

Our Industry Has Opportunity to 'Own' Green Movement

Marshal Cohen, senior analyst for the NPD Group, told attendees at the OIA Rendezvous last month that the outdoor industry has the biggest opportunity to "own" green of any industry except for perhaps the organic food industry.

The outdoor industry is a few steps ahead of the bike industry in embracing and promoting green initiatives. Patagonia has long been a conservation leader in examining its products and its buildings for environmentally pre-

ferred alternatives. Nike is expanding its Considered line, which takes a sustainable approach to design. Outdoor companies dedicated to using natural, recycled and organic materials abound.

But our industry provides a form of transportation that leaves behind no carbon trail. That certainly gives us a leg up when communicating our green message, but it isn't the end-all. It should inspire us to do more in other aspects of our businesses to reinforce and strengthen that message.

At BRAIN, our greatest ability to positively impact the environment is through our paper. In January, *Bicycle Retailer* will move to a magazine-grade paper with minimum 85 percent recycled content.

Bicycle Retailer is on the forefront by switching to an ecopaper, according to Frank Locantore. The director of Co-Op America's Magazine Paper Project said out of about 18,000 magazine titles, only around 200 are consistently printed on recycled paper.

We at BRAIN hope that we can not only demonstrate environmental leadership through our own action, but also highlight companies that are taking the lead in other ways. To that end, we've introduced a new column, Green Notes, in which we plan to highlight industry suppliers and retailers who are embracing sustainable practices.

We hope that as you explore new ways, however small, to make your business more sustainable you will own that effort.

Guest Editorial

Twelve Steps, No, Five Steps to Kick the Carbon Fiber Habit

BY GREGG R. BAGNI

Two years ago in this same spot the alien nation threw a planetary poke at the bike industry. As you basked in the glory of high-end road bike sales we accused the industry of being drunk on everything carbon fiber. After hovering low in our UFO over the Interbike 2007 aisles, it appears the industry is still hopped up on graphite goofballs.

Several smart brands are really beginning to "get it" by embracing city, commuter and multi-activity bikes. These "Two-Wheeled Transporter" style bikes are the opposite of what you've been selling. So kudos to the courageous few who flew their freak flag commitment high with thoughtful product design and dedicated show floor space.

Will a handful of suppliers wean themselves off the slowing carbon fiber gravy train? High-end road sales are dropping due to a full channel and aging customers. Niche mountain bike sales still have some single-digit growth left but neither is directly tapped into

the coming market shift.

The industry's key constraint is the relatively low price of gas. Still not high enough at \$85/barrel, the petroleum distillate time bomb is ticking. It will explode because of peak oil, continued unrest in the Middle East, and a coming fear and loathing of U.S. public transportation.

Here are some alien ideas on what a manufacturer or retailer can do to help solve consumers' transport problems and benefit your business:

- **Build and/or stock the product.** Consider it a virtuous investment in your planet's future. Have your brand's unique version of the Two-Wheeled Transporter in your lineup. Commit for a minimum of 24 months.

- **Partner up.** It's getting more and more difficult to go it alone. Even large brands are co-branding and promoting. Find a buddy to share your Two-Wheeled Transporter development time and energy with. Explore categories like communities, healthcare, in-

urance, food, music, apparel, schools and enviro-groups.

- **Focus on true urban areas.** Don't waste too much time and energy trying to push product into suburban and ex-urban markets that don't currently have the supporting physical infrastructure. If you're a non-city retailer you should still stock it and educate people about the product. Just be careful not to throw too much at it. However, if you're a big city retailer be all over it like a cheap suit. Please remember, this product and its market is still a work in progress. You're on a journey, so be patient.

- **Think about pop culture.** What's culturally relevant to consumers? You can easily "build it" but how can you "be it" in their minds? Bike messengers have successfully done it by creating their own freakazoid community. Don't copy them, instead model a broader urban lifestyle wrapped around this new type of bike. Clif Bar's "2 Mile Challenge" is a great example. And be optimistically opportunistic; leverage your

new products, your knowledge or even your location through public relations. Make passion trump practicality in a consumer's mind.

- **Promote industry conversation.** Quit being so competitive and start being more collaborative. There's little choice because you're already behind the magic eight ball with consumers' mindshare and dollars. You should already be a member of Bikes Belong and IMBA. Consider joining the Outdoor Industry Association. Their research, lobbying efforts and freight program alone should pay off for you. Extend the Two-Wheeled Transport message by working together across categories to build real momentum.

The spacecowboys and I wish you luck in spreading some two-wheeled love! Ack Ack!

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