

## Bike Retailers Can Tap Into Consumers' Fitness Resolutions

Millions of Americans will kick off the New Year this month by resolving to lose weight, get fit or reduce stress through exercise.

In fact, a Franklin Covey poll of 15,031 customers found respondents' top three New Year's resolutions for 2008 are to get out of debt or save money, lose weight, and develop a healthy habit like exercise or healthy eating.

In hopes of making good on such resolutions, many Americans join a gym.

Jan. 1 is Black Friday for the health club industry. According to the International Health, Racquet and Sports Club Association, the first quarter of the year is the key period for new member acquisition for the club industry. January is the single biggest month for new memberships, accounting for 12.4 percent of annual accounts added in 2001.

Cycling can also provide a way to meet fitness and wellness goals. Biking can help a customer lose weight and re-

duce risk of heart disease and stroke.

A bike can be an alternative for someone who has tried and failed to meet their goals by joining a health club in the past. And unlike a gym, a bike offers access to fresh air and the outdoors.

For consumers also concerned with saving money, most bike shops can outfit a new customer with a bike and accessories for less than a gym initiation fee and annual dues.

As you close out your holiday sales,

why not extend your winter sales season by playing into consumers' New Year's resolutions?

Promote your store as the answer to customers' weight loss and fitness goals with window treatments and signage. Develop programs, services and classes similar to those a gym offers to attract new members.

By thinking of your shop as providing an alternative to a gym, you can turn your off season into a selling season.

## Guest Editorial

## Bikes Are Good, But What Africa Really Needs Is Bike Shops

BY MARK RIEDY

Africa is a big place. Much of it rather warm and largely rural. The kind of place that's great for riding a bike. Combine that with a median income across the continent of well under \$1,000 annually, and you'd think Africa would be bike heaven. Yet, despite the work of a number of organizations aimed at getting more Africans on two wheels, it's not.

I may be able to explain why.

A couple of years ago, my business partner Ben Capron and I decided to start a small company. We'd focus on marketing and communications. We'd both spent most of our lives working in the bike industry, so it was natural to continue to fish in this pond. When we were setting the big goals for our business, we both liked the idea of doing the right thing. Whatever that meant.

As it happened, we figured out what doing the right thing was sooner than we anticipated. Just months after starting our venture, we turned up in Gaborone, Botswana. Thanks to the generosity of Steve Madden at *Bicycling* magazine and Mike Sinyard at Specialized (our founding client), we were in Botswana to help *Bicycling's* Biketown program give some 200 bikes to home healthcare workers who'd use them to visit patients. We were inspired to do more.

Thanks to people in the bike business that are giving away bicycles in Africa—people like F.K. Day and Chris Strout at World Bicycle Relief, Tom Ritchey with Project Rwanda, Hans Rey and his Wheels For Life Program—there's plenty of opportunity to do just that.

A few months after we got back we heard from Steve and others that a num-

ber of the bikes had been sidelined due to flat tires and bent wheels. The maintenance classes we'd done didn't have the effect we wanted. Then it became clear: Africa doesn't have more people on bikes because it doesn't have bike shops.

After talking to people familiar with the continent and bike-related humanitarian efforts there, we decided on a simple plan. Get IBDs in developed countries like the United States to lend their time, expertise and some funds to help jump-start IBDs in Africa. We called our program 'Sister Shop' because the key to its success would be an ongoing relationship between both parties. The African entrepreneurs would get a new skill set and a business, and the American IBDs would get to do the right thing in a way that took advantage of the hard work they've done to grow

their businesses.

The first to support a Sister Shop initiative were Matt Adams and Ken Martin, owners of the Bay Area's Mike's Bikes. The two made a trip to Africa, donated money and spent countless hours to help start an IBD in Botswana.

Through the first Sister Shop experiment with Matt and Ken, we fine-tuned the program and continue to make it more efficient. We've learned in the past year-and-a-half that it's pretty easy to do the right thing. It doesn't take a million dollars, a staff of hundreds or connections to Al Gore. It just takes a simple idea and a few friends. Something all of us should have plenty of.

*Mark Riedy is a partner with Ben Capron in True, a communication and sales training business.*