

Originating A Category

An Interview with AJ Blackmon, Chief Executive Officer, Ikonic Yachts

EDITORS' NOTE *AJ Blackmon has 15 years of experience in the yachting industry, starting from yacht management and charters to becoming a top-producing broker at Cambridge Yacht Group. He co-founded Apollo Yachts and played a key role in the acquisition of Apollo Yachts by Vista Global Holdings. Now, as the founder and CEO of Ikonic Yachts, Blackmon is building a company unlike any other in the world of yachting. Ikonic Yachts is built on a foundation of trust and authenticity rather than a transaction-first approach, positioning it as the first family office yachting advisory firm. With numerous sales and high-value charters completed, Blackmon's leadership is driving Ikonic Yachts to the forefront of the global luxury yachting market. His hands-on experience, leadership, and strong client relationships are driving Ikonic Yachts to become a key player in the global luxury yachting market while offering expert family office level advice to yacht owners and charterers.*



AJ Blackmon

COMPANY BRIEF *Ikonic Yachts (ikonicyachts.com) is the first yachting family office advisory firm dedicated to curating bespoke experiences that go beyond expectations, seamlessly blending luxurious comfort, cutting-edge technology, and sustainable innovation. With an unwavering commitment to personalized service and excellence, Ikonic Yachts is redefining the modern yachting experience through the expertise of its world-class team. From buying and selling to chartering and yacht management, Ikonic Yachts creates tailored solutions designed with precision, discretion, and a deep understanding of each client's unique vision and lifestyle. With Ikonic, every yacht journey becomes an extraordinary adventure, guided by a passion for excellence and a commitment to surpassing expectations.*

Will you discuss your career journey?

I grew up in Cameron, Missouri – small town, working-class. My mother used to tell me, “Remember whose you are.” That line still runs my operating system. I wasn't born into yachting. It took a lot of failing, finding myself, a little bit of luck, and endless hard work and determination to get to this point.

I founded Apollo Yachts and scaled it through a market most brokerages don't survive. I sold it to Vista Global in 2022. That exit gave me the freedom to do something I'd been thinking about for years: build a firm that treats yacht ownership the way the best wealth managers treat a portfolio. That's Ikonic.

How do you describe Ikonic Yachts' mission?

We're the first yachting family office advisory firm. The mission is simple: bring institutional-grade discipline, intelligence, and discretion to a

market that has historically been transactional and salesy. Our clients don't need another broker. They need an advisor who treats their yacht the way their wealth manager treats their book, as a long-term asset inside a bigger life.

What have been the keys to Ikonic Yachts' industry leadership?

Three things. One, we originated a category. The yachting family office model didn't

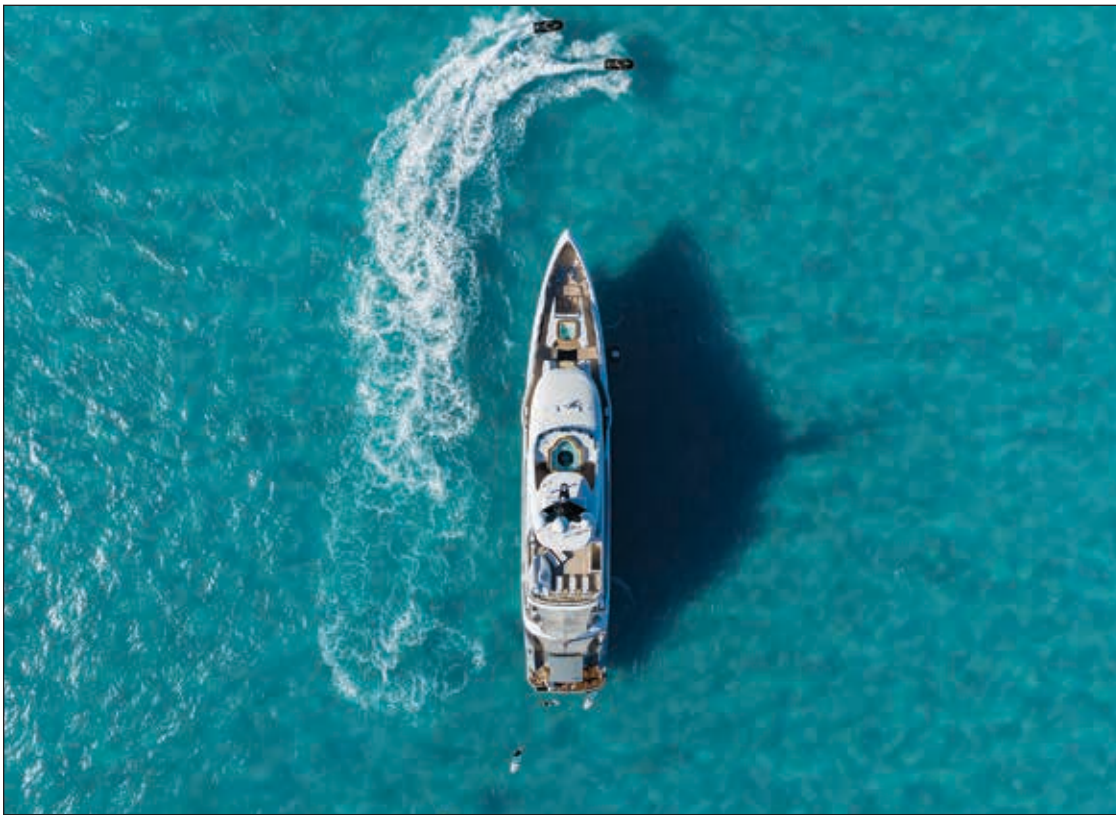
exist before us. Others have tried to mimic the language. Nobody operates the substance. Two, we picked a lane and stayed in it. We aren't built to cater to every yacht owner profile. Every system, every relationship, every piece of intelligence is built for our ideal client and market segment we thrive in. We don't chase volume or relationships outside of it. Three, SVRN, our proprietary intelligence platform. It gives us a view of the market, ownership patterns, fleet movement, and capital flows that traditional brokerages don't have access to. That's not a marketing line. That's a working moat.

How do you define the Ikonic difference?

We don't sell, we advise. The difference shows up in everything: how we structure engagements, how we present opportunities, and what we tell a client not to buy. A traditional brokerage gets paid when a deal closes, so the conversation is always pointed at a transaction. Our conversation is pointed at the client's actual life, how a yacht fits into it, when it doesn't, and what the



Built in Turkey by Bilgin Yachts, the 47-meter superyacht MOONRAKER showcases Ikonic Yacht's signature balance of performance, sophistication, and modern design



Ikonic Yacht's MOONRAKER boasts an incredible naval architecture for outdoor and indoor comfort (above and below)

right move looks like over a 10-year horizon, not a 90-day commission window. That's the Ikonic difference. It's not a tagline. It changes the math of every conversation we have.

Will you provide an overview of Ikonic's services and capabilities?

Ikonic has three core verticals:

Sell-side advisory: we represent owners listing yachts in the pedigree yachting segment – pricing strategy, marketing, qualified buyer access, and transaction management.

Buy-side advisory: we represent buyers as their advocate, not the seller's. That's a structural distinction most of the industry blurs. We don't.

Charter advisory: bespoke charter sourcing and itinerary design for clients who want the experience without the ownership commitment, or owners who want their yacht professionally placed in the charter market.

Underneath all three sits SVRN, our intelligence platform, and a reporting standard built for clients who are used to family office-grade documentation.

How do you focus your efforts leading Ikonic Yachts?

I protect three things: the brand, the pipeline, and the standard.

Brand means we don't drift. We don't take listings outside our segment because they're available. We don't soften the advisory model to win a transactional deal. The discipline is the brand.

Pipeline means I stay close to the deals that move the firm: owner relationships, the institutional buyers, and the long-cycle conversations that turn into eight-figure transactions two years later.

Standard means that everything we put in front of a client – a deck, a market memo,

a contact slide – looks and reads like it came from a firm that takes itself seriously. There's no version of "good enough" at this level.

How critical has it been to build the Ikonic team?

Critical, but not in the way most people mean. I'm not trying to build the biggest team in the industry. I'm trying to build the right one.



Matt Dorman, our COO, and Ben Siegel, our SVP of Sales and Strategy, lead operational and SVRN technology execution alongside me: pipeline discipline, deal management, the work that has to get done flawlessly behind every client touchpoint. That kind of partnership is rare, and it's the foundation for everything built on top of it.

On broker recruiting, we're selective. We're looking for advisors who already think like fiduciaries: relationship-first, anti-sales by instinct, comfortable telling a client no. You can't train that. You hire it. Headcount isn't the goal. Quality of mind is.

What are your priorities for Ikonic Yachts as you look to the future?

Four priorities. One, diversify the pipeline so we're never overweight to a single relationship or transaction. Concentration is a risk we manage actively. Two, keep building SVRN into a real institutional moat. The platform is two years ahead of what anyone else in the industry is doing. I want it five years ahead. Three, defend the category we created. We're seeing competitors copy the language. That doesn't bother me. What I protect is the substance behind it, the operating model, the standard of work, the client experience. They can copy a tagline. They can't copy the system. Four, build a recruiting platform that gives the right kind of broker a real home. There's a generation of advisors in this industry who are tired of working inside transactional shops. I want Ikonic to be where they end up.

The long arc is to be the firm that the most discerning yacht owners in the world default to, not because we're the loudest, but because we're the most credible. That's the build. ●