

Creating Killer Dealership Events

BY [ALISA CLICKENGER](#) ON JUL 30, 2015



Attracting new customers to your dealership is an important part of doing business. Reaching non-motorcyclists and bringing them into the fold is essential to both meeting sales goals as well as to the overall health of the industry. In this world of information overload how do we reach our potential customers in a meaningful way? For many dealerships, one way is through dealership events. Special events, combined with a marketing strategy that brings people to your store, can be a powerful way of bringing new customers through your doors. Done right, these events can also help you have a deeper reach into your existing customer base.

David Diaz, General Manager at Irv Seaver BMW Motorcycles in Orange, California, is a fan of having world travelers come and speak at the dealership. He tells a story of a motorcycle upsell to an existing customer that came to a talk by 'Round the World travelers Simon and Lisa Thomas. The customer was a touring motorcyclist who had never even considered riding a motorcycle outside the United States before

attending the talk. Five years later, the customer and his wife have ridden a series of GSes, all bought at Irv Seaver, all over the globe.

By attending talks, presentations and events at the dealership customers can become exposed to a whole new world of motorcycling. They can also meet other like-minded bikers with whom they can form friendships and perhaps become riding buddies. Developing these connections at your place of business or at an event hosted by your dealership only serves to strengthen their relationship with your business.



Every brand wants conquest sales, and what better way to sway your audience than to show them the heart of what your bikes and your brand(s) are all about? “At any marketing event we’re trying to get customers familiar with our store, and in a way that’s a very positive thing that helps motorcycling in general. And we feel once they come in and see

what we’re about they’ll continue coming here regardless of what they’re riding,” says Diaz.



Variety is the spice of life, and in addition to hearing from other moto travelers, folks go to Irv Seaver BMW for rides, barbeques and biker’s first aid workshops in which customers learn on-the-road triage for their bikes, should roadside repairs become necessary. This month Irv Seaver BMW is hosting a “Straight Talk with the CHP” event, at which customers can

come and learn how to avoid getting pulled over. Customers will be able to ask the California Highway Patrol officers questions as well as use a radar gun on passing street traffic.

At last month’s first-Saturday-of-the-month barbecue the “Black Girls Ride” urban women’s riding group made an appearance. Invited by an employee of Irv Seaver BMW, the women came out memorializing a fellow member that had recently passed away. It was an exceptional sight to see the group roll into the

BMW dealership on all makes and models of cruisers and sportbikes, none of which were BMWs. “The event gave all the ladies an opportunity to come out and see what BMW is all about,” says Diaz.

Not all dealerships are lucky enough to be able to plan and build their dealership before they open for business, yet Thunder Mountain Harley-Davidson did exactly that. Owner Todd Erdmann’s vision was for a destination complex with food, entertainment and an entire experience with a motorcycle dealership at its heart. The 15-acre complex is home to the dealership itself plus training rooms for their Harley-Davidson Riding Academy, an outdoor range for the Riding Academy, an office complex that is home to a media conglomerate owning seven radio stations, an outdoor amphitheater and a Hooters restaurant. The original plans also called for a hotel, which may yet still be in the works.

Taking dealership events to an entirely new level, Thunder Mountain Harley-Davidson has the capacity to host large outdoor music events on a regular basis. They were the first dealer in Colorado to hire a dedicated marketing and events manager who understood events other than dealer events. Jill Almirall, Marketing and Events Manager, has a degree in marketing and 15 years of marketing experience prior to working at Thunder Mountain. “Our objective is to create a unique and kick-ass experience,” says Almirall. The dealership’s entire marketing plan is customer driven with a lot of time spent not only listening to customers but also discussing internally what they hear customers say they want and how to achieve it. “Our entire marketing plan is customer led and customer driven. That means that we pay attention to who the customer is. We want to know what excites them and ultimately provide that experience,” explains Almirall.



Almirall thinks life should be set to a soundtrack and she does her best to do that for Thunder Mountain. They focus on Classic Rock and Country concerts, cultivating the camaraderie between riders and people in general through the medium of music. According to her, music helps people to re-live their glory days;

times when they were free with no responsibilities, no worries. A way to experience the same wind in your hair and freedom of riding, yet in a setting that's not on two wheels.

“We harness the power of the passion that's Harley-Davidson day-in and day- out,” says Almirall. “It's amazing to me the power of the bar and shield. We use that to break down stereotypes.” Almirall and her team harness that power and turn curiosity into passion. She prints tickets for their Ladies Garage Parties and puts them in the hands of her employees. They, in turn, hand them out to their hairdressers, grocery clerks, liquor store employees, anyone they come into contact with in the community.

Ladies turn out in droves. Each ticket offers free entry to the event, which includes food and an open bar. On the back of the ticket, an exclusive coupon is printed that offers the bearer an exclusive Rider Training coupon. It works. In 2014 nearly half of those attending Rider Training were women. People taking classes are the closest to making a purchase in the buying cycle, so, effectively, Thunder Mountain has developed its own gateway for new customers.

Almirall makes it appear easy, yet it's the hard work behind the scenes that creates the big payoffs.

“Creating killer events is long, hard, dirty, sweaty work. You need tenacity and attention to detail,” notes Almirall. Using a thoughtful combination of billboards, direct mail, print, television, radio and social media has paid off for the dealership. They're reaching out beyond their current enthusiasts and

into the community in order to create more potential customers for more sales. Your dealership can do that as well, in part by creating killer dealership events, even if you don't have a rock band playing in your parking lot.



The hardest part is getting people to your event. From there, the rest should fall into place with a well-planned event.