



DEALER SPIKE

DEALER SPOTLIGHT

46 Years on the Water, 10 Years Partnered

The story of Fred's Marine and a partnership built on trust.

Kip Ames is a co-owner of **Fred's Marine** in Layton, Utah. We caught up with Kip on a Tuesday morning during peak boating season and getting him on the phone in June is a bit like trying to catch a speedboat with a kayak. He'd just finished a house call for a customer, bright and early before his store even opened, but still made time to speak with us. We talked about the shop's humble origins, the service philosophy that keeps customers coming back, and why Fred's Marine briefly left Dealer Spike before coming right back.

Where It Started

Fred Ulrich had dreamed of owning his own boat shop since he was a kid. He used to doodle Fred's Marine logo in art class, sketching a little outboard boat to stand in for the apostrophe. In 1980, he walked away from his job as a mechanic at another dealership, just weeks before his first child was born, and started Fred's Marine from scratch.

Kip's own introduction to the family business came with a memorable job interview. The night he asked Fred for his daughter's hand in marriage doubled as a hiring conversation. "It took him about three minutes to give his permission," Kip says, "and then it was like an hour-long conversation about coming to work." Kip and his brother-in-law, Brian, spent the next fifteen years running the front end of the business while Fred ran the shop floor, and in 2020 the two took ownership together.

Doing It Right

Fred's Marine's esteemed reputation comes down to the service department. "We just try and get the job done right the first time," he says. His technicians are factory-trained, but Kip doesn't measure them by hours billed. If a tech notices a loose bolt or a worn hose clamp while working on something else, the standard is to fix it or call the customer first, not quietly add it to the invoice.

This commitment to customer care and trust is why Fred's Marine stays booked at least three weeks out in the middle of boating season, and why customers who try a faster shop come right back once they've seen the comparison.

If our techs see that there's a problem with something else, even if it's not something that's on their repair order, it's, 'Can I fix it right now?'"

KIP AMES Co-Owner

Back Where They Belong

Fred's Marine has been happy at home with Dealer Spike for years, but there was a stretch when they tried a different website provider. A rep from another company had pitched Brian at an industry meeting, promising SEO expertise and no extra marketing costs. In theory, it sounded good enough to try. But in execution, it failed to live up to its promise.

Inventory stopped syncing with Lightspeed, so Kip's team had to enter everything twice. The site's SEO was tuned for Salt Lake City rather than Layton (25 minutes north), and customers started calling to ask if the store had moved. The inventory pages featured photos of the wrong boat brands. After months of asking them to fix it, nothing changed.

Kip picked up the phone, called Dealer Spike, and asked to be turned back on.

I didn't even try to look at other website [providers]. I just said, I'm going back."

KIP AMES *Co-Owner*

Finally, Fred's Marine was back to running a single inventory entry through Lightspeed that automatically feeds its website, KSL Classifieds, and several other listing sites. Kip can make his own changes now, too: new summer hours, a page for a weekend sale, published himself instead of waiting on a support ticket. When something does slip through, like a holiday hours banner he forgets to turn off, his Dealer Spike rep, Chelsea, tends to catch it before he does.

He knows dealers pay thousands more a month for custom sites, and he's always felt Dealer Spike is priced fairly for what he gets. It's usually one of his biggest selling points when other dealers ask him about making the switch.

That Lightspeed connection is exactly where Dealer Spike is putting its next round of investment. Under the New Dealer Spike, deeper and more dependable dealer management system integrations are a headline commitment.

Having the team that kind of monitors and helps that for me is the bigger advantage than probably any of the digital tools."

KIP AMES *Co-Owner*

Not Slowing Down

Kip and Brian are focused on sustaining and scaling that success. They're leaning on the Dealer Spike tools they already trust and building out the educational content and how-to pages that keep customers coming back to the site long after the sale.

Recently, Kip was invited to represent Fred's Marine at Dealer Spike's Dealer Advisory Council, an initiative designed to strengthen collaboration between Dealer Spike and its invaluable dealer community. This council provides actionable feedback that directly supports the development and improvement of the tools and services that power dealership operations. Kip's insights have led to many new and improved solutions, making him an integral part of Dealer Spike's future.

When asked to describe his confidence in Dealer Spike today, Kip doesn't hesitate. "I'm 9 out of 10," he says.

I'm extremely confident with what we have already and the product that's available, and extremely excited with the product that is coming."

KIP AMES *Co-Owner*