



# BIKE SHOPS FOR EVERYONE

*Strategies for making bike retail  
more welcoming to women*

**LEAGUE OF AMERICAN BICYCLISTS  
BY LIZ CORNISH**

**MAY 2015**



*In partnership with*



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## AUTHOR

**LIZ CORNISH** was the League of American Bicyclists' Women Bike Manager, guiding the League's work around encouraging more women to bike and take leadership roles in bike advocacy, from July 2014 through April 2015. Before joining the League, Liz worked as an outdoor educator designing and instructing programs that taught self-efficacy through challenge and adventure. Liz has worked for nationally recognized outdoor organizations such as Outward Bound and Big City Mountaineers. She has a Masters in Education with a concentration in recreation administration from the University of Arkansas, and a B.A. in Adventure Education from Prescott College. She is now the Executive Director of Bikemore, the bicycle advocacy organization in Baltimore, Md.

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## Introduction

Bike shops as we know them are dying. From 2000 to 2013, the number of bicycle retailers in the United States decreased from 6,195 to 4,055.

“In every state since 2000 bicycling infrastructure has improved,” Donny Perry writes in his 2014 book, *Leading Out Retail*. From coast to coast, bicycling is on the rise thanks to increased federal transportation dollars dedicated to recreational trail programs, as well as an increase in bike lanes and cycling advocacy groups. Those facts coupled with public transit embracing multimodal travel and increased gas prices all create an environment that makes it easier to choose to ride a bicycle today than in was 10 or 15 years ago.

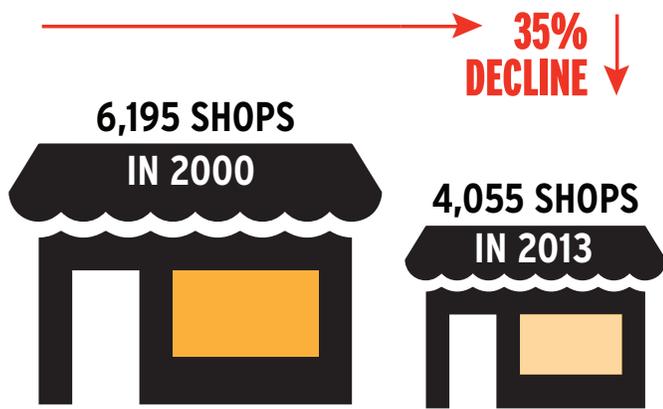
*So why, in the midst of a resurgence of bicycling, are so many shops closing their doors?*

And why is it the concern of Women Bike if they do? What’s the connection between improving the viability of the local bike shop and getting more women to ride? The League of American Bicyclists believes that independent bicycle dealers in providing access to bicycles, bicycle maintenance, bicycling information,

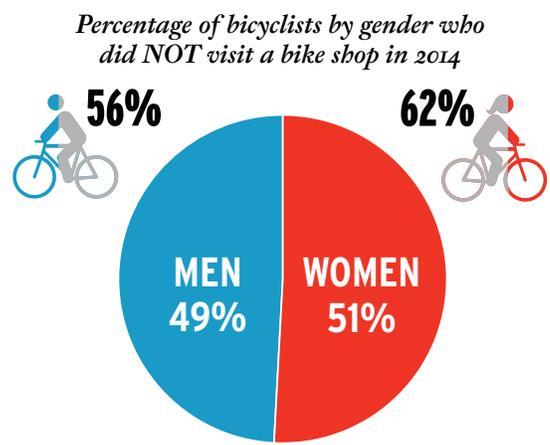
and creating a community of people riding bikes are a critical component to building a bicycle-friendly America. We want them to succeed, which means providing resources to assist them in embracing an increasingly diverse and growing market.

In many cases, the first point of contact for a new or returning rider is the experience she has when she first enters her local bike shop. It is at the local shop that she can tap into expert knowledge, experience quality products, and connect to a community of bicyclists.

We hope this report is not only a useful resource for bike shops but for our broader bike industry and advocacy audience as well. For the manufacturers and distributors, we hope that you share this widely with your dealer network and continue to encourage innovative solutions to attract more diverse audiences to bicycling. For our advocacy partners, we hope that you share this resource with your local shops so they know how important these issues are to you, and it becomes a tool to allow you to partner more effectively. By holding shops accountable, and partnering with and supporting shops that do a great job of creating a welcoming environment to all, advocacy leaders can play a significant role in shaping the bike retail landscape of the future.



*Number of independent bicycle dealers in the United States, 2000-2013*



*Adult bicyclists by gender in the United States in 2014*

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In 2014, Women Bike hosted a webinar with the Gluskin Townley Group, which called attention to key data and highlighted a critical reality: women are poised to be a huge growth market for bicycle retail in the future, whereas sales for men have virtually flatlined. Women represent the new majority of adult bicycle owners, accounting for 51% of ownership. But, of those women bike owners, 62% did not make a single visit to a bike shop (compared to only 56% of male bike owners). Women are also projected to spend \$2.6 billion on new bicycles and bicycle-related products, but that only represents 36% of the total market.

Bridget Brennan, author of *Why She Buys* and Founder of the consumer research consulting firm, Female Factor explains: “If you’re in a consumer business, it means that women are multiple markets in one. They are the gateway to everybody else. What a compelling reason to study the impact of gender in the sales and marketing process. Every time you deliver great service to a woman, she has a multiplier effect on your business because she represents a broad range of other potential customers, and will likely tell people about the great service you offer.”

*Clearly, there is immense possibility for growth.*

For this report, we surveyed 156 bicycle dealers across the country. The respondents ranged widely in size and geography, with stores reporting annual sales from less than \$10,000 to more than \$15 million. The goal of the survey was to inventory the types of services, programs, and amenities shops were offering and analyze their effectiveness in marketing and selling to women.

Our premise was simple: If we can identify strategies and philosophies that allow shops to attract a growing market segment and thrive during what can be described as the waning age of bike retail, we can provide a resource for dealers to reference when implementing future business strategies.

As bicycle advocates, we have a stake in local bike shops’ success. The League’s goal is to create a bicycle-friendly America for everyone. What happens when that gateway experience, in a bike shop, is unwelcoming? Or if that shop doesn’t have the range of products and sizes to allow a new female bicyclist to get out and ride in a safe and comfortable way? Or, even worse, what if that new rider encounters overt sexism or harassment?

These are the types of sales experiences commonly reported by women when they go into a bike shop. As advocates we have a responsibility to call out this behavior, and provide resources and tools to allow shops to improve service to all customers, including women.

The good news is that there are many shining examples of shops that are getting it right. We are so grateful for the shops that took the time to complete the survey and share their successes and challenges. From the survey results, we identified Seven Keys to Success that highlight areas where shops can focus their resources and see lasting results.

- » Sponsor women’s racing teams and events
- » Challenge assumptions about women and cycling and confront sexist behavior and beliefs head on
- » Hire more women
- » Create stores that are welcoming & inclusive to all
- » Host women-only instructional clinics and shopping events
- » Invest in store’s aesthetic feel
- » Commit to high standards of data collection at the point of sale

This report will share results from our survey, as well as more in depth interviews with bike shop owners and other retail experts to pinpoint specific examples of how local bike shops can make changes to their store environment, build a community of dedicated customers, and improve customer service that will lead to increased sales for all customers, including women.

## Navigating the New Paradigm: The National Bicycle Dealers Association

Fred Clements is the Executive Director of the National Bicycle Dealers Association, which works to ensure the sustained success of the Independent Bicycle Dealer (IBD). For Clements that means navigating the changing climate of bike retail, and examining how shops can remain viable in this new paradigm.

“The world is changing around us,” Clements says. “If you look at the typical bike shop customer, it isn’t reflective of the current demographics of society. Generation X and millennials have more diverse ethnic make ups and different attitudes about bicycling. As time goes on, bike shops will need to find ways to adapt to the new prospective customer.”

That’s not just about catering to the new market. It’s good for business. Something many shops have already discovered and found great success. “The things you do to attract women will not detract from men,” Clements emphasizes. “We urge stores to be open to all, listen to customer needs and guide people toward experiences that will motivate them to ride.”

Some stores are less welcoming to the general public because, quite frankly, they are aiming for a more athletic audience. Clements urges shops to consider expanding their customer base beyond folks interested in racing.

Perhaps one of the most common concerns among bike shop owners is competition from online retail. Clements believes that it’s essential to move the conversation from lowest price to what else are you getting when you purchase from your local bike shop. It’s important to remember that bicycles are less than half of bike shop sales — and are the least impacted by online retail. The most impacted categories are parts, accessories, things that are easy to ship and require little or no assembly.

Clements encourages shops to focus on what they can do that online retail can’t, like test rides, service and repair, programming that encourages people to ride more (and thus wear out or outgrow their equipment leading to repeat sales) and building a local community of riders.



So it’s no surprise that many bike shops are now approaching marketing differently. In years past, the newspaper or yellow pages were sufficient. Now shops need to gain attention and traction in new ways, like marketing at events, or creating in-store activities that draw people into the retail space.

But recommending changes to increase shops’ customer base isn’t enough. Clements emphasizes the need to recognize and address the real barriers that can prohibit well-intentioned shops from making these changes. Tight margins leave shops under resourced. Rarely do independent retailers have access to excess capital for improvements like store renovations or increased inventory.

“There are a lot of talented, well-intentioned retailers that want to be better, that want to grow,” Clements says. “There are a lot of things we can do better and we’re well positioned to make that change. It’s not like we’ve tried everything and are still struggling. There are a lot of things we haven’t tried.”

One of the best parts of the Independent Bicycle Dealer model, he adds, is that each shop owner is in charge of his or her own success and failure. “We have a chance to convert new customers into cyclists,” Clements says. “Brick and mortar stores are well positioned to create the change we want to see.”

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## Methodology

For this report we produced an online survey in the fall of 2014 and promoted it through our social media channels, as well as *Bicycle Retailer and Industry News*. The survey closed in January of 2015.

We solicited bike shop owners and managers to share information about their store that would allow us to uncover where shops feel challenged and where they are succeeding in selling to women.

We had 156 respondents. Respondents represented bike shops from 35 states across the United States and the District of Columbia. Annual sales reported ranged from \$5,000 to \$16.5 million, averaging \$1.3 million. They represented large businesses with multiple storefronts to small community-owned bike shops operating as nonprofits.

We asked them to report current training, programming and amenities that they are offering and asked them to self report on their own ability to effectively market and sell to women. We then looked for correlations in the data and drew conclusions.

### *Limitations*

A self-reporting volunteer survey has its empirical limitations. However, we believed this research would help us learn more about the current dealer perspective. We feel that the diversity and range of survey participants gave us insight into what issues are impacting shop owners across the country.

### *Qualitative insight*

To provide context, we coupled the survey data with in-depth interviews with folks inside and outside the bicycle retail world who were experiencing success in the women's market to help illustrate our findings. We also called on industry experts Deanne Buck from the Outdoor Industries Women's Coalition and Fred Clements from the National Bicycle Dealers Association to provide analysis that further confirmed our findings.

### *Data gaps*

Additionally, this research illuminated the lack of solid sales data available at the dealer level. Manufacturers like Trek provide their concept stores with proprietary point of sale software that is designed to capture demographic data, including gender. But as we learned from Amanda Schulze, Women's Business Manager for Trek, many stores aren't properly capturing the data at the point of sale making the program not as successful as it could be.

Sales data that goes beyond product categories is needed to arm dealers and manufacturers with information that can lead to solutions.

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## Data Analysis

Some of our research led to some surprising conclusions that ran counter to current consumer data and conventional logic in the bike industry.

- » We found that the gender of the shop owner (male or female) had little impact on its ability to attract women customers.
- » We found that hosting outside trainings on customer service did not correlate to an increase in women's sales.

To improve the profitability and reverse the decline of local bike shops, there are two critical avenues for action.

First, shop owners must relinquish old models of bicycle retail that, by their very nature, perpetuate stereotypes about bike users, and unintentionally exclude new consumers to the market. The reality is, for bike retail to continue, the industry as a whole must market bicycles for everyone. And, to do that, there must be clear plans of action that shop owners can use to expand their market base.

As a shop, that doesn't mean ignoring or deviating from its historically loyal base. But it does mean being inventive and thoughtful about how retailers market to new users.

Second, shops must proactively work to make people of all backgrounds feel that bicycling is for them. That's contingent on creating a shop in which many different people can feel comfortable.

Certainly, bike retail has been making these adjustments for some time. Stores evolve from their original concept as their market expands, or they reinvent themselves to better service their niche. They create new services to increase added value to the experience of visiting a brick-and-mortar store, or they shrink to become highly specialized. As evident in our case studies, both strategies can lead to financial viability.

There will be some who lament the changes coming to their shop, but the reality is, the small percentage of current consumers has flatlined.

*The only risk shop owners have at this current juncture is do nothing at all.*

Drawing on our 2014 survey, we've compiled input from more than 150 bike shops nationwide. Our analysis looks at what we can discern from these industry insights, and strategies for shops moving forward.

## How a Friday Night Ride Became the Framework for Female-Friendly Shop: **BLOOMINGTON CYCLE AND FITNESS**



Bloomington/Normal, IL  
Years in Business: 7  
Owners: Caryn and Scott Davis  
[www.bloomingtoncycleandfitness.com](http://www.bloomingtoncycleandfitness.com)

Caryn Davis grew up riding with her parents, participating in organized rides throughout the Midwest. Seven years ago, she and her husband Scott decided to purchase a local bike shop that was located along the local Constitution Trail.

Davis still recalls one of her first bike retail experiences. Despite being an opinionated teenager, she remembers vividly how sales staff talked down to her after she had researched and selected a bike for herself. When designing her business plan, Davis was determined that girls and women would feel comfortable in her shop.

Because of their location on the trail, many rides leave from the shop, and end in the parking lot drinking a beer. Davis wanted to leverage that social setting in front of her shop into creating a stronger community of women cyclists. So she started hosting a casual Friday night ride. If there were men there, they could pump up the women's tires, or crack their beers upon their return — but the ride was for women only.

The first few weekly rides attracted 12 to 15 women, but the group grew quickly. Now, depending on weather, it attracts upwards of 40 cyclists. The rides have created an online community of more than 400 members who call themselves The Spokeswomen, inspiring comments like: "We feel like this is our shop," and "I enjoy Bloomington/Normal because of this group!"

The Friday night rides are varied in length and speed but, no matter the pace or route people choose, everyone meets back at the shop for a post-ride beer together. For Davis, part of the success of the women's ride is the lack of rigidity. "It sounds good on paper to 'formalize' everything," she said. "But I think that would kill it. It's the fun at the end of the week everyone looks forward to. The last thing anyone needs is for it to become a responsibility."



That level of intention, to create a space that meets the both the practical and personal needs of their customers, extends to their sales philosophy. They ensure their sales staff makes everyone feel comfortable in the store, whether they're buying a bike for \$300 or \$3,000.

Davis credits all her staff, men and women, with an ability to put customers at ease — but she also goes out of her way to hire women to work in the shop. "There are some women that feel more comfortable with women, so it's always on my radar," she says. "But [female candidates for staff openings] can be hard to find."

In a small community, the shop has to cover all the segments of bike retail — including a push to grow racing by sponsoring a development team with 50-60 male and female riders. The momentum of their team was able to bring back a criterium to downtown Bloomington and create a Central Illinois Cyclocross series. Specialized, a sponsor of the team, also supports the shop through Women's Ride Day, a national event incentivizing shops to host all women rides.

"I feel like the industry is supportive of new ideas and plans," she said. "I feel like they seek out my opinion in building women's ridership."

"Women are overcommitted so you want cycling to be fun," she added. "We're speciality retail. We do have to compete with big box stores. Why wouldn't we provide high-quality service? It's way too much fun to have someone walk through the door and make them feel comfortable."

## Drawing New Families to Biking: G & O FAMILY CYCLERY

Seattle, WA

Years in Business: 1.5

Owners: Tyler Gillies and Davey Oil

familycyclery.com

Davey Oil opened G&O Family Cyclery nearly two years ago with his business partner and best friend Tyler Gillies.

Oil describes himself as more of an activist than a retailer. Growing up, he enjoyed biking but held an even stronger distaste for car dependency. When he moved to Seattle, he became one of the founders of The Bikery, an anti-oppression focused bike co-op, and later worked as a bike educator for Cascade Bicycle Club and Seattle Bike Works. These programs, he said, taught him about leadership and program marketing, and he enjoyed working to encourage folks to practice both bike riding and bike repair.

The thought of opening a bike shop came when Oil and Morgan Scherer, a Seattle Family Biking leader, were teaching family biking through programs at Bike Works. But the effort felt disingenuous at times, because there was nowhere for participants to buy the cargo bikes recommended for transporting children.

It was more than a year after the idea that Oil and Gillies opened the doors of the shop. They built a conservative business model, expecting to sell 10 to 12 cargo bikes in the first year. To their surprise and excitement, they met that goal in the first two months — and sold more than 100 cargo bikes in their first year of operation. While their mission remains focused on the bikes and accessories for family biking, they also offer custom builds of conventional bikes. They mix lightweight frames with functionality, selling bikes that are sporty but practical for the hills of Seattle.

During his tenure in bike advocacy, Oil has openly critiqued the sexism of the bike industry. Women are often called the “indicator species” of bicycling, but, to Oil, that argument is off base. Women are not a different species, he points out, and that premise erroneously focuses on female bicyclists’ and non-



riders’ supposed fear of cycling. It also absolves the industry of its responsibility to become more welcoming and inclusive, he says, and to address the specific needs of different audiences.

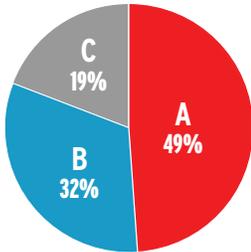
Oil estimates that only 25% of his customers are dedicated, long-time bicyclists. The vast majority of customers, he said, didn’t have an identity as a bicyclist before making the decision to mix parenting with biking. Women like Morgan Scherer and Madi Carlson have been longtime advocates and champions of family biking in Seattle. The challenge for Oil in having two male owners is how to advocate for family biking without shouting over the women who have been leading in this space for some time. As a business owner, he sees it as his responsibility to confront sexism directly.

“You need to name it,” Oil said. “Customers are so relieved to talk about it. We get a lot of customers come in here because of how horribly they were treated at other bike shops. As a man committed to ending the patriarchy, who happens to own a bike shop, our responsibility is to clean up our own house.”

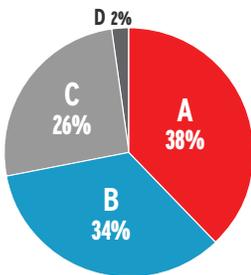
At times, he says, this may mean putting professional relationships at risk. Oil gives the example of an outside sales rep coming in unexpectedly to the shop. The sales rep, who is a man, instantly attempted to build rapport by telling jokes about wives, women, and engaging in what could be described as locker room humor. He and Gillies always make sure to interrupt those moments, to call them out. “Those sales reps assume its part of our culture,” he says. “It’s our job to change the baseline of what’s acceptable.”

“The great thing about feminism, is that it’s not just political,” he added. “It’s a framework for being a good person.”

## Current Perceptions



How would you grade your store in its ability to sell to women?



How would you grade your store in its ability to attract women?

When asked to grade themselves on effectiveness in selling to women 75% of respondents graded themselves as an A or a B. Nearly 66% of respondents graded themselves as an A or B when it came to marketing to women. If this is true, why don't current sales figures reflect that self-perceived success?

When asked if they were given unlimited resources, what strategies might you invest in to increase women's sales, from the open ended responses five top categories for investment emerged:

- » Investing in women-specific programs
- » Hiring more women employees
- » Improving interior design and merchandising,
- » Stocking women-specific product, and
- » Investing in professional sales training

What is encouraging is that the majority of shop owners instincts as to what could correct the problem of low sales to women are supported by our research. Shop owners have a general understanding of what it would take to improve women sales. (One category — investing in outside sales trainers — did not match our findings.)

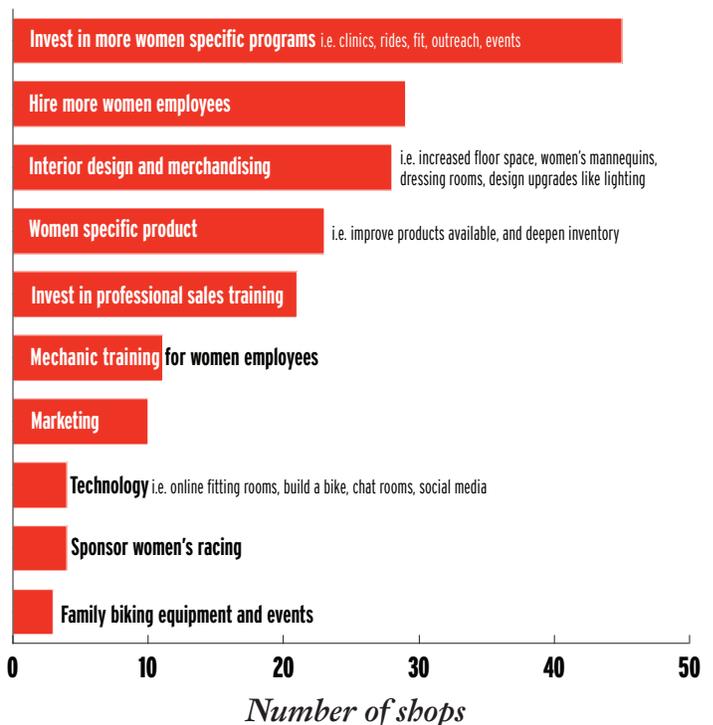
What's concerning is that even understanding the potential solutions, many respondents felt they were unachievable. What we learned is that shops of all types are finding success in acting on these instincts. The assumption that the solutions are out of reach is false.

*These numbers point to problems with current consumer data in bike retail.*

First, many shop owners may not be able to accurately perceive their shop's ability to sell or attract women customers. This is where investing in point-of-sales software that automates demographic data collection would be incredibly valuable for shop owners to help determine what investments produce the best results.

Second, dominant narratives that exist in bike retail — that a shop that is successful at selling to women needs to be women-owned or must invest in outside sales training — may not be true. We believe narratives like this do harm because they falsely tie improving sales to women to investments that may be out of reach of a struggling shop. Rather we found other options — like events that build a community of women riders and are often led by volunteers or only require the investment of staff time — may be more effective at attracting and retaining women customers.

*Given unlimited resources of time and money, what strategies might you employ to improve sales to women?*



## Separating from the Pack by Actively Supporting Women's Racing: **TWENTY20 CYCLING**



Baltimore, MD and Savage, MD  
Years in Business: 5 years  
Owners: Kris Auer, Norman Brach, Johnny May  
twenty20cycling.com

Twenty20 Cycling was born from a love of racing and grew out of a series of free cyclocross clinics.

In 2010, a group of dedicated cyclists noticed that big areas of the bike market were being ignored in Baltimore. For Kris Auer that blind spot included a shop that stocked higher quality women's product. Opening that shop, with Norman Brach and Johnny May, became the logical next step.

But the trio knew that they couldn't just create a retail space — they needed to create a community. So the day they opened their doors, they already had a team established and an event on the books.

Twenty20 has two locations, in Baltimore and Savage, Md. At the Savage store, which is two-years-old, the women's market is hugely important to their shop's success, he said, and they pride themselves on being able to work with all riders. "We try to tone down our manliness," he said, while also implementing a structure in the shop's sales system to accurately capture gender.

Auer believes supporting women's racing is integral to growing the sport he loves. Out on the street, the C3-Twenty20 Cycling Co. Team was created as a women's road team, though it eventually grew to include men. The team still boasts top-ranked and top-sponsored women and has been vital in supporting more female riders in the cyclocross scene.

In addition to sponsoring the team, Twenty20 hosts Charm City Cross each year, a two-day cyclocross race featuring international pro and regional cyclists. In 2014, Auer sponsored the Koppenbergcross women's race in Belgium. Often in European races, women are forced to park far away from the start line and aren't provided some of the same



amenities as male competitors. Twenty20 provided a neutral warm up and support area close to the start line for all women in the race — and ensured equal prize money for the female riders, a first for the race.

For Auer, it's an interesting time for the independent bicycle dealer. Competition is fierce locally, and the internet has created easy access to a wealth of information — but no filters on that information. When manufacturers allow online retailers to sell below the suggested retail price it shrinks profit margins, making it difficult for brick and mortar stores to compete. Particularly when customers can buy from foreign retailers for less than the wholesale prices dealers are required to pay. "It's foolish that customers can buy products at overseas' prices," he said.

To offset for this added competition, Twenty20 is adding services that weren't necessary 10 years ago, like yoga, bike fit, and instructional cycling classes. Women customers are particularly drawn to the instructional classes, he said. "The teaching element of our sport has disappeared. There's nowhere to learn the art of the group ride. Women are more open to being taught."

## Environment

What sort of aesthetic comes to mind when you think of your local bike shop? And how does that affect its overall ability to do business? Women, in general, are much less tolerant of a messy shop — but approaches to merchandising that appeal to women are likely to appeal to a broad array of customers, as well.

If inventory is too crowded or a grid wall too barren, it's difficult to assess if the store has what a consumer needs. How many shops place all the black bike shorts on a single rack? Never mind that they may be different brands, offer different shaped chamois or inseam length — they're all crowded together on a single rack.

In the 2008 study, “Men Buy, Women Shop” published by Wharton’s Jay H. Baker Retail Initiative and the Verde Group, a Toronto consulting firm examined the differences in how men and women relate to the retail experience. Despite women’s increase in professional responsibilities, they are still often the primary caregiver for their family. Women who have to balance many responsibilities prefer stores with limited selections, such as Coach, Trader Joe’s and Sephora.

Bike retailers can benefit from this knowledge by editing inventory to women by offering a distinct range of product and sizes that each offer high quality and performance, and displaying products in a way that highlights that features that differentiate them from one another.



One of the hallmarks of a shop that successfully appealed to women was an intentional interior design that made the space feel more like a higher-end boutique and less like a bike shop. Inventory was arranged so that it was easy to identify the features of each product. Respondents to the survey discussed placing a high priority on store cleanliness as a strategy to attract and retain female customers.

One area to consider is the restroom. Nearly 75% of respondents said they offer fitting rooms for customers, ensuring that the restroom not serve a dual purpose. But that doesn't mean the restroom shouldn't be well-stocked and clean. Many shops place a premier on their reputation as a business that places a high priority on safety, only to expose customers and their children to unhygienic environments.

Interestingly enough, 25% of shop owners that responded to the survey said they place a high value on women-specific floor space and point of purchases merchandising from manufacturers. To examine this, we compared stores that estimated women comprise 40% or more of their customers to stores that estimated women comprise 30% or less of their total customers. We believe shops with customer bases that are closer to gender parity have something to teach us.

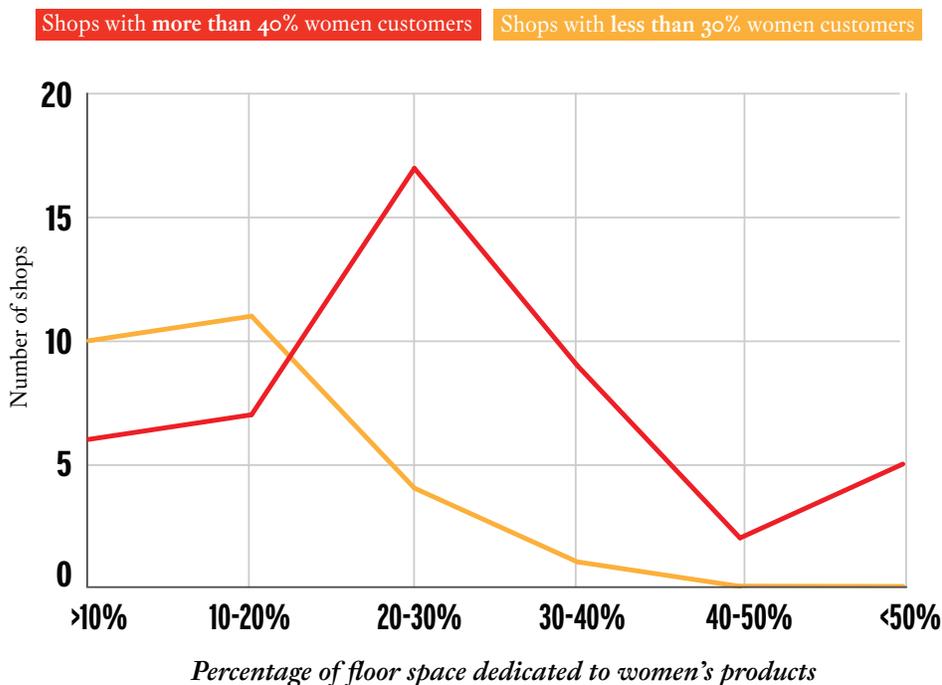
We discovered that the majority of the shops that reported 40% or more of their customers being women were devoting at least 20-30% of total floor space to women's products. The majority of shops who reported less than 30% of their customers being women were on average only devoting 20% or less of floor space to women.

What's also telling is that 35% of the shops reporting high rates of women customers are devoting 30% or more of their total floor space to women. Of the shops where women make up 30% or less of the customers, only 4% reported devoting 30% or more of floor space to women, with zero shops in this category offering more than 40% of floor space to women's product. One way to show women they belong in your shop in

equal numbers is ensuring their needs are not relegated to a single rack. According to our research, shops should be looking to dedicate approximately 30% of floor space to products that accommodate women to see numbers increase. This also is a call for manufacturers to produce more women's products so that shops have adequate inventory to select from to fill that space.

When we asked shop owners to list their highest grossing sales categories, what we found was that shops that have success in attracting women customers offer a more diverse selection. This means expanding out from the racing product core, and including products that relate more to everyday bicycling.

For instance, commuter bikes were the fourth highest grossing sales category among shops with over 40% of their customers who are women. It ranked 8th when we looked at overall responses, and didn't rank at all when we just looked at shops who report 30% or less of their customers being women.



**RANK OF COMMUTER BIKES**  
among top grossing categories

- Shops with more than 40% women customers **#4**
- Average of all shops in survey **#8**
- Shops with less than 30% women customers **DIDN'T RANK**

## Services

One of the distinct realities of the current bike retail market is narrowing profit margins on products. Additionally, many retailers cite low online prices as cutting significantly into their market share. In our survey, only 10% of respondents reported doing any type of online sales. Many were excluded from competing with online retailers due to manufacturer agreements.

To remain competitive, shops are expanding into areas where online stores cannot compete: direct service. In recent years, many shop owners have made significant investments in services that go beyond basic maintenance and repair, like bike fit and nutrition consulting.

Services create additional reasons to come into a shop and cultivate a product line with much higher margins. It also positions shops as an expert, and community center. Why seek out nutrition advice online, when you can come to a shop and get it from a source you know and trust?

To remain competitive, shops will need to stay creative in their service offerings, constantly listening to their customer to learn what additional services they would like to see, and work quickly to provide them before the competition. To be successful in the new market, bike shops must sell a lot more than just bikes.

## Community

One of the keys to engage more women in bicycling is creating a sense of community. Men may engage in the sport for individual pursuits, but Women Bike's research is discovering that more and more women are being drawn to bicycling because of the sense of identity to the community it creates.

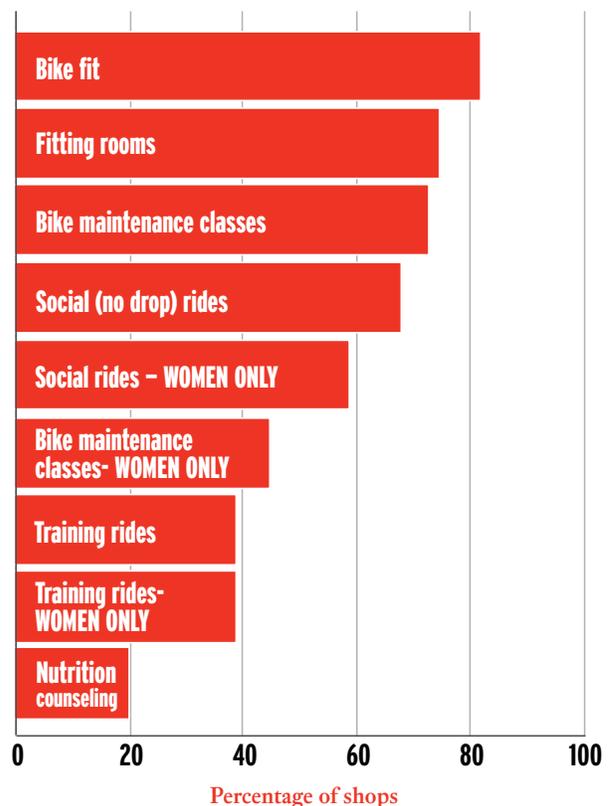
A shop can play a powerful role in both establishing that community, and using that community to draw customers into the shop. The survey revealed many examples of shops investing directly in creating a culture

of bicycling in their community and having that pay off in sales — as much so as any other marketing initiative.

One of the common themes was that, regardless of the style of rider shops were looking to attract, they understood that they are selling a lifestyle. Whether racing cyclocross or riding socially, bicycling has unique communities that shops are well positioned to support. Women in particular enjoy being part of something bigger than themselves. Bike shops are uniquely positioned to not only create that community but to perpetuate it.

Consider the programs that will bring people into the store to meet other customers. Many shops are partnering with other local community-based organizations to draw people into the store. Some common offerings included a free yoga class or trainer session. Slow rides to a pizza shop in the summer time, or in-shop community potlucks in the winter can make a shop feel like an extension of the places they frequent in their daily lives.

### *What services do you offer?*



Hosting speaking events in the store, or even the common Ladies Night, draws people to the shop for a social experience, but it leads to more sales, as well. Typically, people want to invest back into a community they feel a part of; shops that create those opportunities for their patrons to be more than just customers are reaping the benefits.

Sponsoring an amateur race team is one common way to create affinity for a shop and to build community at the same time. Our survey revealed many examples of shops being successful selling to women as a direct result of sponsoring a women's racing team. The teams didn't need to be

a specific style of racing; in contrast, successful women's teams such as BFF Racing in Chicago and Twenty20 in Maryland included riders that raced a range of events from road, triathlons, cyclocross and mountain biking.

One of the reasons women's only teams can be so successful is that women traditionally prefer to learn in a women only environment. This leads to a better first experience with racing, and allows those on the fence about becoming more serious about the sport an opportunity to find women mentors and friends that can keep them deeply connected to the sport, and a bike shop.

## Inviting Women into Racing to Open the Door for More Customers: **BFF BIKES**

Chicago, IL | [bffbikes.com](http://bffbikes.com)

Years in Business: 1 year

Owners: Annie Byrne and Vanessa Buccella

Annie Byrne and her business partner Vanessa Buccella met through racing, but quickly learned they had more in common. They didn't just want to compete; they wanted to grow the sport of women's racing in Chicago — and they both had the same dream of a female-focused retail space. The result: BFF Bikes.

In 2013, the duo secured sponsorship through Liv to establish the BFF Bikes team, a group that engages women at all levels of amateur racing to compete in mountain biking, cyclocross, track and road races. "It's so great when you find an entry into racing," Byrne said, "so we wanted to do that for others."

That winter they launched a successful Indiegogo campaign to help raise the remaining money needed to open their shop. They opened their doors in March 2014 — and while Buccella had more than 17 years of bike racing under her belt, and Byrne six years as an urban commuter, neither Byrne nor Buccella had bicycle retail experience prior to opening their shop. So they've been intentional in their hiring process to bring in employees who can assist in navigating the ins and outs of bike retail.

But it was their perspective as consumers first that enabled them to truly connect with their customers. "It's easy for us because that's who we're closest to anyway," Byrne said.

While BFF Bikes grew from the owners' love of racing, they designed their shop understanding that many women don't start as racers. They sought out products that aren't readily available in the Midwest, and scheduled events so the shop would fill up with potential customers after shop hours.

Their goal was to create an accessible shop. "Cycling seems like this exclusive community," Byrne said. "It's so unnecessary. You shouldn't have to feel like you know a special code to participate." Whether they're meeting women at races or in the shop, Byrne and Buccella keep things conversational. They take the time to learn about their customer and figure out where they are in the process.

"It's a tough business," Byrne said. "It's hard to be profitable," But the BFFs continue to invest in their community and connect to other small business to stay inspired. "Bike shops can do a lot for racing," Byrne said — but racing can do a lot for bike shops. "The effect of the local hero can inspire women to try the sport."

In fact, the members of BFF Racing also serve as shop ambassadors. "A lot of people meet the team at races and they come into the shop," she said. "It helps them feel invited."



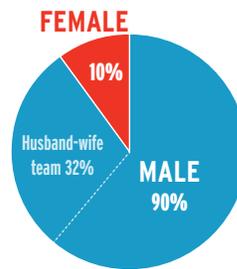
## Staff

This shift from hard goods to services can be a tough transition for shops that haven't spent time developing thoughtful, inclusive sales staff. Time and time again, when discussing their sales training strategy, the shops that were doing the best job simply discussed treating each customer well.

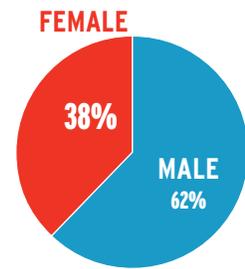
Too often the culture of bike shops has been designed to feel like a clubhouse. But successful shops have learned the best path to a growing, thriving business is not to make each customer learn a secret knock but to fling the door wide open and give each person a warm welcome.

That refrain is the same from customers and shop owners, so perhaps even more important than focusing on women specifically, is ensuring that each customer is treated with the utmost respect and kindness.

According to the 2012 American Bicycle Retail Survey, 89% of bike shop owners are men. And while 33% are owned by a husband and wife team, women owned shops account for a small percentage of the overall market. In contrast, 38% of our respondents to our survey were women owned shops, which allowed us to do some comparative analysis to see if there was any difference between a male owned or a women owned shop. What we



U.S. bicycle shop ownership by gender in 2014

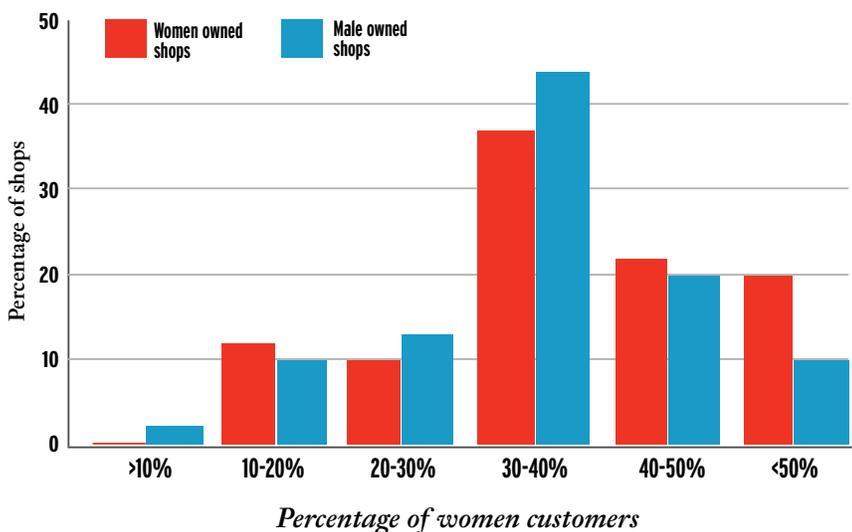


Shop ownership by gender in Women Bike 2014 survey responses

discovered was that store ownership, specifically whether that store was male or female owned seemed to have little to do with their ability to attract or sell to women. What this shows is that male owners are just as capable of running and managing a store that is effective in selling to women.

Some shops work diligently to hire more women to ensure female customers can better relate to staff. Our survey found this to be effective in respondents' sales numbers and marketing effectiveness. Sometimes it's just easier for women to relate to other women, especially when it comes to discussing sensitive topics like saddles and chamois.

Our survey found some interesting correlations in this area. For instance, average bike sale price did not seem to be a factor in determining the number of women customers, nor was it correlated to the number of women employees. However, the percentage of women customers did seem to correlate to the number of women employees.



Many respondents discussed the difficulty in finding qualified women to fill these roles. We recommend that a potential solution be to rethink what qualifications are most applicable when recruiting more women into the bike industry. Rather than seeking out those with only specific bike industry experience, looking for transferable skills such as experience in other retail sectors, or experience managing events might allow more women applicants to stand out.

|   |       |        |         |        |        |       |
|---|-------|--------|---------|--------|--------|-------|
| What % of your customers do you estimate to be women?   | > 10% | 10-20% | 20-30%  | 30-40% | 40-50% | < 50% |
| What is the average sales price of a bike in your shop? | \$728 | \$703  | \$1,169 | \$820  | \$717  | \$708 |
| What % of your employees are women?                     | 0     | 31%    | 16%     | 19%    | 21%    | 42%   |

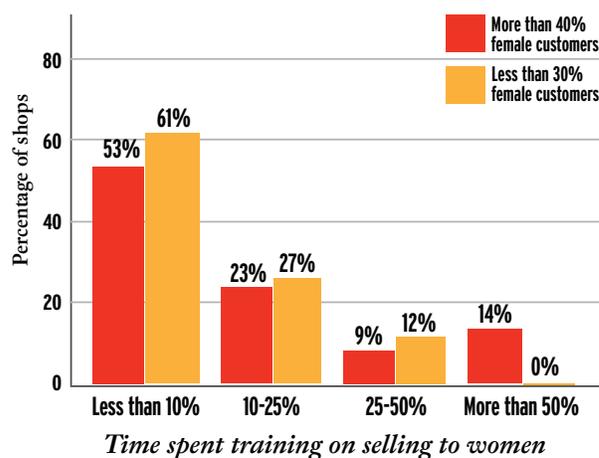
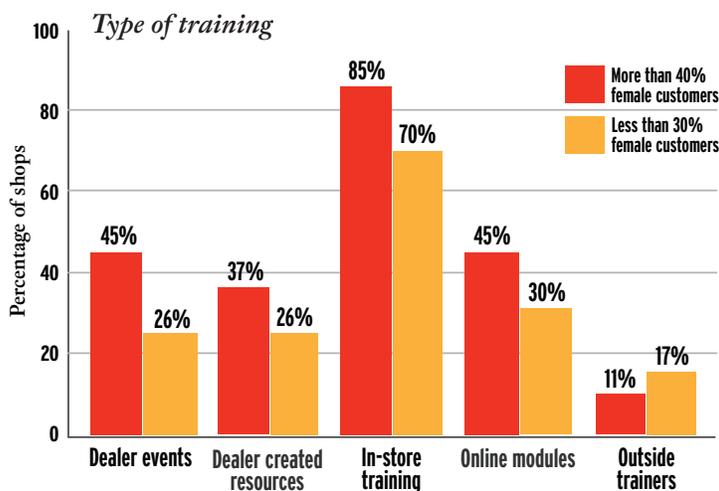
That is not to say men can't be trained to be effective sales staff for women. One common response to our survey was a type of incredulosity that women somehow needed special treatment, or that selling to women was somehow different than selling to men.

Shouldn't everyone receive the same high quality customer service? Absolutely! But the reality is they aren't. Women report feeling patronized, dismissed, and even harassed at times by shop employees. That's not to say men don't experience some of the same poor service, but when one market is projected to grow, and the other has flatlined, who should you be listening to in determining your next sales strategy? Ignoring the real concerns of women isn't an effective way to increase business. Is the solution some complicated sales training getting at the inner psyche of women? No. In fact, in our survey, we saw that hiring outside sales trainers had no impact on sales.

What we did find is that stores reporting women customers in excess of 40% were utilizing all types of training at a

higher rate than stores reporting women customers at less than 30%. Meaning that stores that have a greater success attracting women are spending significantly more time training their staff overall. Additionally stores with more women customers reported spending more time on average on training focused specifically on selling to women. Where the numbers diverged was in the hiring of outside sales trainers. Stores reporting a lower number of women customers utilized this form of training at a higher rate than stores reporting a higher percentage of women customers. Leading us to conclude that this was the least effective form of training.

In summary, the majority of respondents are all training their staff in house. Online modules and dealer events were the second most used form of trainings. Outside training (non-dealer sponsored) was the least used form of staff training. What the numbers show is that more training equals a higher percentage of women customers. Training time spent specifically on selling to women also yields positive results.



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## Outdoor Industries Women's Coalition: BEST PRACTICES FOR HIRING & RETENTION



Deanne Buck is the Executive Director of the Outdoor Industries Women's Coalition (OIWC). Founded in 1996, OIWC is the only national organization dedicated to workplace equity, diversity, and inclusion by expanding opportunities for women in the outdoor, snow, and bike industries through professional development, education, and leadership programming

that promotes women's advancement. We spoke with Buck about OIWC's insights into attracting and retaining more women at all levels of the bike industry.

*Bike shop owners understand the value in hiring women employees to attract more women customers but lament they just can't find qualified women. How is OIWC working to combat that thinking, and create more qualified women in the industry?*

In 2012, OIWC conducted a Workplace Survey in which we looked at four trends we feel are relevant to the industries' ability to move the needle on gender diversity: a lack of women leaders, values that make for an ideal workplace, a low-rate of working parents, and the organic path to leadership.

In some ways all of these revolve around what one could call "trail cred" — our passion for our activities, or what it means to be authentic. The opportunity to prove oneself at work (or to even get the job in the first place) is typically tied to our experience. Our commitment to getting outdoors is a critical criterion on our resumes. For example, if you're not an "accomplished" cyclist the chance that you'll get an interview at your bike shop is reduced.

We understand and recognize that this has been part of our culture; it's about being "authentic." The question we as an industry need to ask ourselves is: We're doing a good job of

connecting to passion, but are we doing it to the exclusion of other values that could increase our workforce diversity? It's a bit of a conundrum. We want to increase the number of people getting outdoors and getting on bikes and we know our business will suffer if we don't target a broader range of consumers. Yet, we still maintain this stringent lens on who qualifies as authentic.

On the other side of the coin, QBP, along with other stakeholders, created a Women's Mechanic Scholarship. In year two, they had more than 800 applicants for 10 scholarships. This is opportunity, boldly and simply. Women want to work in the cycling industry and they want to acquire the skills that elevate their value.

*What are some tangible takeaways for the shop owner?*

### For existing employees:

- » Let them know there's a career in the bike industry,
- » Give them access to the mechanic side of the business,
- » Send them to the mechanic's school,
- » Tell them about OIWC, and
- » Ask them how to create a more welcoming culture.

### During the recruitment process:

- » Evaluate your interview process with an eye toward unconscious biases;
- » Examine where you advertise;
- » Ask women on staff or friends to review your application process;
- » Establish a minimum number of female applicants for open positions and
- » Challenge yourself to keep applications open until you reach that minimum.

OIWC sees itself as a partner on both ends. We're creating a "Turn your Passion into Your Profession" campaign that highlights the outdoor/bike industry as an industry of choice for women and we're working to challenge our partners to examine processes that might unintentionally exclude valuable candidates.

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*Recently OIWC launched the CEO pledge: How do you think it might change the gender make-up of leadership in the industry?*

One of the biggest challenges facing outdoor companies in the next 10 years will be competition for employees with specialized skills, who understand the consumer's needs. Because of the outdoor industry's reliance on technology and engineering for innovation, it's in direct competition with Fortune 500 companies in the energy, automobile, and hi-tech sectors for employees. The CEO Pledge provides the platform for our industry to establish itself as the employer of choice among female professionals.

Specifically, the Pledge is a visible and strategic commitment from industry CEO's to the acceleration of women's leadership within their companies. Research indicates that a visible and an emotionally committed CEO, who is motivated to tell the diversity story and tout accomplishments in the space, tops the list of what makes diversity programming work. CEOs who sign the pledge will foster an environment where individual differences are respected and celebrated, enhance recruiting efforts, provide OIWC metrics for program measurement, and adopt practices designed to increase retention.

Top leaders coming together, like they have with the CEO Pledge, is a testament to the strength of our shared values. We have CEO's committing daily so the list continues to grow. You can view a complete list of the CEO Pledge community [here](#).

*What do you believe are the most common barriers for women entering the outdoor/bike industry?*

Women are actually a solution to one of the biggest challenges facing cycling companies. Research has proven that businesses with a higher portion of women in their leadership teams are also those that have the best financial performance. This all contributes to a vibrant, healthy, and sustainable industry that benefits everyone.

For any woman looking to pursue a career in the bike industry, it's important to remember that the possibilities span far beyond mountain guides, team racers, and elite athletes. Our companies thrive on talented accountants, IT specialists, educators, engineers, and a variety of other professionals who all share a passion for being active and enjoying the outdoors.

*What are the most critical paradigm shifts the industry must make in order to stay viable in the modern retail climate?*

Our belief at OIWC is that diversity in thinking at the leadership and decision-making level is essential given shifting demographics and today's economic realities. That's true for the non-profits that serve the industry, the brands and manufacturers, as well as the retailers. The challenge from this perspective then becomes, "What unconscious biases are holding us back from a more inclusive and welcoming way of thinking?" For each person reading this, the answer will be a little different. The opportunity (and challenge) then is to focus on a new state of business that employs best business retail practices and work back from that.

*What OIWC resources are available to bike shop owners who are interested in learning more about hiring and developing more professional women in the industry?*

In January, the REI Foundation awarded OIWC a five-year Mary Anderson Legacy Grant of \$1.5 million. Mary and Lloyd Anderson co-founded REI in 1938. As one of REI's first leaders, Mary helped frame what today is the country's largest outdoor consumer co-op and a community of more than 5 million active members. It's fitting that her legacy is attached to the grant that will serve as a catalyst to unleash the talent of women and spur ideas.

The funds will be used to building programs and services for the industry; offer match funding for new companies who join OIWC's member network and create new opportunities for entrepreneurial women like The Workshop, an opportunity to pitch ideas in live advisory sessions with senior industry executives. While this grant means the expansion of initiatives for our member companies and the industry as whole, we will also be refining and developing our current suite of resources for women that focus on industry-specific professional and leadership development.



Learn more at [www.oiwc.org](http://www.oiwc.org)

## Building Community to Boost the Bottom Line:

### TRAILHEAD CYCLING

Years in Business: 14 years  
Owners: Larry and Pam Saylor  
Champlin, MN  
www.trailheadcycling.com

Larry and Pam Saylor first met while working in a bike shop in 1985. Larry continued working in various shops, while Pam explored other career paths. In 2001, they left North Dakota to open Trailhead Cycling in Champlin, MN, a suburb of Minneapolis / St. Paul, because they felt it was the hub of cycling in the Midwest.

So what makes a bike shop — particularly a suburban bike shop — welcoming to women?

At Trailhead Cycling, the majority of female customers are suburban moms, Pam said, so knowing your market is key. In her community, mothers make the majority of the household purchasing decisions, so creating a sales environment that allows women to feel informed whether purchasing a bike for herself, a child, or her partner was critical.

Minnesota is also a very health-conscious state, she said, so the majority of Trailhead Cycling's marketing and products are geared toward achieving or maintaining fitness goals through cycling — a distinct contrast to many urban stores, which might stock more products for bicycle commuting.

For the Sayers, making their store an environment that welcomes and retains women customers includes steps that can apply to shops both large and small, including...

**Keeping bathrooms clean:** “My philosophy about clean bathrooms came from 12 years as a rep going in and out of bike shops,” Pam said.

**Displaying products cleanly and neatly:** Partnering with manufacturers that support women, like Liv, and provide great signage and colors for their products makes it easy for the Sayers to create great displays.

**Seeking out female employees:** With a staff of 22 people, Pam makes a conscious effort to ensure a female staff per-



son is on the salesroom floor every hour they're open. Finding women to work in the shop can be a challenge, she said, so she frequently targets customers to gauge their interest in part-time work. She also networks heavily within the community's different cycling groups. The key, she says, is to be continuously looking and recruiting.

**Creating an ambassador program:** Modeled after the Liv Ambassador program, Pam created a smaller scale version to position local women to volunteer at her shop and build a community of women riders. The Trailhead Ambassadors lead group rides, clinics and events, and host the shop's Ladies Nights, which often attract more than 120 attendees.

Ambassadors commit to one year of service, are responsible for developing their own rides and clinics, and receive feedback and support from Pam. In return, they receive a kit and are allowed to purchase one bike through the Liv pro purchase program. For Pam, the Ambassador program isn't about more cash in the register. She believes money flows to good ideas. By focusing on building a strong community of women cyclists, she's seen the benefit to her bottom line.

“I think women want to be part of something that is motivational and educational,” Pam said. By focusing on creating that community for her female customers, she generates loyalty to her shop. “Most women are looking for community,” she added. “Riding isn't just about the solo/competitive aspect of riding like it often is with men.”

**Don't be afraid to evolve:** “If there's one thing that's always changing, it's how people buy — if you want to remain viable you have to be willing to evolve.” Pam said. The Sayers aren't among the bike shops that assume the business model from 45 years ago will be equally successful in today's market. For the Sayers, it's about matching their shop's products and services to what their customers need — and adapting as that changes through the years.

## Embracing Modern Retail and Technology for an Edge: BANKER SUPPLY COMPANY

Pittsburgh, PA  
Years in Business: < 1 year  
Owner: Nick Drombosky  
[www.bankersupply.com](http://www.bankersupply.com)

Nick Drombosky started Banker Supply Company to address the growing market of higher-end bicycle accessories. As the owner and proprietor of Fiks:Reflective, a reflective accessory brand, he'd travel to trade shows and lament that none of the sharp, good looking bags and apparel he liked were carried in shops outside of New York or Los Angeles.

Pittsburgh's East Liberty neighborhood, which is home to a large Google campus with more than 400 employees, is a rapidly growing district full of young people with disposable incomes. For Drombosky that means a market of big city desires, without a whole lot of options. While Banker Supply Company focuses primarily on clothing and accessories, they've grown to carry State and Linus bicycles, and offer full service and repair.

Drombosky was intentional in not looking like a typical bike shop (dark, poorly merchandised); a model that he says is becoming extinct. The result is a bike shop that looks more like a high-end fashion boutique. Drombosky caters primarily to a segment of bike retail that sees bikes as a lifestyle accessory, more than recreation or sport. But Banker Supply also recognizes that these customers have the same needs in service and functional safety equipment as a typical bike customer.

When he brought on a mechanic to offer service, he was concerned about the current reputation of bike mechanics. Even at some of the best shops, he discovered customers' experiences could be miserable. So his repair service places a high priority on making each customer feel welcomed and valued.

The shop utilizes Square as its point of sales software, allowing Drombosky to capture customer information at each transaction. What was a simple, cost effective point of sales solution for his small business sets him apart from his larger bike shop competitors. Many shops currently lack the ability to collect gender at the point of sale. Or, if they do, they don't train staff to do so. This means they can only look at women specific product sales,



rather than track what women actually buy — which goes far beyond women-specific designs. Currently his sales are about 50/50 split between men and women. Knowing that ridership in Pittsburgh is nowhere near gender parity, Drombosky sees this as a huge opportunity for growth. So it's not surprising that his shop was selected as one of the few in Pittsburgh to carry the Levi's women's commuter line.

Drombosky believes that "good business is being a decent person." He recounted the story of a woman who came to the shop to have an older bike from a big box store repaired. She'd previously been turned away at another shop that refused to work on the bike. Drombosky's staff looked at the bike and explained the cost of repairs versus the cost of replacing the bike. The woman explained that the bike had belonged to her daughter who had passed away, and she was fixing it up for her younger daughter to ride. To her, that bike was priceless. Drombosky pondered: "From a business perspective, why wouldn't you want that repair?"

"Women are a barometer of poor customer service," he said. "They don't tolerate it at the same levels men do." And Drombosky is careful to point out that by creating a service environment that may alienate women, shops are inevitably alienating men who also place a high value on customer service, too.

He also believes it's important to hire more women, but notes that, given recent trends in which women are gaining more and higher education than men, it's increasingly difficult to find female workers willing to accept a lower wage part-time job. "If we have to pay more to get more women in sales, where does that money come from?" Drombosky wondered.

Banker Supply is taking a risk by focusing on a niche market of bike retail and stocking high end goods. But its strategic location and commitment to a high-quality retail experience to all customers, has them poised for success.

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## 7 Strategies to Attract and Retain Women Customers

### Commit to growing the sport of cycling by sponsoring women's racing teams and events

The ability for inspirational athletes to drive sales in cycling is proven. During the peak of Lance Armstrong's career, road bike sales experienced a ten year boom. Additionally, USA Cycling statistics reported a steady increase of licences issued between 2002 and 2008, that they credit to Armstrong's Tour de France victories. But the key to having a woman take center stage in professional cycling is early investment in her athletic career. In addition to giving women the space to learn and grow as athletes, even sponsoring amateur racing can have dramatic impacts on your bottom line. The camaraderie women experience on a team keep them investing in the sport, and they are most likely to invest their dollars at a shop that has invested in them. And if you believe that men are the only segment susceptible to inspirational athletic messaging, one only need to look at athletes like Mia Hamm, Serena Williams, and Mo'ne Davis to see how impactful investing in women athletes can be to growing their respective sports.

### Challenge assumptions about women and cycling

Don't conflate women with beginners. Stock a range of apparel and equipment that will appeal to all women customers from novice to Cat 1. If they can't see the type of rider they are or want to be in the product range in your store they will go elsewhere. Don't dumb down the sales experience for women. Women also want to make sure they are making the best investment with their dollars. Do this by creating a sales experience that puts all the information at their fingertips without salespeople turning the exchange into a tech speak chest thumping scenario. Use plain language to describe features and allow the customer to set the tone for how technical the sales pitch becomes. Ask a million questions. Listen. And then ask some more.

### Hire more women

If we're going to invite more women into the world of bicycling, we need to begin by creating a space that also includes them in the field of bicycle professionals. Dealers and manufacturers need to partner to create programs that draw more women into the field, and shop owners can broaden their search criteria to allow more women candidates to rise to the top. Shops that found success in hiring more women explain that they are always recruiting. They are asking their best women customers to apply for part time jobs, they are showing up to club rides and races specifically with an eye at recruiting more women to the business. Successful shops are also finding women with transferable skills that make up for what they may lack in direct bike retail experience.

### Welcome newcomers with open arms

Many women report feeling intimidated or unwelcome in bike shops. The idea that a retail establishment allows this to be part of its culture is confounding. Don't shops want as many people as possible to walk in the shop and buy something? If you notice your staff engaging in this type of exclusive behavior, whether that is talking down to customers, ignoring customers, or judging customers based on appearance and then giving them poor service nip it in the bud. The best strategy is to model the level of inclusiveness you want to see. Do this by implementing inclusive employee policies or hosting trainings that address this behavior head on. And if you get feedback from a customer that alerts you to this behavior, thank them and give them a discount. Their willingness to speak up means they care about your business, and you should care about theirs.

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## Host women-only instructional clinics

Many women prefer a women-only learning space to acquire new skills. Whether that is hosting a fix a flat clinic, and informational session on saddle selection, or hosting an instructional mountain bike ride, these types of events can drive sales. They give women a reason to come into your store, when they previously may have felt it was not for them. Secondly, by arming them with good information, they are empowered to make purchases that they are confident will serve their individual needs. This will result in higher customer satisfaction, and repeat business.

## Design a clean, aesthetically pleasing shop

Looks are important. Cleanliness is important. Women are attracted to shops that “feel good” to be in. If you can afford to, invest in modernizing your store’s look. Make sure the fixtures display the clothing and accessories in a visually desirable way. And we will say it again, make sure your bathroom is clean and well stocked.

## Incorporate data collection on customer demographics into your point of sale process

One of the challenges shops faced in this study was being able to accurately assess the effects of their marketing and sales strategies. This is because many shops do not capture any customer data at the point of sale. Some shop were provided point of sale software that had the capacity to capture this data, but did not adequately train sales staff to collect it. Without this crucial information, it’s impossible to gauge return on investment, whether that is a shop bringing in more inventory or offering more programming. One solution is to automate collection, by using software that collects customer information at the swipe of a credit card, such as Square or Lightspeed. This type of collection allows shop owners to look at individual purchasing habits versus how well Women Specific categories sell which paints a more accurate picture of consumer behavior.

## CONCLUSION

Bike shops are essential to a thriving bicycle-friendly America. Equipping shop with the tools to expand their customer base and encourage more women and other underrepresented groups to ride is key to their long-term viability and success.

Despite challenges in the retail space, the current climate is one of optimism. Many new riders are learning the benefits of bicycling and shop owners are well positioned to take advantage of evolving cultural and political opinions about bicycling across the nation.

Bike shop owners are deeply embedded in the sport and the movement. They are among the most passionate cyclists, willing to invest their livelihood into connecting others to a new sport or a new way to get around town.

While some shops have wholeheartedly embraced the challenge, others have yet to understand the immediacy of making the shift to more inclusive strategies. The aloofness and at times cryptic service that people often experience at bike shops is quite literally turning people away at the door. It’s time to reimagine what a great customer experience looks like at a bike shop, and set the bar much higher.

The strategy is simple: Being courteous, attentive and responsive to customers’ needs — but executing on that consistently, particularly among underrepresented demographics, has proven challenging.

When a woman walks into a shop with a man, who do sales staff address first? What if the sales staff simply asked which one is in the market for a bike today? What if they both left feeling heard, respected, and confident that they got the bike of their dreams? It’s happening at many shops across the country — and those are the ones that will remain in business.

Our hope is that in this report shop owners are inspired to draw more people to bicycling, to ensure generations to come have a place to tap into the joy and freedom of two wheels.

## Insight from other industries: LULULEMON YOGA

Founded in 1998 in Vancouver, Canada, lululemon athletica designs stores and experiences as intentionally as it designs product. The yoga-inspired technical athletic apparel retailer continues to expand globally and sold \$1.5 billion in 2014. Part of the company's success can be attributed to its local, grassroots approach to marketing and guest experience.

“We believe in creating real, authentic connections between our guests, our ambassadors and our community partners,” said Renee Lefrak, Area Community Manager for the Southeast USA. “When a guest walks into our store, we want them to feel both at home and inspired. Our educators take the time to learn what our guests are up to and share tips on everything from their favorite running trails to the best place to grab a coffee — and every week our stores offer complimentary yoga and fitness classes with local fitness instructors and our ambassadors.”

A unique branch of lululemon's guest and community engagement is the brand's thousand-strong ambassador program. Store ambassadors are inspirational leaders, and include yoga teachers, personal trainers, run mavens and more with a passion for elevating the health and fitness of the community.

“Through our in-store classes and run clubs, ambassadors can promote their own brands and businesses,” she said. “We support them with vision and goal training as well as product. In return, they share our brand through their community networks and we get direct product feedback from seasoned athletes to innovate our designs. They are a true extension of our team and they elevate our communities.”

The outreach doesn't end there. The physical space of the store is important to the welcoming feel, as well. In addition to the locally-inspired design aesthetic, all stores have community boards sharing the latest events and experiences. Lefrak and her team spend lots of time out and being active in the community to learn what makes guests tick, share product and collect feedback.

For instance, if Lefrak attends a hot yoga class and sees a woman struggling in cotton clothes, she'll talk to her afterward, offering her pieces to try out from lululemon that offer more technical properties like their signature four-way stretch,



sweat-wicking, breathable Luon. It's hers to keep, no strings attached. If she likes it, she knows where she can get more.

But how do they answer the question on many people's minds: What about the men?

Helen Mckee, Area Community Strategist in the Southeast USA, said having both men and women on the sales floor is important: “Often, a woman wants to ask other women how a certain product might fit or work, and a guy might not know how to support me in that question. It's smart to have both, so we can connect with every guests to make things really comfortable.”

Lululemon also opened its first men's only store in SoHo, New York, in late 2014 and continues to expand the men's product lines, increase in-store space — and build strong male brand ambassadors.

“Last year, Helen created a regional experience for men in the Southeast” Lefrak said. “She had each store hand pick these incredible athletes and influencers in each community and created a ‘man camp’ experience.” In a large estate in North Carolina, the men had a weekend of learning from one another about lululemon. “By the time they left, there was an unbelievable shift that they had with the products,” Lefrak said. “It's been a game changing experience regionally.”

## Insight from other industries: HARLEY-DAVIDSON



Leslie Previsch has spent most of her career marketing, selling and reaching women on two wheels. First, she was a trailblazer at Harley-Davidson Motor Company. During her tenure of 15 years, she became the Women's Segment Lead, a position she pushed the management to create.

From motor to people-powered, Previsch transitioned to Trek Bicycles,

where she was head of global marketing for Towne and Women's Specific Design bicycles and accessories. Her leadership worked: Road bicycle sales increased by 8% and there was a 500% boost in Facebook growth for Trek Women. How did she do it? Here's what she had to say.

*How important is the women's market in the overall company philosophy of the organizations working with you? What about while you were at Harley-Davidson and then Trek?*

Last year, I did marketing and selling to women program for a large company (outside bike or outdoor industries), which involved a keynote at a national conference, survey, blog and webinar. On our first call, they talked about an "army of men selling to an army of women," since 85% of their salesforce were men, yet more than 70% of decision makers for their product was women. They take it very seriously!

I also worked with a multi-tool company on short-term and long-term strategies to increase their sales to women. While some people were on board and others seemed to be, it didn't get the traction it needed. I think they have only implemented a few of the ideas, but that's a start.

At times it takes repeated messages and patience. I first presented a marketing to women plan at corporate Harley in 1998 when I came up from a retail dealership. It wasn't until 2007 that I finally convinced them to create a full-time position. Now at both Harley and Trek, the women's market is seen as an opportunity and the majority of leaders are behind the strategies, with both words and action.

*What are the top techniques/strategies for growing a company's women's market?*

1. Train the retailers. Companies can waste millions at the corporate level on initiatives that will fail if retailers don't understand or buy into the philosophy. Or, if they simply don't treat women right and lose the sale.
2. No tolerance for disrespectful images or language about women. This would include using models at Interbike, Cycle Passion calendar, any comments that are not appropriate — from the top down. It isn't going to change unless every person is treated with respect — and people call each other out on what is not appropriate.
3. Use real women and real stories in ads, not models or all 20-somethings. Marketing must be relatable!

*What value do they see in hiring women sales staff to increase women's sales? What are the challenges in finding qualified women sales staff and tactics to recruit/hire/train sales staff?*

I'd say women selling clothing is more necessary. I think men and women can sell bikes equally, if they are respectful, open-minded and knowledgeable. To hire, look at the female customer base — maybe semi-retired, so they don't worry about low pay. When training women for the sales floor, get them up-to-speed on the technical aspects if they aren't already. But don't make them feel like they need to know EVERY techy detail to be successful.

*Where there are differences when looking through a gender lens moving from Harley-Davidson to Trek?*

I always tell people I think there's a higher percentage of Harley dealer employees who are women than Trek dealers. Part of the reason is that many Harley dealerships have dedicated apparel staff, many of whom are women. Also, many women who started in apparel (or other areas), learned to ride and are now motorcycle sales people. And good ones!

I would say a similarity is the fact that many men—and women—in the motorcycle and bicycle industry (so not pinpointing Harley or Trek here) overlook inappropriate behavior and don't really address it. Would the running industry ever allow some of the comments and images that the bike and motorcycle industry does? Nope.

*Learn more from Leslie at [www.previschmarketing.com](http://www.previschmarketing.com)*

## Insight from other industries: **RUNNING**

In stark contrast to the male-dominated bike world, running is majority women. And that invitation to female participation starts at local retail shops like Mojo Running and Multisport in Pittsburgh, Pa.

Owner Jenn Wohlgamuth's sales split 60 / 40 and it's the women who have the foot forward. Which makes sense since she describes the women's market as "extremely important" to her company's philosophy. "We believe in promoting and creating strong women," she said. "So we cater to that market from young to old, new runner to elite."

Her mission is evident in the store itself, which blends an intimate feel with cutting-edge product. "We have a small shop; just 1,800 square feet," she said. "The store is divided into men's and women's — 60/40 as our sales are. We have the women's shoe wall and bra wall on one side and the men's on the other, and we look for the latest and greatest products for our customer base."

And her customer base see herself in the store's staff, which consists of seven women and one man. "Men have a harder time relating to our female base and we have found this mix to be working," Wohlgamuth said.

How do they get those women to the door? "We stay close to the women's organizations in our community," she said. "We have relationships with our local yoga shops, cross fit boxes and Whole Foods Market. We go to where our customer base shops and try to make sure that we're making the right connections."

And once those connections are made Mojo keeps customers engaged with "a ton of events" and groups and races galore.



And Mojo certainly isn't an outlier in the running realm. Susie Stein, an owner of Up and Running, which has two locations in a Dayton and Troy, OH, caters to a similarly female customer base. Her sales also break to the women, at 60% of sales. In fact, its only recently that men were added to the mix at all.

We opened initially as a women's store," she said. "Then two years in added men. My thought has always been, if she isn't buying for herself, a woman is buying for her family. She steers the ship."

So Up and Running stores are very women-friendly: bigger dressing rooms, kids area, plenty of aisle space for a stroller and more. And not just for the clients, but for the employees, too.

Her staff is overwhelmingly female, and she recognizes the time restraints that can come with kids and family and other responsibilities. "The best thing we can do for any of our staff is be flexible," she said.

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