

Editorial

Suppliers Need to Tailor Offerings for Sales Down the Middle

Sales of high-end road and mountain bikes have slowed over the past few months to a mere trickle as a result of the sputtering economy.

Retailers visited on the BRAIN Twin Cities Dealer Tour last month confirmed that sales of expensive carbon fiber machines remain sluggish. Consumers are still buying—but those who once purchased \$5,000 road bikes are now purchasing \$3,000 road bikes.

As Kevin O'Connor, owner of Gear

West Bike & Triathlon, pointed out, suppliers now offer such nice bikes at such affordable prices that consumers have no incentive to spend more money when budgets are tight.

On the other end of the spectrum, dealers in Minneapolis-St. Paul reported that low-end sales have dried up. Retailers said that customers for that entry-level bike aren't even coming in the doors.

Steve Phyle, owner of Tonka Cycle &

Ski, added that manufacturers' price increases the past few years have moved entry-level IBD bikes out of the budget shopper's price range. Price-driven consumers are now shopping in mass-market stores instead.

If what we heard in the Twin Cities is any indication, retailers are increasingly relying on mid-priced bikes for turns.

Suppliers and retailers would be wise to focus on the mid-price range for next season. Companies that have histori-

cally focused on the entry level or made their mark by touting upper echelon products may need to diversify their strategy.

We're already seeing performance-oriented suppliers like Scott and BMC adding more value offerings to their ranges for next model year. Companies that make adjustments and move to the middle will be fine, while those who operate on the fringes may find themselves high and dry next season.

Guest Editorial

Persistence Pays In Getting Cycling Projects Off the Ground

BY KEVIN ISHAUG

When getting your project funded, there are three important constituencies to consider: government agencies, the community and the media.

Persistence pays. City hall is filled with bureaucracy. Find out who your allies are and how to use them to get a positive outcome. Doing a little research to find out how your city or community works is important—in our city, the council controls most of the budget and oversees most departments through committees. If your city has a biking coordinator, find out who they report to. While usually not in a position to fund your project, the biking coordinator can identify influence “pedalers” and detractors. Make introductions early on in the timeline of your proposed project. The more you keep in contact, the better

chance it has of staying on their radar.

Get beyond the pencil pushers. I found two council members who were project champions. These two council members were on the Transportation and Public Works committee that held the purse strings for the city's portion of the project. Get the message directly to the decision-makers and, from there, everything flows downstream. Oftentimes middle managers are afraid of making a decision for fear of project failure on their watch, but if the directive comes from above, this becomes less of an issue. All of the committee meetings and tedious follow-up phone calls and emails are crucial. It's in these meetings where things can quickly get off track. Political environments and agendas can change, so keeping abreast of changes in city hall can be critical.

Partner with a non-profit. The alliance formed with a non-profit group that shares your goal has a huge upside if and when your project is off the ground and you need assistance. Many hands make light work. Having good rapport and support from within the cycling community is also very important in spreading the word about your project and soliciting support. Every shop has thousands of potential project champions on their mailing lists—tap into them! They are voters, and no politico will turn a deaf ear on thousands of voters.

Know your project's detractors. Address their concerns and your project stands a much better chance. You may not gain their support, but hopefully you can insulate some of the negative comments. Too often you hear after a proj-

ect fell apart that one of the people that voted against didn't have all the facts.

The media can be a great ally. Every media outlet is looking for a feel-good story, and what could feel better than a story that involves getting more people biking? Consider hiring a media relations expert to help navigate these waters if they are unfamiliar to you. The media not only draw attention to your project, but also to the elected officials against it. Often, the reporters that cover cycling-related stories are cycling advocates themselves, and you just gave them a soapbox to stand on with your new project!

Kevin Ishaug is the owner of Freewheel Bike in Minneapolis. For more on how he gained political support for the Midtown Bike Center, turn to page DT-4.