

Editorials

Grab the Cudgel the Court Gave You

The U.S. Supreme Court has spoken. And, ironically, this pro-business court gave retailers a cudgel with which to occasionally smack the supplier who fails to tackle blatant discounters and gray marketers.

Without going into the long and hoary history of price maintenance agreements and anti-trust rules, the Roberts Court said suppliers now have greater leeway to enforce minimum pricing. Conversely, it also gave IBDs the right to loudly complain when suppliers duck chasing after cutthroat discounters, particularly on the Web.

The National Bicycle Dealers Association should step up and help the nation's IBDs identify these price scoundrels and publicize their activities.

While many retailers are doing well, they still carry the burden of enormous overhead—staffing, training, rent, taxes, etc. Suppliers who tacitly support cheap discounters undercut their retailers and should have no place to hide.

Successful suppliers want to work with successful retailers. Right now is their chance to cleanup blatant price cutting, which is an industry-wide scourge on profitability.

Focus on Your Customers, Not Performance

Independent retailers took notice when Performance Bicycles announced its private equity purchase by North Castle Partners and its plans to add another 90 locations over the next four years. We offer our congratulations to Gary Snook and his team of managers. They have shown us all that the bicycle industry can indeed be profitable.

Still, if you are a retailer with a Performance store springing up nearby set your fears aside. Instead, tune-up your operations, beef up your staff training and get involved in community cycling activities. Sure, Performance has some buying clout but when it comes

to people, the Chapel Hill company already has its hands full.

Strip away the management and financial chatter for a moment and retail boils down to this: Develop a strong and lasting bond with your customers. You do that with excellent customer service and an unassailable position for integrity within your community.

Sure, stores can sell on price alone and make a go of it. That's not much fun, though. And are their customers truly loyal? It's doubtful. Focus like a laser on your customers and service and it won't matter who opens up next to you. You'll win in the long run.

Social Networks Can Bring Cycling Passion to World at Large

BY MIKE GERACI

Social networks are nothing new to the industry. While many of our pursuits are individual, we're hardly incommunicado. We gather around campfires, repair stands, coolers, kegs and espresso machines to hash over our passions, successes, failures and travels.

Take that natural community network and turbo charge it via the Internet and you get social media. Blogs, content sharing (Flickr, YouTube, Digg), social networks (MySpace, Facebook), podcasts and wikis have changed the way we process news, opinions and entertainment and blown up the traditional social, media and marketing landscape.

Technorati.com, the leading blog search site, has stopped trying to count the number of blogs out there (rough estimates calculate 60 million, doubling every six months). On top of that, 100 million videos are downloaded each day at YouTube, and as I write there are 183 million members of MySpace.

After analyzing seven years of con-

sumer data, Forrester Research concluded in the Executive Summary of its 2006 report "Social Computing" that:

"Easy connections brought about by cheap devices, modular content, and shared computing resources have a profound impact on our global economy and social structure. Individuals increasingly take cues from one another rather than from institutional sources like corporations, media outlets, religions, and political bodies.

"To thrive in an era of Social Computing, companies must abandon top-down management and communication tactics, weave communities into their products and services, use employees and partners as marketers, and become part of a living fabric of brand loyalists."

Social media offers the tools that empower businesses, groups and people to participate and thrive in "the living fabric" regardless of age, wealth, geography or male pattern baldness.

As social media continues to evolve,

it has become even more dynamic and powerful through interconnectivity and compatibility. Your WordPress blog can now incorporate images and slideshows, videos, RSS feeds, your own social communities, a custom music stream, a live video feed, comments from readers and easy ways for readers to share your content.

At Base Camp Communications, we've tracked and participated in social media for five years. From a PR perspective, we recognized its ability to communicate directly without relying on traditional cultural and media gatekeepers to interpret the message.

Social media can build vigorous brands in your specific niche, no matter if you're a local climbing shop, an international manufacturer, an athlete, event promoter, or even a professional dirt bag. And with a little help from your intern, your shop rats, or your high-schooler, you can create a dynamic site that enables you to have a "conversation" with your customer.

Here are some things to consider:

- Define your topic. Where's your passion?
- Define your audience. Who are your people? Your tribe? Your customers?
- Deliver content of value to your audience. Don't build an audience for your content.
- Be open and honest. Enable your audience to be open with you. Comments, tips, RSS, guest authors, etc., all give your presence credibility.
- Just because you can do it, doesn't mean you should. Yes, there are plugins for video, music, photos, but do they add value to the site?
- Update frequently. Keep it fresh.

While campfires and specialty brews will always be essential to bike culture, social media is a powerful, affordable and dynamic way to bring your passion to the world at large.

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