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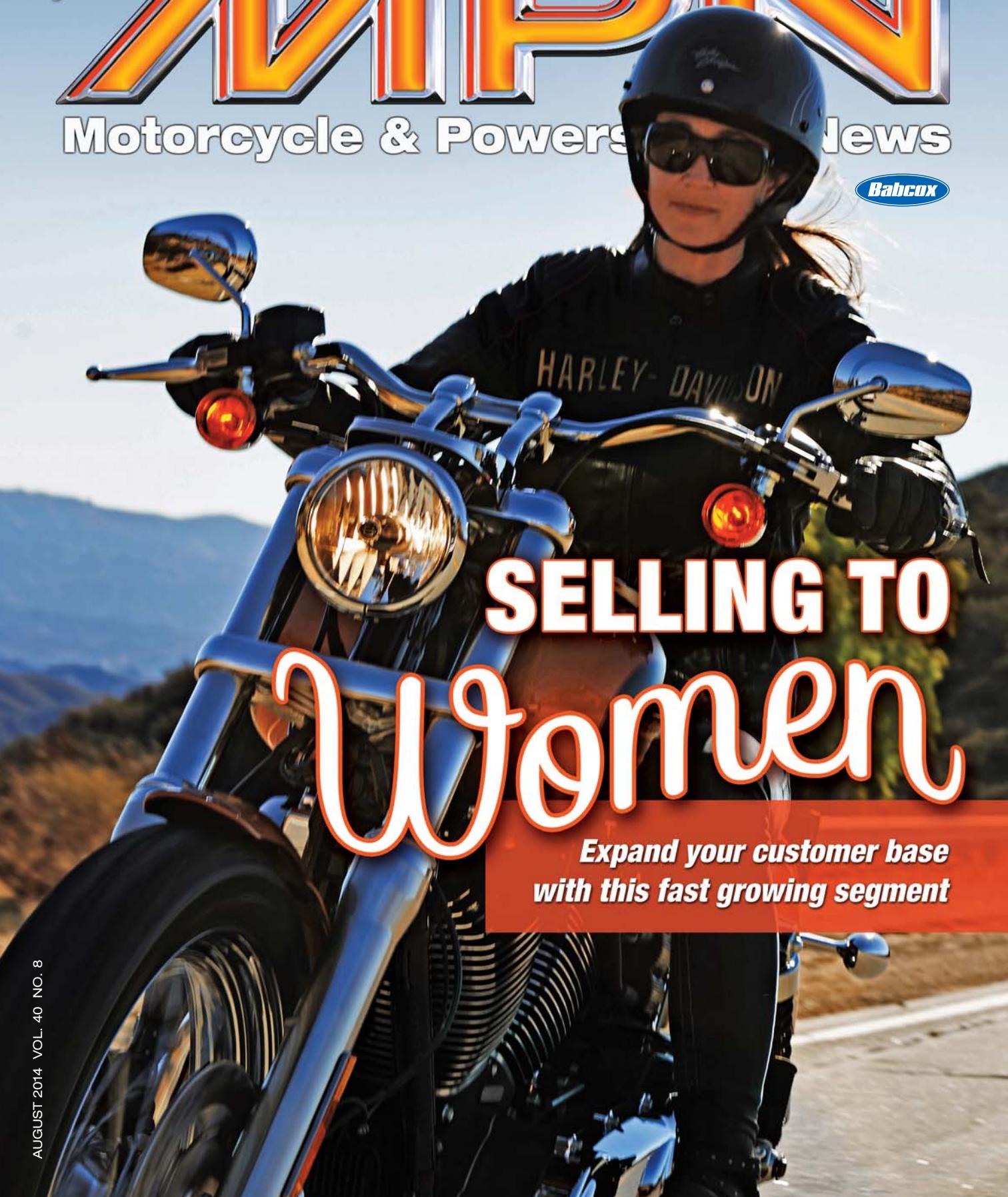
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Business Intelligence for Powersports Dealers

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Motorcycle & Powersports News

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SELLING TO Women

*Expand your customer base
with this fast growing segment*

SELLING TO



Women

By Alisa Clickenger

More women than ever are learning to ride and purchasing motorcycles. We're the fastest growing segment of the marketplace, and we're tooling down the road in record numbers. The Motorcycle Industry Council says there are an estimated 6.7 million women operators, which is roughly 25 percent of the riding population. 12.5 percent of motorcycle owners are female. If your dealership hasn't thought about how to increase your sales to women, then you are missing out on a formidable piece of profit. Whether the woman who walks into your store is a rider or passenger, mother or significant other, there's a high probability she's going to influence the sale you are trying to make, whether you like it or not. The dealerships that like it and embrace it – Harley-Davidson as a brand is an excellent example – are flourishing.

Talking to Women

Women respond best to questions that refer to their experience. Genevieve Schmitt, founder and editor of WomenRidersNow.com, has been a consultant to dealers for 15 years. According to Schmitt, good conversation icebreakers are questions such as "What do you plan to do with that motorcycle you want to buy?" or "Where do you plan to ride it?" Get your woman customer to start talking about all the adventures and things she dreams of doing with her bike. Ask these questions instead of the usual, "Do you want a cruiser or a sport bike?" or "How much power do you want?" etc.

Schmitt's recommendations for communicating with your female customers include active listening – re-stating or paraphrasing what your customer has just asked or told you – to confirm the understanding of both parties. She also recommends asking open-ended questions and forgoing some of the more technical aspects of motorcycling in favor of the more experiential questions.

Motorcycling is a male-dominated sport, and a successful dealership's written communications need to specifically call out to women inviting them to participate in events, dealership programs and community rides. "Unless women are specifically called out to, women will assume, those women that are not involved in motorcycling, they will assume that they are not invited," says Schmitt.

Relationship Selling

Successful dealerships work hard to move beyond one-time sales and to cultivate long-term customer relationships. Motorcycles in general are more about the relationship and the services rather than the products and the deal, and this is especially true for women. This is why women are your ideal



Photos courtesy WomenRidersNow.com



Photos courtesy Ride Empowered

Crafting a Female-Friendly Dealership

→ Have a qualified woman rider on staff – not just someone’s relative but an actual rider. Her presence will help other women feel more comfortable in your dealership. She can also ease your dealership into the nuances of creating a more inviting environment for female customers

→ Make sure you have a women’s bathroom separate from the men’s, and make sure it’s clean

→ Do not consider the women’s bathroom the fitting room

→ Make sure there are mirrors inside the dressing rooms

→ Go to the mall. Walk through Nordstrom’s or Macy’s and you’ll see where women enjoy spending money. Copy those environments

→ Ditch the girly pics. Women are not going to purchase anything in an environment where they are not comfortable

→ Clean up the clutter



customers – not just because they control the majority of household income, but because women by nature are long-term, loyal customers.

Tigra Tsujikawa, an industry veteran who focuses on consumer engagement marketing, believes that selling is all about relationships. “The most important thing is relating to your customer,” she says. “Whether that customer is a woman, a man, a young kid or a child that’s learning to ride, it’s about learning to relate to that customer.”

Tsujikawa notes, “While men are very task oriented, women are very discovery oriented.” Why does this matter? Because women are prone to express their concerns more than men. This is where a salesperson’s listening skills come in to play. Women want to be heard and feel like they are being listened to. A salesperson that



understands this and can ferret out a woman’s concerns will be a successful one. “If you don’t listen, and you don’t take the time to understand your female customer, then there will be a lot of misunderstanding,” says Tsujikawa.

The Sensory Shopping Experience

Women are sensory oriented. Schmitt suggests dealers ask themselves if their store is well lit, if it smells good and is there music that is pleasing to the female ear. If you want to create a space where women feel comfortable coming to shop and spend their money, this is where your design dollars make the most sense.

Take one look at popular retailers such as Nordstrom’s, Macy’s or Lord & Taylor. There’s a friendly welcome, the racks are spread out, there’s no clutter, and the dressing rooms all have their own mirrors. Go to the



bathroom and it's clean, plus there's nice-smelling soap. It's all part of the design to make women feel more comfortable spending time there, which equates to women spending more dollars.

Loyalty

How can Doris Schumacher, founder of Ride Empowered, a women's motorcycle apparel shop based in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, make a living when most dealerships struggle to make ends meet serving men as well as women?

Schumacher incorporates the above elements and more. She puts a lot of time and effort into listening to her customers and then working specifically to meet their needs.

Schumacher, who has extensive customer service experience in other industries, tries to be personable and not an aggressive salesperson. The soft sell works for her, and she finds that most of her customers appreciate the personal connection with her and her

honesty. "Part of what I do is spend the time to do the research and find the products that will work [for the customer]. Or if I cannot find something that is motorcycle-specific, maybe I can find a similar brand that can at least meet the need. Maybe I can't find a Milwaukee Motorcycle boot, or a Harley-Davidson boot, but I might be able to find a good quality boot that will make a functional motorcycle riding boot that will also fit a wider calf or a smaller foot.

Investing all that time and effort into finding the product that is exactly right for her customers pays off for Ride Empowered. Although Schumacher's business plan calls for supplying motorcycle apparel for women, she finds that her women customers are loyal and send their network—men and women—to her shop. "I have women whose husbands or their brothers are coming in and ordering from me," says Schumacher. "They believe in me

Ten Tips for Talking to Women Customers

- Always say Hello
- If a woman or a man-woman couple walks in to the dealership, send a female sales person over to talk with her or them
- Talk to women about their riding experience, not technical nuts and bolts
- Beware of sounding condescending
- Look your female customers in the eye
- Ask open-ended questions
- Listen
- Practice active listening (repeating the last three words your customer just spoke)
- If a woman is with your male customer include her in the conversation
- Slow down. Know that female customers are customers you will have to spend more time with



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Photo courtesy Alisa Clickenger

and my approach to business, and they want me to succeed, and they will order from me even though they know they can go somewhere else and get it."

The Family CFO

It's commonly known that in today's marketplace women are typically the family CFO, either head of the household or holding the purse strings. Sarah Schilke, head of marketing and PR for Schuberth North America and Held USA, is experienced in marketing to women. She points out that salespeople who can effectively talk to women,

whether riders, passenger, or the "family CFO," will be the most successful.

"It's essential for dealers to include women in the conversation so that when a couple is in the shop together or when the man goes home, she understands how that motorcycle is a smart purchasing decision or how it's going to work with their family budget," says Schilke, who notes that if a woman is not the direct buyer, she most likely still plays a role in the decision.

Making the Play for Passengers

Schilke points out that if women are 12 percent of the market, and the dealership is not marketing to women, they are missing out on at least 12 percent profit right there. But she says that women being twelve percent of motorcyclists is a bit of a misnomer because that number represents registered motorcycle owners that are female.

What if your dealership took into account the money that can be made from the passenger portion of the market? Consider that most men will have a woman as a passenger at some point, and she'll

need safety gear as well. It's important for dealers to look at this segment of the market as well because of the number of potential sales.

Schilke points out that, "Seen in this light, it could be said that women just might make up more than one hundred percent of the market."

An interesting point, considering that motorcycling is still seen as a male-dominated sport. Perhaps, then, the key is not only shifting the way female customers are addressed and catered to, but also making not-yet-motorcycling women more curious about and comfortable with the sport. Consider hosting more woman-centric events, and tying them in with community events. Better yet, give women a night out and have them start associating motorcycling with female fun, camaraderie and education, even before they begin riding.

"That is the basis of Garage Party events that Harley-Davidson dealers have hosted for several years," says Claudia Garber, Director, Market Outreach, Harley-Davidson Motor Company.

Sounds fun. It's on the calendar. ✎

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