

Is Your Shop Missing the Mark?

At first glance, one could say that the cycling industry is so male dominated because of the wide disparity in competitive cycling—87 percent of competitive cyclists are men, according to USA Cycling. However, as the National Bicycle Dealers Association (NBDA) reports, participation in cycling on the whole is nearly even. In recent years, men represented 53 percent of cyclists while 47 percent were women.

Those numbers are not reflected in the industry at-large. Very few women hold leadership roles within cycling and very few companies offer a broad selection of women-specific product. There's a lack of female representation in product catalogs and cycling magazines, and when there is, the presentation often borderlines on sexism.

Regrettably, bicycle retailers rarely realize the potential for increasing sales by catering to the female demographic. Many women report feeling talked down to, ignored, or that they are being had. It's important for dealers to realize that they're not just competing with the bike shop down the street for women's attention—they're competing with every retailer, from women-savvy shops like Ann Taylor or Chico's to large department stores like Macy's. Women bring every one of those shopping experiences with them into the bike shop.

For Frostbike, we asked a few of our top dealers to give their input and feedback on what's been successful or challenging when selling to women. From their comments, we came up with a few tips. We know every shop is different, so these tips aren't meant to criticize, but rather provide you with a starting point to get you thinking.

SALES TIPS

Know Your Audience and Educate

Ask a lot of questions of your female customers. Figure out what they know and what the next step is. Forget any preconceived notions about women shoppers. They may need to learn how to properly shift, fix a flat, fit their bike or overhaul a hub. Don't assume you know what they know. A few suggestions from our dealers:

- Sell and teach bike fit
- Go on test rides with customers and switch bikes halfway through. You can help them understand the different bikes and how they work
- Give away one hour of Cycling 101 with every bike purchase
- Sell the kid's bikes to the kids: mom is watching
- Don't assume women will ask

Training Your Staff

Perhaps the most important step you can take to improve customer service is hiring and training quality staff. Your staff represents you when you're not around—make sure they know what you expect from them when dealing with customers, male or female.

- Train staff on your shop's mission and vision
- Teach them to be inclusive, finding the right product for any customer
- Employees should be approachable and accessible
- Greet every customer within a few minutes of them entering the store

Special Treatment

No, we don't mean that you should treat your female customers better. Rather, these practices are good ways to make all your customers, including women, feel connected to your shop.

- Allow customers to touch and experience products through demos and rentals
- Validate purchases: ensure your female customers the products they're buying are deserved and worth the money
- Extend flexible payment programs
- Offer a free tune-up with bike purchase
- Offer to set up an appointment. Women like to shop around and don't want pressure. Keep it one-on-one
- After the sale, maintain contact and follow up. Ask how they (and their new bike) are doing

PRODUCTS

Refine Your Women-Specific Offerings

One of the biggest complaints heard from women shoppers is the lack of stock in bike shops. If there is a selection of women's products, rarely is there a wide variety of quality, price-point, color or size options.

- Stock multiple sizes of each product
- Provide plus-sized products
- Stock higher-end product for women
- Stock demo product
- Stock kid-friendly products that help mothers get out by bike
- Stock step-through and mixte frames
- Bike geometry specifically designed for women
- Stock softgoods that complement bikes
- Stock maternity softgoods
- Keep things in stock—women want to touch and feel
- Equip women's bikes with high-end groups. They like the good stuff too
- Stock more lifestyle products
- Maintain a good stock of women's saddles

STORE APPEARANCE

Attract Attention

As stated earlier, your shop isn't competing with other bike shops, but the sum total of the customers' retail experiences. In order to be successful with women, the shopping experience in your store should be on par with what they're used to.

- Provide clean, well-lit fitting rooms, not just a back closet or bathroom
- Don't allow employees to hang "pin-up" girl posters—no sexism
- Keep product organized and well merchandised
- Set aside a women's section to display women-specific product (not hidden in the back corner of the store)

- Make your store kid-friendly with a play area or something to keep their interest. This allows mom to shop without worry
- Keep plenty of mirrors around for hats, sunglasses and apparel
- Lighting should be appealing, not just fluorescents
- Use mannequins to display apparel: tell a story, create a lifestyle with displays
- Cross-merchandise. Spell out what goes together and make it look appealing
- Hang apparel on nice hangers, not cheap plastic ones

SOCIAL EVENTS

Create Lasting Connections

Hosting a women-only night gives ladies a chance to socialize in a low-pressure setting, building community around something as simple as fixing a flat or going on a group ride. One note our dealers gave us: be explicit in your advertising that events are women-only.

- Host a customer appreciation wine & cheese party
- Host a fashion show where you showcase your softgoods selection
- Distribute a SWAG-bag at each event, customized for women
- Hold one-night-only sales events

Clinics

Educating customers is a great way to keep them coming back for more. Customize some clinics to cater to your female customers. The more knowledgeable a customer becomes about their bike, the more comfortable they'll feel riding and maintaining it.

- Teach basic bike skills
- Teach skills for riding in traffic
- Speak to all levels—identify the skill level of each clinic
- Use clinics to identify barriers for women: what's keeping them from taking the next step?
- Host fix-a-flat clinics
- Bikes 101: give customers an overview of the bike and its parts
- Invite women in to teach the clinic or speak
- Demonstrate how to properly fit a bike

Group Rides

Regularly scheduled group rides are the most frequently hosted shop event. These give your customers a chance to get to know you, your employees and interact with each other. You'll want to cater to your shop's unique niche, but here again, offer a variety of options. Outside of the initial logistics, group rides are low-cost and low-commitment.

- Host family-friendly rides; bring the kids along
- Have a ride leader and sweeper
- Vary the levels and distances of rides
- Be clear as to rider skill-level, planned route and speed
- Have extra maps on hand
- Stop for coffee; give riders a chance to socialize

QUESTIONS?

For more information and sales help, contact your QBP Account Executive or Leigh Carter at lcarter@qbp.com.