



Scuba Confidential

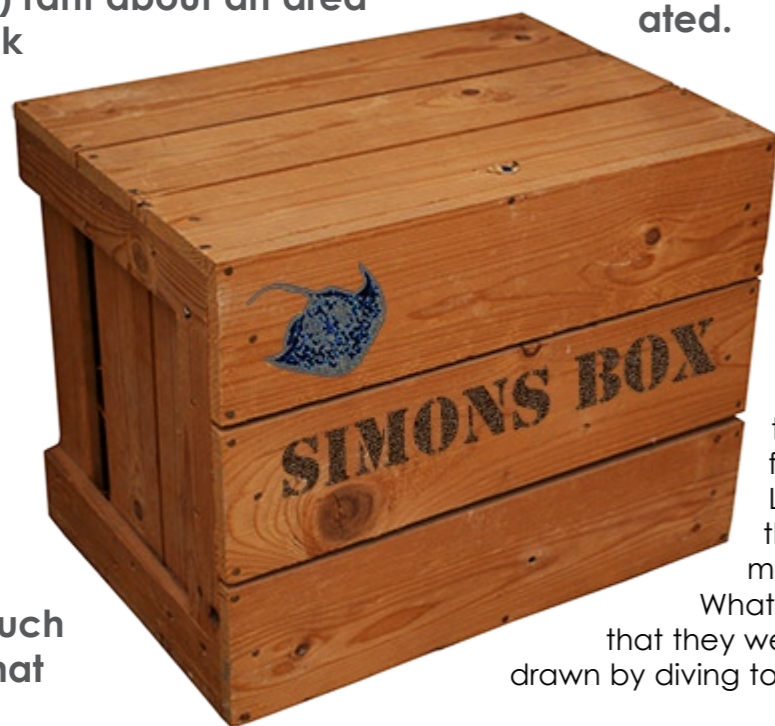
Unselling the Product

Scuba Confidential—A new regular column offering scuba diving tips and tricks, serious discussion of safety issues, insider revelations and provocative think pieces.

Text by Simon Pridmore

For the first article in this series, I have chosen to get up on my soapbox with a little constructive (I hope) rant about an area where I think the dive industry is failing itself and its customers. At a time when the dive industry is facing recruitment and retention challenges, to such an extent that

it is asking divers to make a special effort to introduce their friends and colleagues to the sport, (something most divers do anyway,) perhaps the industry should be looking closely at its own procedures to see if the recruitment and retention problems are partly self-generated.



I say this because I have met a number of folk recently who have told me that they tried diving once and found that "it wasn't for them". Let's examine that statement more closely.

What they mean is that they were sufficiently drawn by diving to pay for lessons

or a Discover Scuba experience, and the people involved with delivering that course or experience managed to put them off ever doing it again. In other words, when they walked into the dive centre, the sale had already been made and the dive centre somehow managed to "unsell" them!

Deliberately providing poor service

This was in my mind the other day when I was chatting with a dive centre manager and remarked on the poor condition of the rental gear that his operation issued to beginners. "Of course," he said, "we do it deliberately. It encourages them to buy their own equipment."

I was stunned that he would make such a crass statement. Quite apart from his ignorance of economic realities (dive centres make much more in percentage terms from renting out equipment than selling it) his thinking is about as wrong-headed as you can get. If a new diver does not enjoy his experience or his course, if he is not made as comfortable as possible, he will not pursue the sport. He will not become a diver, he will not rent equipment again, and he certainly will not buy anything!

This dive centre manager evidently is not alone in thinking this way. A while ago, I was consulting for a hotel chain that was looking for a local operator to run their on-site dive centre. One applicant, a very well known company with many branches, invited me and one of the hotel chain's directors to go diving with their flagship dive centre in order to impress us. The hotel director was a new-ish diver with 60 logged dives but did not own his own gear. "No problem," the operator said, "you can use ours."

Shabby gear

All the equipment was pretty shabby but it was the fins that drew our attention most. Where the foot pocket joined the blade, there was a wear line, and you could easily bend the blades up and down beyond 90 degrees. In the water, the fins just flapped around uselessly.

I noticed that my buddy did not have a dive computer, so asked if the dive



centre could lend him one, but the staff told us they did not have rental computers.

Anyway, they added, he didn't need a computer because the guide had one. Needless to say, the operator did not get the job.

Other anecdotal examples abound. One lady told me that for her first pool session (with a very large and successful dive centre in the Caribbean), she was not offered a wetsuit and ended the day with knee and elbow scrapes. She also had chafing marks from her BCD, which was so ill-fitting that the shoulder straps floated above her head on the surface.



opinion

The depth gauge on her console did not work and when this was pointed out to the

instructor he just said, "it doesn't matter, we are in a pool; we know how deep it is!" Luckily she persevered, found another shop and instructor and is now a proud and certified new diver. But she is an exception; we rarely get a second chance at recruiting someone to the sport if we mess it up first time.

Try it yourself!

Instructors and dive centre owners

should perhaps try diving with the equipment that they give beginners. They should experience for themselves how awkward it is and maybe then they will have some sympathy and improve the quality of their service. Those who do not give every one of their divers, no matter how inexperienced, the means to record depth and time on every dive should reflect on how naked they would feel diving without a computer.

I can just imagine the excuses that dive centre managers will come up with on reading this, pleading financial and time constraints or complaining about competitors that force them to cut corners. But think of this,

banks are hardly a benchmark for customer service these days, but even they know how important it is to look after new customers with special treatment and services. What do we do in the dive industry? Make them feel uncomfortable and unappreciated. It's a wonder any of them stick around!

Simon Pridmore has been around the scuba diving industry in Asia, Europe and the USA (well, Guam) for the last 20 years. His latest book, also called Scuba Confidential, was published in September and is available on Amazon.

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New dates set for EuroTek 2014

EUROTEK.2014 – the advanced and technical diving conference and exhibition – has announced that the dates for next year's event are changing.

Rosemary E Lunn, EUROTEK co-founder and co-organiser stated "After careful consideration we are moving

EUROTEK.2014 to September. When we heard that the Birmingham Dive Show would be held on the same weekend, we were pleased because it would have meant that delegates had the opportunity of attending both shows.

However we know that certain delegates want to devote themselves to a specific event and choosing can be tough. We felt the fairest option would be to change dates.

With EUROTEK.2014 now being held on Saturday 20th and Sunday 21st September, divers are free to attend both shows.

Deep wreck photographer Leigh Bishop has been busy pulling together a fabulous speaker list and this will be unveiled in due course.

In the meantime tickets will be going on sale in the early part of next year via www.eurotektickets.com

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