

Why certified divers drop out of diving

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Key words

Scuba diving, questionnaire, World Wide Web, PADI

Abstract

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In early 2003, PADI conducted an online, two-week Web survey of 190,000 individuals certified at various levels after 1 January 2000. One of the questions asked was “Are you currently continuing to dive?” Out of 12,049 total responses (6.34% response rate), approximately 25% (n = 3041) had dropped out of diving at the time of the survey. The most prevalent reasons given included lack of time, equipment, local diving opportunities or dive buddies, and expense. Eleven per cent stopped due to a bad experience, and 4% stopped for medical reasons. Many respondents gave more than one reason for ceasing to dive. This presentation looks in greater detail at some of the reasons given for why divers quit.

Introduction

Historically, the drop-out percentage or ‘decay rate’ for diving has been a subject of uncertainty and debate. Estimates have been made in a number of reports but with no reliability. As part of a survey of its customers, the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) have attempted to provide some information in this area.

Methods

In early 2003, PADI conducted an online, two-week Web survey of 190,000 PADI-certified scuba divers, asking a variety of questions. One of the questions was “Are you currently continuing to dive?”

Results

Responses were received from 12,049 divers (a 6.34% response rate), approximately 25% (n = 3041) of whom had dropped out of diving at the time of the survey.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF RESPONDENTS

Of the respondents, 62% were male and 38% female, with about two thirds having a college or tertiary degree. Over 80% were Open Water or Advanced Diver certified. The drop-out rate for women was higher (32%) than for men (21%). The data also suggested that the higher the certification level, the more likely divers were to continue to scuba dive.

WHY CERTIFIED DIVERS ARE NOT DIVING

Many respondents gave more than one reason for ceasing to dive (Table 1). The top five reasons why divers were not diving were: no time (50%); they did not own their own diving equipment (48%); local diving was not available (47%); they had no buddy (32%); and diving was too expensive (31%). Of interest were the 18% who indicated they were not currently travelling, a reflection of the caution and fear of travel that was prevalent at the time of the survey. A bad experience was identified by 11%. 'Medical' reasons were given by 111 (4%) of the respondents, but no additional information was presented. Approximately 4% of women had stopped because of a pregnancy or a baby.

DIVERS WHO DROP OUT DUE TO A BAD EXPERIENCE

Three hundred and thirty four divers (11%) indicated that they had had a bad experience. Of these, 121 provided more detailed explanations. Thirty eight had experienced a lack of professionalism exhibited by dive industry personnel they encountered. A wide range of complaints were noted in this most common factor listed.

Twenty seven of the write-in respondents described an episode of anxiety, near panic or panic underwater, which caused them to stop diving. Contributing episodes included running out of air at the beginning of a deep dive, becoming lost or separated from a group, difficulty with mask flooding or clearing, ascent problems (including an inverted ascent in a dry suit) and other stressors. Buddy abandonment or poor buddy pairing by a dive master, or being paired with an unfamiliar person also led to anxiety and stress.

Eighteen respondents attributed the bad experience to poor diving conditions that caused them to stop scuba diving. Examples cited included rough water, strong currents, high seas, seasickness, cold water, dark water, the dive not meeting personal expectations, and discomfort from cold. Fifteen respondents reported a diving injury or accident, including pulmonary barotrauma, decompression sickness and immersion pulmonary oedema; whilst fourteen listed

a malfunction and/or faulty equipment maintenance as the causative factor. Problems with equalisation or other ear problems were reported by only nine divers.

Discussion

Historically, the drop-out percentage or 'decay rate' for diving has been a subject of uncertainty and debate. This representative sample of divers, who had received certification or an upgrade to certification within the past two years and responded to this online survey, indicated a drop-out percentage of 25%. Further study and analysis of divers over a longer period would be of interest. Of note is the declining percentage of female participation in PADI continuing education as compared with males, and the fact that female divers are more likely to stop diving than male divers.

The lack of time in today's busy world came out as the most cited reason for not continuing to dive in this survey. This has important implications for the diving industry, which would need to create attractive experiences to invite divers back into diving without having to commit a large amount of time in order to do so. It seems more likely that an individual will purchase diving equipment after continuing their diving education to more advanced levels of certification rather than at the time of their initial course. The time-proven advantages of offering attractive, convenient, continuing education programmes are clear.

The lack of someone to dive with was noteworthy. This is an opportunity for dive centres to design and promote social events and dive clubs to encourage participation. Diving is a lifestyle in which people enjoy socialising and sharing the experience.

The most common reason that a diver had had a bad experience was an unprofessional attitude by members of the recreational dive industry. Striving to reduce and

Table 1
Responses by divers who were not diving at the time of a PADI Web-based survey (Total n = 3041)
(Multiple responses accepted; total over 100%)

Number of responses	n	%
No time	1517	50
Don't own equipment	1447	48
No local diving	1423	47
No dive buddy	958	32
Too expensive	928	31
Don't like local diving	675	22
Won't travel now	540	18
Had bad experience	334	11
Other	139	5
Took up another hobby	121	4
Medical reasons	111	4

eliminate such attitudes and behaviour is in the best interest of every stakeholder and consumer involved in diving. Finally, 'word of mouth' has proven to be the number one source of new diver acquisition in the dive industry. If the best possible goods and services are provided for clients, and they derive value and satisfaction from these, then they will recruit new consumers into recreational diving.

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