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SELLING TO WOMEN RIDERS

WHAT DEALERS CAN IMPLEMENT TO
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SELLING TO WOMEN

Women are riding down the road in record numbers, and we continue to be one of the fastest growing segments of the riding population. The Motorcycle Industry Council says there are more than 7.5 million women operators, which is roughly 25 percent of the riding population. According to *Forbes*, women drive 70-80 percent of all consumer purchasing and "women are the world's most powerful consumers."

This means that every woman who walks through your doors is an exciting opportunity to influence a sale. Women from all corners the industry are rooting for more women on two and four wheels, and several have generously shared their decades of insights with us at MPN in order to help your dealership serve as well as capitalize on this lucrative market. Let's build this community together for a better bottom line in all dealerships.



Male vs. Female Customers

Twenty-five years ago John Gray, Ph.D. wrote a book titled *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*. His metaphor sparked a new understanding between men and women around the globe. While Gray's approach to our differences is a humored one, it's a biological

fact that men and women are different. And since we come from different societal contexts, women differ in how we communicate, process information and make significant purchases.

"Women like collaborating with each other, and with other people. They like input, and they want to talk about the decision-making process and why they are making this decision," says Gail Worth, owner of Gail's Harley-Davidson. "They want to talk to other people who have bought particular models and find out what their reasons are. They want to know why. Men are more silent in their decisions. They make their decisions inside their heads and their contemplation is more private. Not totally, but as a whole men are more silent about their decisions."

Although we don't like to talk about it, fear is a known barrier to consumer entry into the powersports industry. Many women come to riding later in life, when we're naturally more cautious. Helping to eliminate fears by listening and being a resource for information and inspiration is a key way to ameliorate concerns. "Women are, generally speaking, more fear-based than

What's one thing a dealership could implement and see immediate results in more sales to women?

Shelly Rossmeyer Pepe: "Develop genuine relationships with women riders and women who show interest in riding. Lead by example and show women how much fun it is to go riding and be part of the dealership's activities and motorcycling community. Make sure that your company and employees provide an amazing experience for all customers who chose to do business with you."

Gail Worth: "When a woman walks in with a man, greet her with as much gusto as you do the man. And don't give her the limp fish handshake, which is an immediate turn off."

Genevieve Schmitt: "Take a page from the Nordstrom playbook. They are one of the long-standing retailers that do an exceptional job of customer service and motorcycle dealerships are no different than big-time consumer outlets."

Pam Kermisch: "Being inclusive is the first step. Don't make any assumptions about any customers."

Liz Jansen: "The number one thing sales people can do is listen. Ask questions to the woman, not the man who's there with her, or trying to answer for her, but sincerely take an interest in her, her riding style, experience and skills, and then sell her the appropriate bike."

Ruth Richter Stever: "Never pre-judge anyone on how they are going to spend their money."

We all say: "Having more female salespeople in your dealership will help tremendously in boosting your sales to women."

men, I believe. Women come to motorcycling with a healthy level of fear that needs to be worked through as part of their decision-making process. Talking to another woman who handles a 500- to 800-pound machine will go a long ways toward making women feel more comfortable and envisioning themselves riding too," says Genevieve Schmitt, founder and editor-at-large of WomenRidersNow.com.

Relationship Building

Building a relationship starts with the dealership showing a genuine interest in women riders whenever they're in the showroom. A genuine greeting when they walk through your doors is the first step. Not making assumptions about whether a woman rides or not, or whether she is a rider or passenger is the second step. It's human nature to make judgments, and the most successful salespeople suspend those generalizations and assumptions and actively listen to what their customer is saying.

"Relationship is so strong for women. I think with that, women want to meet the team. Women want to know every person she'll be dealing with as the relationship builds. Her end is not today. Her end is forever ahead, and she wants to know the team she's going to be dealing with throughout her Harley-Davidson life," says Worth. Give new riders a clear vision of the entire experience of being a motorcycle rider from purchase to powering down the road and it will help cement the deal.

It's important to build the relationship from the very beginning. "It doesn't start with a specific event. Women-only events are great for assembling women riders and providing networking opportunities," says Liz Jansen, author of *Women, Motorcycles and the Road to Empowerment*. "It's OK to staff with male employees, but also engage qualified women

experts from the riding community to facilitate them." Having women on your staff goes a long ways toward helping women feel comfortable, and more importantly, helps them envision themselves becoming part of the tribe of riders.

Share the Vision

What I've learned speaking at dealerships across the country is that if a man tells a woman that she can do something, there will always remain a seed of doubt. Yet when a woman sees or hears another woman tell her experience, sharing her story and her glory, it ignites the spark of "gee, maybe I can do that too." This is why having women who are real riders on your sales staff is so important; that woman-to-woman interaction helps women connect to your dealership.

"Women bring a lot to the dealership. Are there women employees at the dealership?" asks Pam Kermisch, senior director of integrated marketing and customer experience at Indian Motorcycle and Slingshot. "Because part of it is if you walk into a dealership and there are no women, that's more intimidating than if there are men and women there. With women there it makes women think 'this is a place for me.'" Using images of women in your marketing materials and your online presence, videos, etc. is another powerful way to share the vision of women riding and will help bring new riders into your store.

"People become inspired when they visualize themselves doing something that moves them in some way. If they visualize themselves riding a motorcycle – looking like a rider, feeling the excitement and connecting with other riders then it's human nature to want to be like that person and get involved – their inner voice may say, 'wow, I want to do that,'" says Shelly Rossmeyer Pepe, general manager of Bruce Rossmeyer's Harley-Davidson.



"Developing a trusting relationship is more important than simply stating the facts. For women, the relationship is so strong. Women want to trust you first, then know the facts."

- Gail Worth



No Judgment Zone

A couple of years ago Ruth Richter Stever had a female customer come in to West Valley Cycle and buy a motorcycle. The woman left the parking lot and rode out on a 17,000-mile journey. Her customer rode to the North Pole, and in the process set a world record for a first-time motorcycle ride. If Richter Stever had pre-judged what was possible for her new customer, not only would she have missed out on a sale, but more importantly she would have missed out on an opportunity to create a lifetime rider.

"The biggest thing is to focus on women as people and as riders and get to know what they're looking for," says Kermisch. "One thing I love about women is that they'll bring other women along for the ride." Because women are natural community builders, when treated right as customers they bring and refer their friends, their colleagues and everyone else they connect with through your doors. This is a golden opportunity to increase a dealership's customer base in an easy and organic way.

"We are all in this together in terms of responsibility of growing the industry and making sure that we're expanding who is a part of motorcycle riding," continues Kermisch. "That's the OEMs, the dealers, the aftermarket suppliers, the riders groups and all the groups that support the sport. You can't do it if people aren't in across the board, and so my challenge is what are we doing as an industry to ensure that we are welcoming in all different types of riders?" ✓



Twice Honored

Genevieve Schmitt recently joined an elite group of female motorcyclists, those who belong to the two-time Hall of Fame club. One of the early pioneers of the motorcycle industry, Schmitt was inducted into the Las Vegas Motorcycle Hall of Fame last month and into the Sturgis Hall of Fame in 2001. In 1999, Schmitt started focusing her journalism efforts on female riders and later founded WomenRidersNow.com, an online magazine which is read by more than 150,000 unique visitor a month. The reach of the website stands as a testament to the ever-growing community of women riders and their passion for the sport. "If you pursue your passion, you can become a leader in the motorcycle industry and if you persevere, you can make

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