

# Apparel University

BY [ALISA CLICKENGER](#) ON APR 15, 2014

Whether your dealership sells sport bikes, cruisers, café racers, quads or adventure bikes, there's a common theme among every customer who walks through your door: they all want to look the part. This is great news for dealers because it means you have the opportunity to inspire, enlighten and enrich your customers, all while helping your bottom line.

Despite the groaning we hear about e-commerce this and Internet that, there is still nothing like face-to-face interaction with customers. The truth is, Americans' attention spans are shrinking, and that is to your advantage. Only four percent of Internet surfers stay on a Web page for more than 10 minutes. Yet, the average customer who walks through your door will spend much more time in your store than on the Internet.

This gives your staff a prime opportunity to hook them on the excitement of motorcycling, show them what is new and interesting in the industry, and demonstrate the ever-changing look of the sport. Here is what several motorcycle apparel experts say on how to make the most of your

customers' time in your shop.

## Painting the Picture

"All customers really want is to look the part. They're buying into the family, they're buying into the culture, and they're buying into the whole lifestyle. It's the dealer's job to paint that picture for his customer," says Eric Anderson, president of the Vroom Network. Anderson suggests looking towards the ski industry. Open any skiing magazine and you'll see that the pages are filled with beautiful people dressed in beautiful clothes in scenic places. After being surrounded by that level of beauty and quality, skiers' desires and expectations cannot help but rise.

The same is true of the motorcycle industry. As a dealer, you have an unequalled opportunity to show your customers what's new, what's possible, and what goes well together. Show your customers how terrific they can look. Provide your customers a vision of the motorcycling lifestyle. Help them see it in new ways and in new combinations.



“Help customers visualize how they will look while riding these bikes,” says Jayson Wickenkamp, National Sales Manager for Scorpion Sports USA. “They walked into your store because of an inspired idea. The more you paint the picture for them, the more you help them create a vision of what motorcycling means to them, the more valuable your dealership becomes to them.”



Nick LoMonaco, Director of Powersports for The Fulmer Companies, sees the most successful dealerships having a wide variety of product out on the floor. “Even if you don’t have what a customer walks in the door looking for, if you have another product with similar features within reach there’s a very good chance that you can make the sale,” LoMonaco says.

Our society is now placing more emphasis on pictures than on words as attention spans shorten. Show your customers what it is to look the part. Don’t just rely on your sales staff to tell them.

### **Setting the Stage**

Sixty percent of a mall retailer’s display budget goes towards lighting. Whether your showroom is well lit and inviting or not can make or break your retail operation. Priority should be given to creating an inviting space that supports your sales rather than hinders them.

“Space affects people. It doesn’t matter if it’s at your house, or a business, or your favorite place to go for coffee. There’s usually something about that space that you either like or don’t like and it’s something that you’re not always conscious about,” says Jennifer Robison, Field Brand Support Manager for Tucker Rocky.

“I have learned that customers’ behaviors can be affected by the space. You can have the greatest franchise dealer and it can be presented really nice and tidy, but if its boring and dull and it’s vanilla, then the customer probably won’t have the behavior you think they are going to have getting involved with products and brands.”

Robison has spent her entire career in motorcycle apparel merchandising. She now travels the country advising dealers and apparel retailers on how to create the optimal selling environment. In her opinion, the most successful dealers take their function as a retailer seriously and treat apparel merchandising as a very important function of turning a profit.

Even if your dealership doesn’t have a budget for a large scale remodel, Robison says there are some very simple things that dealers can do to make an immediate improvement. Having a clean, well-lit space works wonders. Hiring a cleaning company to get those stains out of the carpets and to do a thorough spring cleaning at least three times a year is essential.

Robison strongly suggests getting those brown cardboard boxes off the showroom floor. There's not one thing about them that says "buy me" she contends. Those stacks of overflow stock behind the parts counter? Get rid of those, too. That back wall is the hottest real estate in the dealership. Make it count with your high-ticket, high-margin items.

Make your space visually appealing. Don't subscribe to the "stack it high and let it fly" theory of merchandising. Get creative with the use of your walls, racks and POP displays. Create displays on different levels to make your retail space more interesting to the eye. Also be sure to showcase your branded merchandise first. And if it's old, dirty or dusty, get it off your showroom floor.

"Stale inventory is one of the biggest problems I see coast to coast," says Robison. "Obsolete inventory, stale inventory and shop-worn inventory are big problems. If an item hasn't sold within six months, you have to mark it down and get rid of it. Just get your cash out of it and re-invest in something that will sell.

### **Tricks of the Trade**

Jayson Wickenkamp suggests creating a fresh romance with the motorcycling lifestyle every time a customer walks in the door. One way to do this is by rotating your floor. Do this seasonally for best effect, and have things be found in different places – strategically relocating your inventory brings a fresh and invigorating experience for your customers.

Wickenkamp points out that a savvy move is to take this a step further by creating custom signage to educate your customers and really highlight the "specialty retail" environment. He also suggests creating "experience enhancers" that make customers stay in the space longer – offering customers a beverage, setting up a coffee station that is inviting and having areas for your customers to congregate and enjoy the experience of shopping for a motorcycle. Feed their passion.

LoMonaco advocates arranging your showroom floor by specific category of riding. Create the visual picture of everything that style of riding entails. "When a customer sees an entire display centered on his motorcycle or his style of bike, he thinks 'this store gets me' and he wants to do business there. It makes the customer feel understood and valued."

Eric Anderson hails mannequins and mirrors. Jackets on hangars in a long row are flat and lifeless. Make your displays come alive and three-dimensional by showing off your apparel in true-to-life fashion. Create complete displays that showcase entire outfits of items that work well together. Showcase and show off your more expensive items.

Anderson also says to set higher standards. Do a good, better, best scenario and showcase your best product. Put it on a pedestal. "Don't you think everyone deserves to know what a \$300 pair of gloves feels like? Then they can aspire to that either now or later in life, depending on their budget," says Anderson. "Instead of going for the bottom right out of the gate, go for the top, and have the bottom available should customers gravitate to that price point."

Robison says that merchandising is about creating urgency, creating sales, engaging your customers and helping them discover new product. There's a logic to merchandising and it's in your best interest to approach it with fresh eyes. What's Robison's best tool for discovering fresh ideas and new themes and product placement? Shopping!

Wander over to your local mall, outdoor, or sporting goods store and pay close attention to how they group merchandise and put together their displays. If you don't have the in-house resources to develop your merchandising skills, consider hiring an outside source or turn to your vendors. After all, it's their business too, and together you can paint the picture for retail success in support of all disciplines of riders.

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**Tip from a Pro:**

"If it has to do with buying, merchandising, displaying or selling clothing in a male dominated market, hire a woman to do the job. Our trusted mothers and wives have bought our clothes since we were born...and for the few years "in between" those women, we wore one pair of jeans and all the free t-shirts we could collect. The only reason men want to look good and wear clothes at all...is because of women."

Eric Anderson, President of the Vroom Network, has been building powersports industry apparel and helmet brands since 1986. Eric's dealer training has been a big part of those brands' successes—good display and sales techniques enlighten customers to invest more in the riding gear they choose. The Vroom Network specializes in brand building, channel management and sales training specific to the powersports and motorsports industries.

The following two tabs change content below.