



## Tournament Fishing and Technology Come Together to Foster Tremendous Growth for FLW Outdoors

**Name:**  
FLW Outdoors

**Internet:**  
www.flwoutdoors.com

**Products/Services:**  
Hosts Fishing Tournaments

**Location:**  
Benton/Marshall County

**Leadership:**  
Charlie Evans, President and CEO

**Employees:**  
200

**Founded:** 1979

**Reach:** International

**Innovative Insight:** *“Hosting a frequently updated website which includes live streaming video of our events, weigh-ins, registration, as well as a large archive of photos, results and stats.”*

**Way Internet Has Made You More Competitive:** *“The Internet allows us to keep our readers, followers and anglers tuned in and up-to-date with our most current news.”*

**Ways to Continue to Attract the Best Workers:** *“By taking care of your current workers.”*

**Ways to Maintain other Competitive Advantages:** *“Continually strive to improve and don’t take anything for granted.”*

**Benton, Kentucky** - Many people probably remember the first time they went fishing. With Kentucky’s abundant rivers, ponds and lakes, fishing is a rite of passage for many residents.

FLW Outdoors, located in Benton, Ky., has turned this popular pastime into a lucrative business. The company hosts competitive fishing tournaments around the nation, and the popularity of these events has exploded during the last 10 years.

Founded in 1979, FLW Outdoors began as Operation Bass under Mike Whitaker of Gilbertsville, Ky., a former high school teacher and football coach turned electronics salesman. The company held its first tournament on Barren River Lake near Glasgow, Ky., in March 1980. That year the company hosted 12 events in two states and awarded \$20,000 in prize money.

“The prize money is the best way to demonstrate our growth. Today, we have 12 tournament trails and are giving away \$43 million in prize money,” said Dave Washburn, vice president of communications for FLW Outdoors.

There are currently more tournaments offered and greater cash awards earned than at any point in the sport’s history - a feat that can largely be attributed to the strategic actions of the leadership at FLW Outdoors. The company’s sponsors read like a “Who’s Who?” in corporate America with names like Castrol, Kellogg’s and Chevy. Perhaps the biggest catch of all, however, is Wal-Mart, which partnered with the company in 1997 and today is the title sponsor of all 12 tournament trails.

“There are 55 million anglers in this country, and there are more people in the U.S. who fish than play golf and tennis combined,” said Washburn. “Prior to the FLW Tour in 1996, this audience had never been marketed to, and our sponsors understand that our audience is a very loyal consumer group.”

Technology has allowed FLW Outdoors to expand its market globally and to better serve anglers and consumers. The company’s website, designed and maintained in-house, regularly receives 5 million page views per month. Anglers who participate in FLW tournaments include people from nearly every state in the nation plus visitors from Australia, Canada, Italy, Japan, Mexico and Spain. The website is instrumental in keeping anglers updated and informed about ongoing events.

The site offers up-to-the-minute coverage of tournaments and “FLW Live,” which features live streaming audio, video and leaderboards from selected events. The site has an extensive archive available of past tournaments and also has interactive features allowing anglers to register for tournaments online.

“Before the website, there was a large volume of calls, and now more and more people register for tournaments online – this allows our customer service people to work more efficiently, as simple inquiries are more automated,” said Washburn.

Taking FLW Outdoors online was a strategic move that brought the world of tournament fishing to the masses. “This website has been a significant investment on our part,” Washburn said.

