

Broad Cultural Trends Propel Interest in Fixed-Gear Bikes

Long the calling card of bike messengers and urban hipsters, fixed-gear bikes have become the mode du jour for rebellious youth, trendsetting yuppies and chic commuters.

Many in the industry roll their eyes over the fixie trend, viewing it as a short-lived craze that doesn't offer sufficient profit or growth potential for the

industry to capitalize on.

But it may be a sign of the times. Two major cultural trends are playing into interest for fixed-gear and single-speed bikes that could spur heightened and prolonged demand.

Simplicity is in. Analysts predict that post-recession buyers will seek simplicity in products and services. With

an eye toward streamlining their lives, consumers are making purchases that are less complicated and require less maintenance. A single-speed bike by definition fits this desire.

Customization is in. The social media phenomenon is driven by a need for personal expression. People customize Facebook pages by adding photos and

personal interests as an expression of who they are or who they want to be perceived as. Fixes and single-speeds offer another avenue by which young people can express themselves through custom colors and graphics.

Call it a fad, call it a fetish, but fixed-gear bikes seem to be converging with broad and influential cultural trends.

Guest Editorial

Find Magic Balance Between Product and Personality in Message

BY STEVE FRANCISCO

People are fortunate to live in a world where bikes are such a key part of transportation, fitness and culture. Why then, is the prevailing message from many companies a bit off?

Cycling has been under aesthetic and attitudinal attack for years. The enemy doing the attacking? In many cases it is often cycling itself. Brands tend to push rational drivers like technology, quality and price while treating the feel and the attitude of cycling in either cliché or ultra elitist ways. The visual and tonal spectrum this creates is woefully disconnected from the energy, the honesty and the purity inherent in riding a bike.

To be fair, the state of affairs within bicycle brand communications is not universally bleak. Not all brands are devoid of a unique point of view. A handful of people have found the magic bal-

ance of product and personality when it comes to delivering their message to the masses (or the minority, as the case may be.) What are they doing (besides making kick-ass product) to connect with riders in a real and meaningful way?

The first thing is to stay true to the culture of cycling by being a part of it. So often cyclists are faced with ads and images and ideas that don't ring totally true to the sport they know and love. There's a reason for this: the people creating these initiatives are attempting to speak to an audience they essentially know nothing about. Riders (of all ages and ability levels) can tell when they're being marketed down to and can smell when the people on the other side are actually on the outside looking in. You can't expect to communicate honestly and effectively to people if you don't share real common ground, and with-

in such a passionate pursuit as cycling the culture will reject you if they think there's anything untrue or unshared about your values and your intentions.

The second thing to consider is how to break free from the industry's dominant communication approach, which has been driven primarily by benefit/attribute propositions with a pinch of bravado (or "You go, girl!") thrown in for good measure. Emotional and cultural connections must be equal to the rational dimensions of a brand's message if you want to build a lasting relationship. At the very least, maybe you'll choose to resist the product shot/action shot/tech call-out model that's been a blight on the pages of publications for years. Perhaps you'll have the confidence to embrace society's own move towards design sobriety. Or maybe you'll go deep and come up with a voice and visu-

als inspired by your brand's own unique vision and in the end deliver something that cycling's never seen before.

The third point goes without saying. Never forget that bikes make the world a better place. This fact needs to be respected and reinforced by every brand at every turn. Cycling is a potential solution to so many of the challenges the world is facing and it would be wrong if every brand didn't tell this message in some way, shape or form. Companies whose communications combine authenticity and uniqueness while reinforcing all the great things that cycling does will help move themselves, the industry and ideally society as a whole, a lot farther forward as a result.

Steve Francisco, CEO of JDK Design in Burlington, Vermont, collaborated with JDK staffer Cris Dabica on this editorial.