

Apparel UNIVERSITY

Re-Framing How to Sell Apparel

By Alisa Clickenger

It's a fact that the most successful dealerships are good at PG&A sales as well as selling units. In today's hurry-up world it's natural to gravitate towards the easy solutions to turn a profit. The expedient approach, however, might not always be the best one for serving customers, and ultimately it may not be the most profitable.

It may seem counter-intuitive, but it doesn't always pay to chase the highest margin apparel lines. Knowing your consumer base and their underlying motivations, as well as developing a connection with them, is the best path to your profitability.

Customers First

According to Jennifer Robison, Field Brand Support Manager for

Tucker Rocky, price is much lower on the list of buying motivations that you might imagine. Customers are much more motivated by questions such as: Will this product work? Does it fit my bike? Does it fit me? How long will it last? Is it new technology or a new style? If a product is not suitable or does not fit, price is not relevant.

"Much higher on the list of customer motivations are, 'Nobody else has it and I want to be the first to have it,' or 'I've read about it or I've heard about it and I've got to have it,' and 'It will make me look amazing,'" says Robison.

Robison's job involves working with sales teams at brick and mortar stores across the United States helping them recognize the things that may be impeding them from growing sales.

She advocates thinking about your parts department as a business research department. This means doing your research and stocking the appropriate brands for your region, season, gender, age and lifestyle demographics.

"Seventy percent of buying decisions in a standard retail setting still happen in-store," says Robison. "People like the experience of in-store. In-store means discovering product. And the only way to discover it is if it's presented in a way that speaks to them. So you want to use the product's branding and use products and brands that speak to people."

Speaking to your customers' needs is the most important part of your job as a dealer. Customers feel it when the focus is on them and their desires,





and the feeling needs to be genuine or they won't come back. From the moment they walk into your store, show them that you care and that you're there to make their powersports dreams come true.

REV'IT! is an apparel company that is very selective with its dealer outlets and how those dealers interface with customers. "We work with dealerships that believe in apparel as a good source of margin and also a good part of the service that they give to the final user," says Paolo Bacchiarello, director of operations for REV'IT!. Being selective actually works to REV'IT!'s advantage as a brand, and ultimately works to the benefit of its dealers and customers alike.

Eric Anderson, president of the Vroom Network says, "I think we need to do a better job of stimulating our customers as

to how they can dress. We need to show them. We need to demonstrate how to dress. I think by setting an example of how you dress whether it be as a retailer or the way you dress your mannequin, you need to raise the expectations not only of yourself and your staff, but of the customers too. That's the dealer's job. That's what a retailer does."

Sometimes, serving customers means acknowledging that we cannot help them with a particular need. "Care enough about your customers that you are willing to refer them to someone else," says Joanne Donn, founder of GearChic.com. "Even if it's a competitor. If it's really something that they need, and you can't provide it for them, then you have to refer them out to where they can get what they need. And then they will come back to you

later for what you can provide. That loyalty really does come back."

Tap the Strength of your Vendors

Caring for your customers means not only listening to them, but also training your staff to be knowledgeable enough to serve them. This is where your vendors come in handy. They're trained to support you, and very often their companies have given the reps broad training on a variety of topics, not just facts about products. Some companies even train their reps in other areas such as merchandising. Your vendors may also have POP support materials that can help you achieve your ends. Ask them.

"A little secret to getting more support is changing your mindset about how you interact with your vendors...consider



treating them like a customer, you might be surprised at how many resources are available," says Jayson Wickenkamp, national sales manager for Scorpion Sports USA. "Your vendors are always looking for ways to help." Wickenkamp should know – he was once a sales rep and remembers well the dealerships that were friendly and accommodating.

Wickenkamp returned the favor with additional sales help and support, often going above and beyond in looking for more ways to help those dealers profit and succeed. In the end, this created a win-win situation for both the dealers and the reps, and at the same it was a win for the customers.

Create Community

One way of creating customer loyalty is creating community within your dealership. "The future for American motorcycle stores is to create a destination point. Whoever doesn't do this at this point is in trouble. Otherwise there is no advantage over the online

guys," says Bacchiarello. "You need a fireplace to go to, so to speak. Create the right community. This is what we are trying to do as a company."

In fact, REV'IT! Believes in community so much that it recently hired Tracy Motz, a former motorcycle journalist, as community manager. Motz suggests dedicating space. "Communities exist because of interactions, and a physical space that encourages this can be a huge asset for a dealer," says Motz. "Instead of using couches or chairs wherever they most conveniently fit or installing them as an afterthought, dedicate a small section of the store to a well-curated space that inspires people to sit, talk and connect. Ultimately this makes riders feel they are part of something bigger."

Motz also suggests making your dealership a start and end point. You do this by identifying active riding communities and inviting them to use your dealership as a start or end point for their rides. Motz suggests offering space

to local clubs, and if you've already got a dedicated space in your store, connect with local clubs or active forum groups and offer to host their next meeting. "It extends a feeling of goodwill, and also puts your newest products in front of active consumers," says Motz.

A service-oriented, what-can-I-do-to-help approach to your accessories sales will take the dealership far. Customers that feel heard, appreciated and understood are the ones that become loyal customers. "Customers are more open to someone who cares about them," says Nick LoMonaco, director of powersports for The Fulmer Companies. "You're selling a solution. When customers think that you have their best interests at heart, they become much more willing to make the purchase from your establishment."

"Help customers visualize how they will look and who they can be while riding these bikes," says Wickenkamp. "If we do a good job of painting that picture for them, then the sale is ours." ↙



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New and Noteworthy:



MTech breaks onto the US motorcycle apparel scene with eight new products designed in Italy. Distributed by Total Parts Distributors, both their textile and leather gear combines state-of-the-art technologies with appealing designs. MTech has street and adventure apparel lines for men and women.

www.mtechgear.com

Brittany Morrow just re-launched **RockTheGear.org**. Inspired by her unfortunate and extreme motorcycle accident in 2005, the site is dedicated to the promotion of motorcycle safety apparel and the education of riders. Rock The Gear takes a friendly approach and makes it easy for riders to get baseline apparel information.

www.RockTheGear.org



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SOUTHERN



Tip from a Pro:

“Merchandising always has to be about creating a sense of urgency, engaging customers, discovering new product and generating sales. Want to be successful selling apparel? Re-define how your dealership thinks about add on sales.”

-Jennifer Robison, Merchandising Expert and Field Brand Support for First Gear and River Road

The **KLIM Altitude** jacket and pants are now available. The Altitude was built specifically for women riders and is a full-featured motorcycle touring jacket. Like all of Klim's technical riding gear, the Altitude is feature-rich with 3M Scotchlite reflective accents for increased visibility, a micro-fleece lined collar, nine pockets, adjustable side gussets and forearm straps and an external waist belt. Made of Gore-Tex Misano performance fabric with two bicep vents, two armpit vents, & two back vents and is guaranteed waterproof.

MSRP Jacket: \$569.99-\$609.99
 MSRP Pants: \$499.99
www.klimusa.com



Racer Gloves announces two new gloves. The **Mickey** is a short cuff glove with a combination of leather and mesh construction. It's available in black and good for street, adventure and off road riding. The **Guide Glove** is mid-length sport glove featuring a Clarino goatskin palm and mcFit lining technology. Knox SPS protectors on the palm and TPR protectors on fingers and knuckles. Perforated fingers and back of hand provide airflow. Available in black and white/black for dual sport, motard and sport riders.



MSRP: \$115.99
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www.racerglovesusa.com

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