we can do a lot better in terms of participation in voting, events, committee work, and shows by finding more effective ways of communicating.

The key to membership participation is regular engagement. As a board member, I have heard a lot of feedback from members that they aren't aware of key events that are being offered for member benefit. This is despite a pretty large number of emails that are being sent out informing

members of what is happening. Clearly, we are not succeeding in making sure that members are engaged in a regular and sustained way.

In the age of information overload, we need to find multiple ways to engage members simultaneously. A well-established marketing concept is “The Rule of Seven.” It means that a consumer needs to see/hear things seven different times before making a decision to buy. Part and parcel of that is increasing the likelihood that the consumer will actually see and/or hear it.

A cohesive messaging strategy that includes SMS, a robust social media presence, a mobile app, as well as a consistent, well-crafted email strategy are some ways that we can ensure higher membership participation.

3. My professional background for the seventeen years preceding the purchase of a dive store in 2013 was in technology, new media and advertising. Having worked at media companies like Condé Nast, ESPN, Time, Inc., and at several top-tier advertising agencies, including TBWA/Chiat/Day, DraftFCB and Grey Healthcare, I participated in the leading edge of marketing methodologies and techniques, and increased my experience with the latest technologies used to promote a wide cross-section of businesses and products.

While marketing was not my initial focus, it became a passion of mine after establishing Oceanblue Divers, the club I founded in New York City in 2006. I had a lot of exposure to marketing when my primary career focus was technology, but became more involved in it both professionally and while building the club membership, now exceeding 1,500 members.

I worked on the launch of Mobile ESPN, currently the ESPN suite of mobile apps, at the very beginning in 2005. I also worked on the design of a number of entertainment, pharma and other sites and apps, a key component of which was brand positioning and promotion of products. This has given me a good understanding of how marketing should be conducted, and the most effective ways of gaining audience, translating that into sales.

Having served on the board of directors for the last four years, I have functioned as a key marketing and technology thought leader. I am always interested in and reading about the latest marketing trends, but there are some well-established tenets of marketing that hold true no matter what: effectively and creatively engage your audience and that will deliver participation.

Furthermore, and most critically, I have now owned a retail dive business for more than four years, and am now keenly attuned to key challenges facing dive business owners in the face of the gravity presented by Amazon and big online retailers, and others that they face on a day-to-day basis. I’ve earned a few scars in the last few years, and believe that helps me to help the dive association to which I am completely dedicated.

I hope, given all of these experiences, to continue to help guide NAUI on a path toward greater success worldwide.