

Superyacht Industry: What Was it Like Before the iPhone?

Do you ever wonder what the Superyacht industry was like before the invention of new technologies?

Comms is a hot topic amongst crew and owners alike across the Superyacht industry. From keeping up with friends at home, to accessing real-time weather models and streaming movies. Yachts are humming with some of the latest and sometimes most advanced communications technologies on the planet. Budgets are often unlimited. And, owners are usually unwilling to accept compromise as they spend more time onboard. Resultantly, the marine communications sector has radically revolutionised the entire process of managing a yacht over the past 20 years.

It wasn't always like this though. Those of us who have been yachties for longer than we care to admit will remember the simpler times. Before Kymeta flat-panels, Crestron systems, and the days when the yacht didn't need its own profile on Instagram. Having "no signal" was once an inconvenience coupled with a shrug of the shoulder. But today, the key is reliability. Good communications mean happy owners, satisfied guests, and boatloads of charters. Here's what our captains had to say about 'the good old days'...

VHWhat?

Captain Alberto Zambelli, M/Y Tommy

Italian captains will remember a VHF telephone subscription service that cost a bundle and required pre-payment. Even if

you didn't use your "minutes". A switchboard would connect your call but there was a catch.

"During down times, we could listen in to sailors talking to their wives and girlfriends. Which, often turned comical with tears and arguments out in the open for everyone to hear..."

What about when you were out of Italian waters?

"You had to go to the post office and send a telegram to communicate with the owner or a broker to set up a charter!"



Image credit: Ulf Larsen

The joy of internet cafes

Captain Glenn Shepherd, PARSIFAL III/BigSailBoatJobs

Once the internet was in its infancy, Captain Glenn used to walk down the street to get online. In those days very few people had passwords on their home wireless networks, so catching a lucky break for a streetwise yachtie wasn't too difficult!

"VSAT was out by 2005, but it was so expensive, with no bandwidth whatsoever. In fact, I once had to take my boss to one of those rustic Internet cafés in the Caribbean to get online. He was an IT billionaire!"

Some of you will also fondly remember the process for contacting suppliers over in Antigua before the advent of mobile phones.

"Remember the VHF 68 channel?! You used that for everything from a restaurant booking to getting in touch with a contractor. And after working hours it wasn't a bad way of finding out if a mate was in a bar ashore either! It's funny because I could have sworn Antigua had 4G before most of the UK did..."

You spent how much?!?!

Captain Mike French

Mike talked with us about the changes in the exchange of information that the whole Superyacht industry has experienced since reliable Internet access has come about.

"We used to download emails twice a day. Emails had to be small with no graphics, otherwise, they would be intercepted

and deleted. The crew were allowed email addresses for the boat; Deckhand1, Stew2 with the boat's name etc. This was a major advance, and I recall having several prospective crew members check on whether we had email access prior to interviewing."

Then there are the horror stories of massive bills, of which there are many. Besides the costs there was always that message that didn't arrive. Which, meant no delivery of provisions, or a transfer that hadn't arrived because of a bad connection.

"On one trip, back in those days, we were acting as a wedding guest party venue and had around 100 guests coming and going to and from the boat. One of the guests found the bridge computer and decided to connect to the internet and collect their emails. They left the connection open, and it stayed open for about 36 hours until it was discovered. The bill was close to \$30,000 as it was charged by time online as well as data."

**Today's Superyacht Industry
landscape:**



Image from Roaming Expert Yachts

Mark Pattman, RoamingExpert Yachts

Modern providers of voice and data solutions for crew and boats are working hard on making connectivity between sea and shore easier and more cost effective. Gone are the days of having a phone number for every country you set foot ashore in (sorry Mum!). Nowadays an entire vessel's internet connection can be powered by a single 4G SIM package. Which, for the most part, is just as competitive as a regular, shoreside providers offering. Mark from RoamingExpert Yachts explained a bit to us

about how they work:

“For us, it’s really important to be able to explain the costs and limitations in simple terms. Users are much more conscious of their usage requirements these days and the related costs. This is because the digital age means that a lot more of our interaction hinges on internet usage. Crew and captains we work with really appreciate it when we let them know if their monthly data usage is approaching. And the limits set by them help to ensure that they get the best deal regardless of excessive data usage.”

Offering support and flexible data packages is key to keeping the roaming workforce of yachties connected and content.

“On the rare occasion that there is a connection problem, we ensure that a one of our technical team can be reached directly. We then check for any global network issues. And, go through router settings, often finding a solution to get users back online right away. An added benefit is the ability to pool our data allowance across all of the SIM cards issued to a particular yacht. Which, allows individuals to work away from the yacht with ease.”

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