





## Taking Care of Business

they keep out of sight in a cabinet.

"We're neat freaks," says Don. That much is readily apparent to anyone who comes aboard. The L-shaped desk in the office space at the foot of the steps between the salon/galley level and the stateroom level is conspicuously uncluttered. An office is an option on Kadey-Krogen trawler yachts. On *Landd Ho*, it's simply a stateroom minus a section of bulkhead that would normally separate it from the companionway. Most custom and semi-custom builders offer similar spaces, and several production builders will accommodate customers who want an onboard office. A counter in place of a berth or some salon cabinetry often constitutes an "office" on the water. For many boat owners, their desks are their dinette tables.

The Obitzes have a satellite TV antenna, but not a satellite phone. "Our cruising is primarily coastal, and our Verizon cell phone is all we need. It works in the Bahamas, Mexico and Canada and as far as 20 miles offshore," says Don. "We have a FedEx account and a mailbox at a UPS Store from which mail is forwarded to us every week. Marinas are always very cooperative about handling mail. I know that I could gain onboard access to the Internet, but that's also available at most marinas. Besides, I'm not addicted."

The Internet. That's the Holy Grail of onboard communications. Everything else is relatively easy. Home-like Internet access is key to many business ventures and work-from-home jobs, hence to many business people who want to stay plugged into the Web from aboard their boats—even when anchored out. Two such people are Al Behrendt and Brenda Fletcher, who, along with Al's daughter Jennifer, run the Bahamas Billfish Championship—a series of five big-game tournaments. They have to post results on the Internet daily and field online registrations. Behrendt converted a stateroom on his



**FAR FROM HOME:** Brenda Fletcher posts tournament results on board in the Bahamas.

37-foot Phoenix to an office in the mid-'90s. Now, he operates from the office aboard his Hatteras 52, *Still Uncontrollable*. Because of fast and easy Internet access, he's able to spend weeks at a time in the islands, far from his office in Hollywood, Fla.

Spurred by his own communications

### Communications Sources

[www.beaconwifi.com](http://www.beaconwifi.com)  
[www.geosatsolutions.com](http://www.geosatsolutions.com)  
[www.globalstarusa.com](http://www.globalstarusa.com)  
[www.iridium.com](http://www.iridium.com)  
[www.kvh.com](http://www.kvh.com)  
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requirements, as well as by those of many of the anglers who fish his tournaments, Behrendt has made the business of onboard Internet access part of his own business. He markets a 12-volt 9" x 9" x 2½" Internet access box called GEOSat Mobile Wi-Fi for \$1,300 (including cables and antenna). It can be mounted anywhere and contains a LAN card (in essence, a two-way radio) that provides wireless Internet access in all parts of the U.S., as well as in several of the most popular areas of the Bahamas. To make use of it, your computer must have an ethernet port and your boat must be within five miles of a "hot spot"—an access point from which the GEOSat's signal can be relayed via a DSL line or a satellite dish.

These hot spots are becoming increasingly common at marinas and are often accessible for free. But more often, they are by subscription. Beacon

Wi-Fi is an Internet access provider that charges \$12 a day or \$30 a month to boat owners who dock at its 120 wired marinas from the Florida Keys to Falmouth, Mass. (plus four on the Great Lakes). This rate guarantees high-speed (at least 1.5 mbps/sec) wireless access from within the marina to boaters who have computers with built-in Wi-Fi modems. Those who don't can purchase a Beacon modem (a PC card) for \$99.

Handheld satellite phones, such as those from Globalstar and Iridium, allow you to dial from far offshore, and are invaluable as safety gear and as office hardware. Satellite antennas, such as the compact Tracphone F33 from KVH and Wave Call from SeaTel, provide Internet access from out at sea, even while under way. Such hardware is expensive, however, and rates for online time are relatively high. Internet "surfing" speed from satellite phone connections can also be quite slow. The quest for instant, painless onboard Internet access continues.

Working from home has become a way of life for millions; working from aboard a boat is just an extension of this liberating arrangement. As Behrendt says, "The ultimate object is to make it as easy as possible for boat owners to conduct business from their boats, no matter where they are. The easier it is, the greater the chances they'll take advantage of all that their boats have to offer." ☺