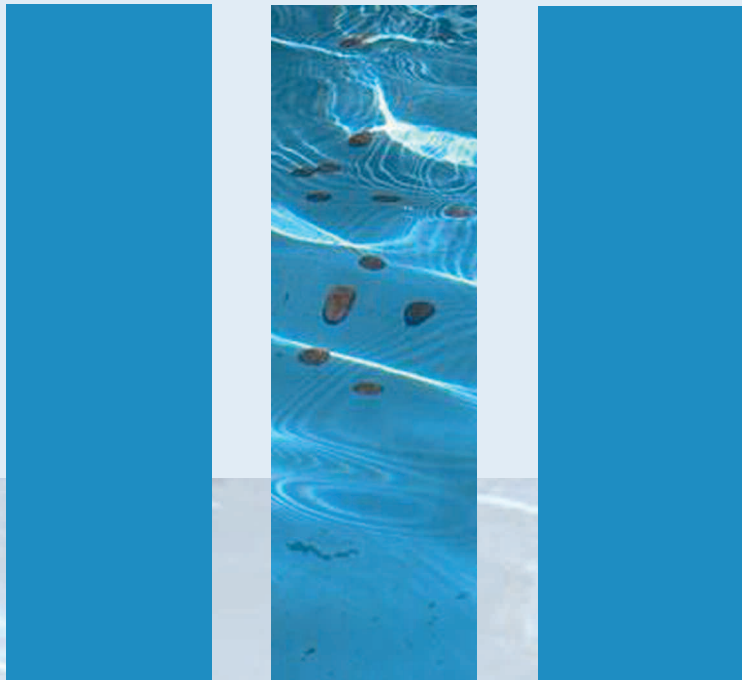


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Distinguish Yourself with a Distinctive Specialty

by Steven Schultz [MSDT-42464]



As dive operators in the fiercely competitive leisure activity market, we can fight for new customers amongst ourselves using tired, old business strategies, or we can work together to innovate, differentiating ourselves from the competition and opening new markets.

PADI's training tools and marketing techniques have overwhelmed other certification agencies with their sophistication and innovation. The difficulty now is that we often use these tools and techniques to compete against each other, thereby neutralizing the advantages gained when we competed against non-PADI members.

The question to ask now is, "How can we, as PADI Members, leverage the strengths of PADI's marketing programs while still differentiating ourselves?" One powerful way to do this is to develop and market PADI Distinctive Specialties to open interest in diving to new, and existing, markets.

Instructors who have taught or serviced divers for more than a year or two have likely found their own areas of expertise, areas where they enjoy teaching or leading divers the most. Some instructors have become accomplished wreck divers. Others have gained interest and expertise teaching cavern diving. In my particular case, I found I enjoyed helping nervous divers work through their first dives or get past the barrier of learning dive skills that were difficult for them to master.

As I worked with more and more students in these areas, I earned a reputation for being able to help nervous and uncomfortable divers. I was soon receiving referrals from other divers and instructors. I soon realized I could formalize my techniques for helping divers relax and improving their underwater performance for other instructors and divers to use, so I set about developing a PADI Distinctive Specialty.

I originally called the specialty Mind, Body and Spirit Scuba because I used mental, physical and spiritual tools to relax divers and empower them to improve their scuba experience. I directed the program towards those I considered my customer base:

- Uncomfortable novice divers who wanted to relax into the dive experience; and,
- Experienced divers who wanted to improve their skills and enhance interaction with marine life.

However, because I use techniques drawn from yoga, meditation, Pilates, etc., to help divers become more relaxed underwater, I was able to market the course to people I had never considered potential dive customers. These included people with new age interests, environmentalists and martial artists. Adding meditation and yoga to the dive experience helped me overcome customers' unfounded fears that scuba is dangerous and hard to learn. The breathing and stretching techniques positioned scuba as a potential relaxation therapy in the pool and open water. At one point, I had a pool full of

eight middle-aged professional women with no dive experience who were using scuba-based weightlessness as a way to relax and de-stress. Now that is truly a new market.

The Mind, Body and Spirit (MBS) Scuba and Snorkeling Distinctive Specialty course teaches students to relax while diving, enhances inwater fun and increases diving's fun and enjoyment. The program is geared toward both novice and advanced divers.

training time to become truly comfortable underwater.

Once I'd finished writing my distinctive specialty program and had it approved by PADI, I quickly realized that to teach MBS Scuba, I needed to market it. I put together a brochure with photos of my students performing the skills and went off to DEMA to market the program.

As an independent instructor, it was important to find partners to help market MBS Scuba. I was looking for dive centers to host the program and it was a tough sell at first. It was hard to find dive operators who took the program seriously and who would help develop these new markets. Eventually I found a few resorts that were promoting health and fitness as part of their — and scuba's — image and a match was made.

The Harbour Village Resort and Spa on Bonaire, Netherlands Antilles, has hosted the MBS Scuba program twice as part of its Wellness Festival. And, one of my MBS Scuba students became certified as an MBS instructor and now markets the program to women's and wellness groups, with much success. I have had the good fortune to teach MBS on the *Belize Aggressor* and am currently working on arrangements with another dive operator in the Turks and Caicos Islands, British West Indies.

Future sales and marketing goals for MBS Scuba include finding a permanent

home for the program, a place that can brand itself as a premier dive relaxation resort; a place to really get away from it all and de-stress — almost a necessity in today's world. Partnering with an operation would also help me develop an annual or bi-annual event, much like the Nikonos Shoot Outs or the International Free Diving Championships, in which the average diver can participate.

By the way, in addition to the highly stressed, this non-traditional application of scuba diving has also piqued the interest of the mainstream press. *Shape* magazine, a women's wellness publication with a monthly circulation of more than 1.6 million readers, will be running a profile of the program in an upcoming issue.

If you, as a dive instructor or operator, have a specialty or skill that distinguishes you from the pack, it might be a good idea to develop it as a PADI Distinctive Specialty. I'm living proof that in today's tough market, it pays to differentiate.

For more information about the Mind, Body and Spirit Scuba Distinctive Specialty, email Steve Shultz at mbsdiver@mindspring.com

To learn more about distinctive specialties and how to develop yours, contact an educational consultant at your PADI Office. ♦



The most important skill in MBS Scuba is the breathing exercises. These were adapted from disciplines including meditation, yoga and martial arts. People who have experience with these activities are delighted to discover they can adapt them to scuba, which — strange as it sounds — they often view as a more aggressive sport.

Another important skill in the MBS Scuba Distinctive Specialty is stretching. I found stretching skills invaluable in attracting dedicated athletes, as well as people who practice yoga, Pilates and other deep breathing and stretching disciplines to MBS Scuba. The stretches in this specialty were modified from yoga and modern sports training techniques to:

- Enhance pre-dive relaxation;
- Cut down on cramps and muscle pulls; and
- Release endorphins to make the dive more relaxing.

In addition, I incorporated visualization skills into MBS Scuba, which are a powerful tool for helping uncomfortable and nervous divers work through complex skills. These skills were added for the many divers who enjoyed diving, but who needed more