

Editorial

Do You Believe the Bicycle Can Be a Vehicle of Change?

Over the next month Americans will elect a new U.S. president. We don't yet know who will be chosen, but at least both candidates are spreading a message of change.

Americans are embracing the concept of change not only in a presidential agenda but also in their own lives. And bicycles are a change agent, offering a way to conserve fuel and cut expenses.

As more Americans begin to trade short car trips for bicycle trips, we as an industry have to keep pace and influence change.

Recently we've seen signs of the shifting sands as manufacturers develop more products for casual cyclists and commuters. Vendors also are creating programs that quantify the benefits of bicycling, such as Cateye's worldcommute.com and

Trek's Go by Bike Challenge.

It seems we're taking steps as an industry to provide the tools and resources for everyday Americans to turn short drives into rides. Still, something seems to be holding us back.

We are all in this business because we are passionate about cycling, whether as a weekend pastime, competitive sport, or as a lifestyle. But although many of us

spend countless hours on a bike, it's still hard for some of us to truly believe in the bike as a form of transportation.

As we gather here at Interbike, look around at the massive shift toward commuter categories on the show floor and ask yourself, "Do I believe that bikes can be a catalyst for change?" If your answer is yes, figure out how you can be part of that change.

Guest Editorial

Step Up From Basic Advocacy to Championing a Bicycling Cause

BY LESLIE BOHM

American Express popularized cause marketing with its 1983 campaign that raised \$19 million to restore the Statue of Liberty. By concentrating on that single initiative, it captured more attention for the cause and for itself.

For bicycle businesses, supporting a variety of local causes is good, but consider focusing your advocacy effort on a single cause. This can deliver more impact for the cause and your business.

The Cause Opportunity. By fully committing to a single cause, your business stands out—transcending goods and services to connect on an emotional level. It also aids in recruiting, retaining and motivating staff.

In 1984, Benjamin Cycles organized the community of Ft. Myers, Florida, in a multi-year effort to win bike access

over a major local bridge. Ed Benjamin recalls, "When we started, Lee County had 20 to 30 miles of bike paths. This year, they report more than 500 miles of paths. Many customers told us they supported Benjamin Cyclery because they saw money spent with us would benefit the cycling community."

How to Choose a Cause. A goal lofty enough to brand with is probably larger than what a bike business could achieve on its own. Our maximum leverage isn't our manpower or financial clout; it's being the nucleus of local cycling interest.

Cause branding requires staff buy-in. Is your management team deeply committed? Would they work on it even without public recognition? Can you execute: Raise money? Get people involved? Dedicate the time?

Penn Cycle is synonymous with Min-

neapolis. Penn is 51 years old with seven stores across the city. Bill Randen, general manager, explains that Penn wants to refocus Twin-Cities commuters on cycling. So it works with the 494 Corridor Commission and the Bike 2 Benefits program with businesses along Minneapolis's major artery. "Our employees have done dozens of bike clinics and safety checks at local corporations. We're increasing bike commuting by sponsoring the program and providing advice on route planning, bikes on transit and minor maintenance."

Cause branding declares what your business stands for. Is the cause something customers can get emotional about? Is the goal inspiring enough to mobilize volunteers, customers and other community forces?

Causes to consider include local on- or off-road path and facility projects, youth

programs, bike recycling or family cycling events.

Landry's Bicycles in Boston is so committed to the state advocacy group MassBike that it actively sells MassBike memberships. Jack Johnson, Landry's marketing and advocacy director, reports, "We've sold over 1,800 memberships (totaling over \$54,000). We send them a check every month. It helps inspire our staff, and customers tell us they appreciate it."

Selling bikes is a good business, but promoting bicycling is a great business—with substantial benefits for you, your staff, your customers and your community.

Leslie Bohm is the chief executive officer of Catalyst Communication and a founding Board Member of Bikes Belong and Frierer.org.