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SHOOTING INDUSTRY

THE INDUSTRY'S BUSINESS MAGAZINE — EST. 1955



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Selling To The
HIGH END
*Buyers Still Willing
To Pay A Premium*

“
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”
Dealers Praise Top Brands

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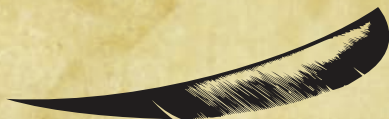


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The Start Of A Two-Month Sprint

Entering the 11th month of the year — it's going to be an all-out sprint from here until New Year's Day. Key moments ahead over the next several weeks to build specials and sales campaigns around include Veterans Day (Nov. 11), Black Friday (Nov. 28), Small Business Saturday (Nov. 30), Cyber Monday (Dec. 2) and, of course, Christmas.

Inside this issue, Hank Yacek includes tangible tips dealers can take to close out 2024 in the black. In "Ending The Year On A High Note," Yacek highlights the vast utility of gift cards.

"Gift cards serve a variety of functions: They're an important avenue to finding new customers, building brand awareness, entrenching customer loyalty and improving cash flow," he contends. "In addition, a measurable percentage of gift cards are never redeemed and can bring a little free cash to your establishment.

For more insights, see p. 36.

OVERCOMING 7 COMMON MARKETING MISTAKES

In this month's *Best Practices* column, FMG Digital Content and Marketing Director Ashley McGee identifies seven common marketing mistakes dealers make — and offers tips to remedy them.

The "race to the bottom" pricing model has become prevalent in the industry, and McGee argues this strategy diminishes a store's value and ability to invest in quality products and services for customers — and it erodes customer loyalty.

"Instead of competing on price alone, focus on highlighting your business's unique value proposition. Emphasize aspects like superior customer service, expert knowledge and quality products," she recommends.

The other six marketing mishaps are on p. 26.



NOVEMBER 2024

CONSUMERS WILLING TO PAY PREMIUM?

It's been well-documented the negative impact inflation has had on the market. In "Selling To The High End," Peter Suci concludes premium-priced brands may be in for a rebound.

"While overall firearm sales continue to decline from the pandemic high, the market is seeing some shifts toward higher-priced products," reports Nancy Bacon, Southwick Associates VP of outdoor analytics.

Suci interviews a panel made up of former dealers and high-end manufacturers on their expectations and experiences in this subset of the firearms market. For more, see p. 28.

NEXT MONTH: NEW BUSINESS YEAR EDITION

The December 2024 issue represents *Shooting Industry's* first of two special 2025 New Business Year editions. This issue will be packed with engaging features — from Bryan Hendricks' take comparing lever guns to AR-15s to a comprehensive SHOT 2025 preview and a continuation of the "de-evolution" series and more.

Additionally, the issue will be anchored by Part 1 of the 2025 New Product Showcase — highlighting products from more than 50 brands. (Submissions can be sent to nps25@fmghq.com.)

Have a comment on anything you see inside this issue? Contact the *SI* team anytime: comments@shootingindustry.com. **SI**

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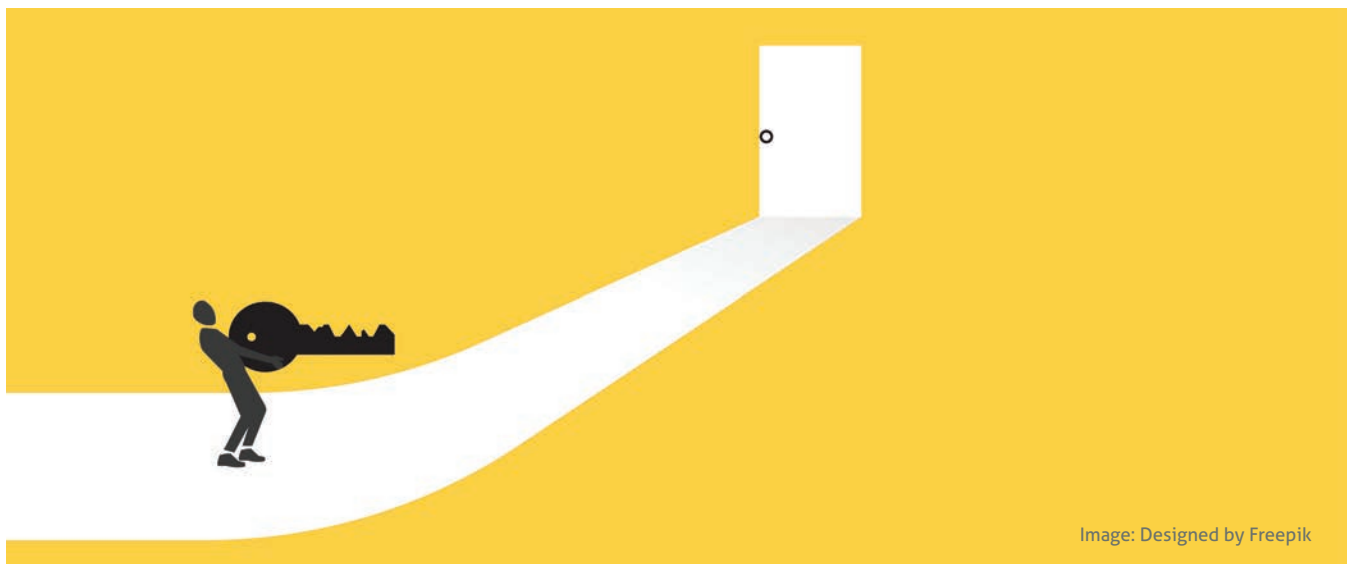


Image: Designed by Freepik

MY KEYS TO SUCCESS

I've been following Hank Yacek's "De-Evolution" articles and I love them, but this is why I'm still in business and just renewed my FFL for another three years. My rent is low, and I sell a lot of ammo in volume. No way in hell can you get MSRP or retail prices for your product — this industry sucks right now. Customer loyalty has been huge and is keeping us going.

— **Anthony Cervassi, Owner**

AC Arms

Mendon, Mass.

Anthony, thank you for weighing in — we have received some excellent feedback on these stories. I'm excited to share Hank's "De-Evolution" series has been expanded to include a third story, which will be published in next month's issue. — **Jade Moldae, Editor**

WHAT S/ READERS ARE SAYING ...

Editor's Note: The following exchange comes via LinkedIn. In the Sept. 2024 *Arms & The Woman* column ("Attracting & Retaining Female Customers"), Bethany Beathard shares ways dealers can tailor their approach to market to women better and be more effective in the products they offer. **SI**

Great article, Bethany Beathard! I would like to see a parallel product and marketing outreach to left-handed shooters as well. While far more ambidextrous products — both firearms and gear — are available now than they were a few years ago, I think there is continued room for improvement. As a smaller female and a left-handed/left-eye dominant shooter, it can be challenging to find something in-store that isn't customized.

— **Lisa Felix, Business Development Coordinator**

Lisa, definitely! Check out Savage Arms. They have several left-handed options.

— **Bethany Beathard**

Thank you! I do like their products. One time I found an AR at a shop with a left-handed ejection port that didn't have ambidextrous controls. I know that's an easy fix, but the lack of thought in engineering when they went through the effort of the left-handed ejection port baffled me.

— **Lisa Felix**

I would like to see a parallel product and marketing outreach to left-handed shooters as well.

HAVE A THOUGHT WHILE READING THE ISSUE?

Let us know at comments@shootingindustry.com, facebook.com/shootingindustry or linkedin.com/company/fmg-publications

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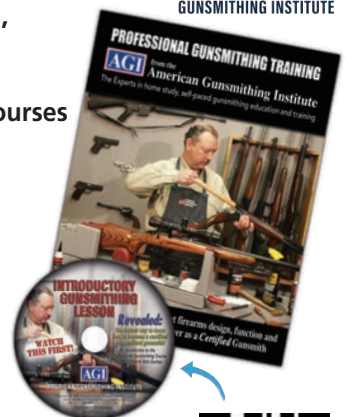
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"I feel this is the best gunsmithing school out there. I took another course prior to AGI, and it was nowhere near as complete as AGI's. Learning design, function and repair has helped me feel comfortable repairing any gun that has come into my shop."

Glade Ridd, Sandy, UT

"I hadn't planned on opening a gunsmith shop as soon as I did, but the company I worked at had a different plan. And, because of AGI's training, I was able to open my own shop quickly.

I have taken in hundreds of guns already with no previous customer base at all. I would never have imagined I would be three months back logged with gunsmithing work less than a year after opening. All of this and I haven't even completed the course yet. AGI's training works! Thank you AGI!"

David Johnson, Johnson Gunsmithing LLC, Athens, AL

"Your program changed my life and I am now an AGI Certified Master Gunsmith. Hands down, the best knowledge base I have seen yet. The instructors are successful business owners and true Masters of their trade. Thank you for your dedication and perseverance. Our nations Veterans need more of you in the world! Bravo Zulu!!

James N. Woods, Master Gunsmith, CJ's Custom Shop

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The American Gunsmithing Institute's approval to operate as a private postsecondary institution in the state of California is based on provisions of the California Private Postsecondary Education Act (CPPEA) of 2009 (California Education Code, Title 3, Division 10, Part 59, Chapter 8), which was effective January 1, 2010. The Bureau can be reached at 2535 Capitol Oaks Drive, Suite 400, Sacramento, CA 95833, www.bppe.ca.gov, toll-free telephone number (888) 370-7589 or by fax (916) 263-1897. Professional Gunsmithing Courses not available to Oklahoma residents at this time.



SIG SAUER OPENS JACKSONVILLE ARKANSAS AMMUNITION CENTER

Oct. 9, SIG SAUER officially opened its Jacksonville Arkansas Ammunition Center (JAAC) on the SIG SAUER Ammunition campus. The advanced manufacturing facility in Jacksonville, Ark., brings 210,000 additional square feet of high-tech modern manufacturing in support of the U.S. Army Next Generation Squad Weapons and family of 6.8 Hybrid Ammunition.

“In just one year, we have built a manufacturing facility that will stand for generations with the mission to provide our soldiers an ammunition technology advantage in lethality and overmatch versus our enemies,” began Ron Cohen, SIG SAUER president and CEO. “This incredible facility gives us the ability to significantly scale manufacturing and grow our output for years to come — and this is only the beginning.”

SIG SAUER’s \$225 million investment in facilities and equipment will yield more than 675 jobs and over \$300 million in total economic impact in Arkansas. Since the 2016 establishment of SIG SAUER Ammunition in Jacksonville, the operation has grown significantly — now producing ammunition for all branches of the U.S. military, Special Forces and U.S. NATO allies across its six-facility campus.

“Arkansas is proud to be home to this facility. It isn’t just a quarter-million square feet of manufacturing space and more than 600 jobs; it reinforces Arkansas’ place as the arsenal of America,” said Arkansas Gov. Sarah Sanders. “To Ron and all the team at SIG SAUER: Thank you for believing in Arkansas and investing in our state. And to everyone who played a role in

◀ SIG SAUER President and CEO Ron Cohen and Arkansas Gov. Sarah Sanders — along with other local, state, military and SIG SAUER dignitaries — officially open the \$225 million Jacksonville Arkansas Ammunition Center.

bringing this facility here: Thank you for your hard work.”

The focus of the JAAC is advanced ammunition, strengthening the industrial manufacturing base for the U.S. Department of Defense. Through a strong cooperative effort, SIG SAUER and the U.S. Army realized this scalable manufacturing capability in just over two years.

“This facility exemplifies the significant investment being made to enhance capacity and capabilities to enable ammunition production at scale in direct support of our Warfighters,” said Maj. Gen. John T. Reim, U.S. Army JPEO for Armaments and Ammunition. “It is amazing to see what the team has accomplished in two years with the introduction of the NGSW and the new 6.8mm round that ensures, when called upon, our soldiers are equipped with the safest, most reliable and lethal munitions, enabling them to decisively fight and win our nation’s wars.”

Governor Sanders, Cohen and Reim were joined by Arkansas Senator John Boozman; Ron Goslin, SIG SAUER chief operating officer; Katelyn Wilson, SIG SAUER VP strategic capture operations; Sean McGee, SIG SAUER director of ammunition operations; and Jason Imhoff, SIG SAUER CTO, ammunition to cut the ceremonial ribbon.

[/sigsauer.com](https://sigsauer.com)

ZANDERS UPGRADES WEBSITE TO IMPROVE DEALER EXPERIENCE

National distributor Zanders announced enhancements to its website aimed at improving the dealer experience, including a “Buy Now” button. The new feature provides a one-click check-out experience for items

they want to purchase. This refinement gives dealers and customers a more efficient counter experience, especially appreciated as the busier holiday season approaches.

“The initial feedback from our dealers has been very positive with this new rollout. This has been a significant undertaking, and our Dev-Ops team has done a great job with implementation and execution,” said Danny Siegler, president and COO of Zanders.



With more than 40,000 products that now include archery, archery accessories and camping products in its new, streamlined warehouse, Zanders has been serving U.S. firearms dealers for well over 50 years.

[/gzanders.com](https://gzanders.com)



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WMD GUNS AWARDED SBR CONTRACT WITH BRAZILIAN SPECIAL OPERATIONS UNITS

WMD Guns was awarded a contract to supply 5.56 short-barrel rifles (SBR) to two special operations units in Parana, Brazil.

Selected over other large OEM competitors, WMD Guns' rifles passed all qualification tests in accordance with the Brazilian army and contractual requirements. The evaluation included a 20,000-round live-fire test, drop tests, mud-soak testing and sand-drag testing. WMD's NiB-X coated firearms proved their

durability and reliability in the harshest environments.

"We had a great team, including our agent in Brazil, that worked very hard to win this contract. This is another step in our expansion efforts to supply LE, security and military professionals with tools that work reliably in all environments and critical situations. We believe that fielding our SBRs to these high-level operators lays a solid foundation from which to build upon in South America," said WMD President Wynn Atterbury.

WMD Guns was established in 2011 by a group of firearms, plating and technology experts determined to bring



advanced surface-finishing technologies to the firearms industry. The company's product line began with a bolt carrier group coated in its exclusive NiB-X nickel boron formulation.

Today, WMD Guns believes it offers the most durable firearms on the market, all utilizing state-of-the-art surface treatment technologies on the highest-quality parts.

[/ wmdguns.com](http://wmdguns.com)

COLT CZ GROUP EXPANDS PRODUCTION TO HUNGARY

The Colt CZ Group SE announced the ongoing global expansion of its firearms manufacturing network now includes the Colt CZ Hungary facility.

The Hungarian firearms manufacturing plant will boost production capacity to meet the growing global demand for Colt CZ's commercial, military and law enforcement products, along with its newly designed firearm platforms.

The investment and technology transfer from CZ in Uherský Brod, Czechia, includes cutting-edge manufacturing

processes, robotics, fully automated turning-and-milling centers and advanced finishes. All production will be overseen by CZ specialists, known for high-quality engineering and manufacturing expertise.

The partnership between Colt CZ Group and the Hungarian government, which began in 2018, will continue to supply military-grade CZ firearms to the Hungarian armed forces and produce small arms for global export.

Headquartered in West Hartford, Conn., Colt's Manufacturing Company LLC is among the world's leading designers, developers and manufacturers of firearms. Founded by Samuel Colt in 1836, Colt's Manufacturing has supplied civilian,



military and law enforcement customers in the U.S. and abroad for over 185 years.

Founded in 1936, CZ (Česká zbrojovka a.s.) exports firearms to more than 100 countries around the world. Over the years, its portfolio has extended from supplying domestic and international armed forces to a wide range of firearms for hunting, sport and recreational shooting. Since 2022, CZ has been one of the key pillars of Colt CZ Group SE.

[/ colt.czgroup.com](http://colt.czgroup.com)

REMINGTON HOSTS 3RD ANNUAL SHOOT TO CURE FUNDRAISER

Remington Ammunition's third annual Shoot to Cure sporting clays fundraiser was a resounding success. The event, held on September 20 at the Remington Gun Club in Lonoke, Ark., brought together 28 teams and a total of 140 shooters for a day of friendly competition and philanthropy.

The Shoot to Cure Sporting Clays Fundraiser is an initiative by Remington Ammunition to raise funds for Arkansas Children's Hospital, which is dedicated to providing exceptional healthcare to children in need. Showcasing Remington's

Gun Club Cure Shotshell, the competition raised \$10,000 to support the hospital's critical mission.

"We are thrilled with the overwhelming success of this year's Shoot to Cure event," said Ronnie Evans, Remington Ammunition shotshell product line manager. "The event not only showcased the passion and skill of our shooting community, but also highlighted our commitment to making a positive impact in the lives of children. We are grateful to all the participants for their support and dedication."

For the third consecutive year, Healthway Pharmacy emerged as the winning team. Their combined efforts resulted in a team score of 412.

[/ remington.com](http://remington.com)



Remington's third annual Shoot to Cure sporting clays fundraiser, held Sept. 20 at the Remington Gun Club, raised \$10,000 in support of Arkansas Children's Hospital.

GUN TOTE'N MAMAS REOPENS PRELOVED BAG PROGRAM FOR INSTRUCTORS

Gun Tote'n Mamas' (GTM) PreLoved Bag program, exclusively for certified instructors, is once again open.

This program was created for the network of certified instructors who utilize GTM products in their firearms education classes. It allows instructors to easily and cost-effectively gain access to GTM's refurbished, pre-owned line of bags and purses for concealed and off-body carry for their classes.

Certified instructors may participate in the program by sending an email to gtm@guntotenmamas.com requesting program information. They should specify

what size concealed-carry purse they most use in their off-body curriculum so GTM can match them as supply allows. With a \$35 donation plus the cost of shipping, instructors will be able to receive up to three gently used GTM bags.

"Our goal for this program is to help instructors gain hands-on experience with the number-one concealed-carry purse and bag brand in the country, support women's firearm education and give a second life to returned bags," said Claudia Chisholm, owner of Gun Tote'n Mamas. "Our product is the Cadillac of construction and warranty, perfect for a sustainable pass it on."

The instructors' donations not only cover refurbishing, but a portion also goes to Armed Women of America, A Girl & A Gun, Shoot Like A Girl and other women-focused industry organizations.



GTM's new PreLoved Bag program allows instructors to access refurbished bags and purses for use in classes.

The GTM team evaluates returned bags and ensures every bag sent through the program is fully safe to use. Supplies are limited, and GTM will select bags for instructors based on availability.

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POWDER VALLEY ANNOUNCES REBRAND

Powder Valley has rebranded to Powder Valley Outdoors after significantly expanding its product offerings beyond reloading supplies and ammunition. With its new name and a refreshed logo, Powder Valley Outdoors now reflects

its wider range of products for hunting, shooting and outdoor sports.

Already known as the largest distributor of canister powder, stocking nearly every brand of smokeless and black powder offered in the U.S., Powder Valley Outdoors now boasts an extensive inventory that includes optics, shooting gear, knives and tools from top industry brands.



The company remains “dedicated to excellent customer service and reliable quality.”

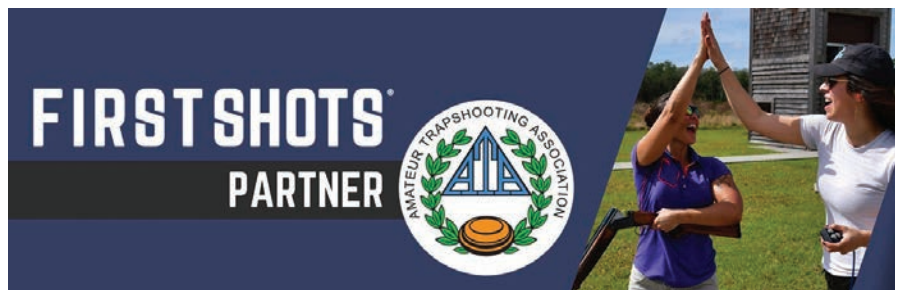
[/powdervalley.com](https://powdervalley.com)

ATA PARTNERS WITH FIRST SHOTS

The Amateur Trapshooting Association (ATA) has become an official partner of NSSF’s First Shots program. First Shots is an introductory and refresher target-shooting program made available through host target-shooting ranges and gun clubs across the country.

The ATA, the governing body for the sport of American-style trapshooting, works to grow interest and participation in trapshooting through programs such as its AIM National Trapshooting Day and satellite competitions associated with its Grand American World Trapshooting Tournament conducted annually in Sparta, Ill.

“Being on a trap field with friends is one of recreational shooting’s most enjoyable pastimes, and NSSF and ATA



want more people to have that experience. Americans in growing numbers are eager to learn about firearm ownership, and First Shots has been designed to assist them by providing education in the classroom and experience on the firing line,” said Zach Snow, NSSF director of member development.

Surveys show that more than 43% of First Shots participants become target-shooting enthusiasts.

“As a dedicated partner of First Shots, we’re all in on opening up the wide world

of recreational shooting opportunities — particularly trapshooting — that can provide a lifetime of enjoyment,” said Liz Lloyd, ATA marketing director and AIM coordinator.

The NSSF invites other organizations associated with the shooting sports and industry to consider becoming a First Shots partner.

[/nssf.org](https://nssf.org)
[/shootata.com](https://shootata.com)

HK EXPANDS U.S. OPERATIONS WITH HK USA

Heckler & Koch (HK) announced via communications to the HK Pro Community that the company is expanding its U.S. operations with a new strategic initiative, HK USA.

Five years in the making, the new move is a response to a growing demand for HK products and will better address the regulatory requirements that have made some products challenging to import.

More HK products will now be designed and manufactured in the U.S.

“HK USA represents a significant advancement in our ability to serve our American customers more effectively. Over the years, the Heckler & Koch name has become synonymous with precision engineering, reliability and innovation in the world of firearms,” said Michael Holley, HK USA president and managing director.

Holley said HK products, whether designed and made in Germany or the U.S., will be held to the same “No Compromise” standards.



“Our commitment to excellence remains unwavering, and HK USA is poised to bring new opportunities for engagement, collaboration and growth. We expect to introduce three major, new/enhanced platforms between mid-October and the HK Pro WOFT event in February,” he said.

[/hk-usa.com](https://hk-usa.com)





CELERANT MARKS 25TH ANNIVERSARY

Celerant Technology is celebrating 25 years as a leading retail technology provider of point-of-sale, ERP and e-commerce solutions in the FFL retail space. The company marked this milestone with a promotional sweepstakes giveaway of 25 months of free point-of-sale SaaS and awarded to a retail winner on Oct. 13.

“In celebrating 25 years, we continue to drive our passion for improving the retail experience for both FFL dealers and their customers,” said Ian Goldman, president and CEO of Celerant. “Our commitment to innovation allows us to continually develop new technologies and strengthen our relationships with every one of our dealers.”

Celerant’s technology solutions enable FFL sellers to offer seamless and convenient shopping experiences across multiple channels — online, in-store, curbside and mobile. New and improved mobile shopping apps let clients expand their customer bases by offering push notifications, scheduling services and membership and loyalty rewards.

Celerant offers two point-of-sale retail platforms, Cumulus Retail and SaaS solutions. Additionally, Stratus Enterprise is a comprehensive solution with advanced and custom functionality.

“We continue to expand our footprint within the retail industry by offering the latest retail technology and third-party integrations. All of our new partnerships across multiple industries offer us valuable insight into the rapidly changing world of retail,” said Rob Goldman, CTO of Celerant.

[/ celerant.com](http://celerant.com)

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NSSF ADDS RESOURCES FOR VETERANS

NSSF has developed a webpage containing resources for military veterans, including a fact sheet discussing mistaken beliefs that cause some veterans to forego seeking health care from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) because of concerns about having their firearms taken away.

“Understanding the facts about this topic can help veterans make informed decisions about seeking the health care they are entitled to,” said NSSF President and CEO Joe Bartozzi. “This care can range from a routine checkup to a hip replacement to screening for PTSD to mental health care.”

The fact sheet is titled “Correcting Mistaken Beliefs About The VA Confiscating Veterans’ Guns:” nssf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/VA-Correcting-Mistaken-Beliefs-NSSF.pdf.

The webpage notes, “NSSF and its

member companies proudly support America’s military service veterans. On this page NSSF shares information and resources that can benefit veterans’ health and resiliency, and that highlights their importance as employees and leaders in America’s firearm industry.”

The site includes information about several NSSF veterans-focused initiatives. They include programs to help prevent suicide among veteran and non-veteran populations and a careers center that lists job opportunities in the firearm industry, which employs thousands of veterans.

Also featured is NSSF’s support for Honored American Veterans Afield (HAVA), an industry-run organization that helps the healing and re-integration of disabled combat veterans back into normal life through participation in hunting and the shooting sports.

The goal of the fact sheet is to dispel misinformation about veterans, health care and personal firearms.

“Many veterans hold a common misconception that seeking mental



health care or other treatment from the Department of Veterans Affairs will lead to their guns being confiscated. This belief, though widespread, is mistaken. The following information gives the facts about veterans’ health care, disability claims, and gun ownership rights,” Bartozzi added.

The fact sheet was developed by the Veterans Healthcare Policy Institute. NSSF joins other groups in distributing “Correcting Mistaken Beliefs About The VA Confiscating Veterans’ Guns.” Additionally, some firearm retailers are distributing the fact sheet in their stores. NSSF encourages any individual, business or organization invested in the well-being of veterans to share, too.

[/nssf.org](https://nssf.org)

BARRETT ANNOUNCES TWO ALLIED-NATION RIFLE CONTRACTS

Barrett Firearms Manufacturing Inc. announced a contract with the NATO-allied Norwegian Defense Materiel Agency (NDMA). The agreement upgrades the Norwegian Armed Forces’ existing Barrett Model 82A1 rifle, in service since 1999, to the more advanced model M107A1.

“We are honored to continue our partnership with the Norwegian Armed Forces by providing the M107A1, a rifle that embodies our dedication to precision, reliability and innovation. This move ensures the Norwegian forces are equipped with the latest advancements in long-range firepower,” said Barrett CEO Bryan James.

The M107A1 rifle, chambered in .50 BMG (Browning Machine Gun), is a substantial upgrade from the Model 82A1, offering reduced weight, improved performance, greater durability and features tailored to meet the evolving demands of modern warfare. The M107A1 is also suppressor-capable,



adding a critical feature for reducing the rifle’s signature in varied operational environments.

Barrett also announced its first international government contract for the MRAD Extreme Long Range (MRADEL) sniper system. Specific details of the transaction were not disclosed, but Barrett confirmed the order for the U.S.-allied nation will be fulfilled and delivered within the year.

The MRADEL is a military-proven, precision, extreme long-range system. As part of the MRAD family, the rifle features user-changeable barrels and calibers, allowing it to adapt to a range of operational needs. The MRADEL is available in multiple calibers including .416 Barrett and provides superior

performance for target engagement beyond 2,000 yards.

“The MRADEL is yet another testament to our commitment to excellence and innovation in the field of long-range precision firearms,” James said. “Barrett is proud to partner with allied nations across the world. We all share the same dedication to excellence and continued improvement. Barrett has a long history in this field, and we will continue to grow our relationships with our partners.”

Barrett products are used by civilians, sport shooters, law enforcement agencies, U.S. armed forces and more than 80 U.S. Department of State-approved countries around the world.

[/barrett.net](https://barrett.net)

WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY PD ADOPTS GUNSITE GLOCK SERVICE PISTOL

Gunsite Academy announced Western Kentucky University (WKU) Police Department chose the Gunsite GLOCK Service Pistol as the agency's duty sidearm.

The department provides services to the WKU Main Campus and additional properties owned by the university, which include the South Campus, The Center, Lost River Cave and The WKU AG Center.

WKU police officers are Kentucky Law Enforcement Council-Police Officer Professional Standards (KLEC – POPS) certified, and have full police powers under Kentucky Revised Statute 164.955. The agency employs 23 sworn police officers, nine communications officers, two student workers and an office coordinator.



“We chose the Gunsite GLOCK 45 Service Pistol with Holosun optic because it checked all the boxes. The department wanted a GLOCK with a sight and a milled slide,” said Sgt. Bryan Jones of the WKUPD. “The entire department went through a red-dot transition course. We took the Gunsite GLOCK, shot thousands of rounds through it and it never once failed.”

“As a retired 35-year LEO and county sheriff, I can't say how pleased I am to know that our Gunsite GLOCK Service Pistol was chosen for the very reasons we approved our name on it: accuracy,

reliability and affordability. This should serve the officers for their 20-plus-year career,” said Gunsite Academy CEO Ken Campbell.

Originally known as American Pistol Institute, Gunsite Academy offers classes on multiple levels of instruction in handgun, carbine, shotgun, bolt-action rifle and precision rifle. Going beyond the shooting fundamentals, Gunsite Academy also teaches the principles and mindset of gun handling.

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HYDRA WEAPONRY EXPANDS TO NEW FACILITY

Hydra Weaponry announced its expansion into a new 20,000-sq. ft. facility. The addition of this second location will significantly increase production capacity, allowing Hydra Weaponry to meet the rising demand for its growing line of Modular Weapon Systems.

“Our growth is a testament to the

quality and craftsmanship that our customers have come to expect. As a descendant of Gwinn Firearms, Bushmaster Firearms and Windham Weaponry, we carry a rich legacy, and this new facility will help us continue to raise the bar for firearms manufacturing in the USA,” commented Mack Gwinn, III, owner of Hydra Weaponry

As it continues to build on the legacy of its predecessors, the company remains focused on innovation and quality,



ensuring that its customers have the best options available. With this expansion, Hydra Weaponry is well-positioned to meet future demand and maintain its status as a leader in the firearms industry. [/hydraweaponry.com](https://hydraweaponry.com)

BENELLI USA HOLDS 10TH ANNUAL INVITATIONAL CLAYS EVENT

The 10th annual Benelli USA Invitational took place at the Prince George's Trap and Skeet Center in Glenn Dale, Md., on Sept. 20.

The annual sporting-clays event supports the Freedom Hunters military outreach organization. Freedom Hunters creates life-changing outdoor experiences for service members and their loved ones.

The Invitational drew in 164 competitive shooters, many of whom were military veterans, and raised \$132,000 with additional help from its online auction. Over the past decade, the Benelli USA Invitational has raised \$922,000 for Freedom Hunters.

“The Invitational is one of the most anticipated events of the year for our team at Benelli. It’s a day that embodies the spirit of adventure and the bonds of camaraderie, all in support of a mission that deeply resonates with who we are. With nearly a quarter of our staff being military veterans, we are proud to stand behind Freedom Hunters and their commitment to giving back to the military community through transformative outdoor experiences,” said Tom DeBolt, CEO of Benelli USA.

Since its inception in 2006, Freedom



For the past 10 years, Benelli USA has hosted its Invitational match in support of Freedom Hunters. This decade-long event has raised more than \$900,000 for the organization — supporting its efforts to serve U.S. military veterans.

Hunters has served over 14,000 veterans and their families, offering unique outdoor adventures in 46 of the 50 states, and venturing into Namibia, Canada and Mexico. In 2023 alone, Freedom Hunters planned 104 adventures for 1,015 veterans and family members. Those efforts required the dedication of over 300

volunteers, who contributed 35,996 hours of service valued at over \$1.1 million.

Benelli USA extends its deepest gratitude to all the sponsors and contributors who made the 10th annual Benelli USA Invitational possible.

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LION ANNOUNCES TWO NEW BUSINESS UNITS

LION, multigenerational family-owned manufacturer of first responder personal protective products, announced a change to its operational structure. The company has added two new business units, LION Safety Solutions and LION Identity and Protection Systems.

LION Safety Solutions is dedicated solely to the LION training products, training solutions and TotalCare product lines. This unit has its own dedicated sales and marketing, product management, R&D and operations functions.

LION Identity and Protection Systems is focused on the PPE, PPE essential and NFPA-certified and non-certified Elbeco uniform product lines. This business unit will maintain field sales and marketing, product management, R&D and operations separate from those dedicated to LION Safety Solutions.

“I am confident that by creating these two business units, we will create the dedicated focus and resources that ensure we continue to innovate and deliver the best LION products, services solutions and world-class customer experience to the industries we serve,” said Steve Schwartz, fourth-generation family co-owner and CEO of LION. “We look forward to building on our long history as one LION team while bringing additional value to our customers, our distributor partners and our suppliers.”

LION, headquartered in Dayton, Ohio, was founded in 1898. From personal protective equipment and uniforms to professional gear maintenance to state-of-the-art fire safety training tools and facilities, LION’s mission is to make sure first responders are ready for action.

[/lionprotects.com](http://lionprotects.com)

ICONIC FIREARM BUSINESS FOR SALE

Sharps Rifle Company, founded in 1848 by Christian Sharps, is known for firearms innovation, long-range accuracy, and high-quality products. After 11+ years at the helm, we are contemplating transitioning to retirement and offering the company for sale. Consider the possibilities of owning this historic and profitable rifle company, which has a well-known presence in media and history.

Sharps today focuses on the AR/MSR rifle platform, which has a loyal following in the military, LE, and civilian markets. Segments include hunting/outdoor enthusiasts, sports shooters, competitive shooters, and manufacturers/gunsmiths of AR platform products. We have a subscriber base of over 20,000 discrete contacts and over 8,000 active customers. Please see our online store @ www.srcarms.com for a better overview of Sharps offerings.

Constantly innovating, the new owner will assume three in-force patents for AR bolt carrier group systems and six trademarks. Two of these patents are for controlling the flow of gas through the bolt carrier group, a key advantage for shooters using suppressors. This proprietary technology and Intellectual property can position the right buyer with significant competitive market advantages.

Sharps Rifle’s loyal following, innovative engineering and patents make it a great fit for the right buyer. Our CEO, Jay Johnston, can provide full details and patent information at jjohnston@sharpsriflecompany.com.



BLACKPOINT TACTICAL, CRUCIAL CONCEALMENT, COMP-TAC HOLSTERS RELOCATE

BlackPoint Tactical, Crucial Concealment and Comp-Tac Holsters — all brands under High Speed Gear Products Group — announced their relocation to a new, larger facility in Alpharetta, Ga. The move further centralizes holster operations, aligning their capabilities under one roof and relocating Comp-Tac from Houston.

The new facility, spanning over 26,000 sq. ft., is fully operational. It will greatly enhance the companies’ production capabilities, increasing efficiency and the ability to scale operations to meet the growing demand for their products. The expanded space also paves the way for the introduction of new products.

“This new facility not only allows us to increase our production capacity, but also provides us with the resources to innovate and bring new products to market faster than ever before,” said Tyler



Johnson, director of sales and marketing for BlackPoint Tactical.

“Comp-Tac Holsters joining forces with BlackPoint Tactical and Crucial Concealment in this state-of-the-art facility is an exciting milestone for our brands. Together, we are not just expanding our capabilities, we’re setting the stage for a bright future filled with innovation and success,” said Kip Guyon, COO of High Speed Gear Products Group.

The new Alpharetta location will create new job opportunities for the local community. BlackPoint Tactical, Crucial Concealment and Comp-Tac Holsters are actively recruiting skilled professionals to join their team, with positions available in manufacturing, logistics, customer service and more. **SI**

[/comp-tac.com](http://comp-tac.com)

[/blackpointtactical.com](http://blackpointtactical.com)

[/crucialconcealment.com](http://crucialconcealment.com)



T. SCOTT

SureFire Welcomes Marketing VP, PR Manager

SureFire recently welcomed Tom Scott to its team as the VP of marketing, and Brenna McCoubrey as the public relations manager.



B. MCCOUBREY

Prior to joining SureFire, Scott served as the

VP of marketing and product management for Real Avid; senior director of marketing and product management for Kimber; and director of marketing and communications for FN America.

He earned a B.S. in marketing from the University of Florida, and an MBA in marketing from Case Western Reserve University.

McCoubrey joins the team after serving as the marketing manager for Yankee Hill Machine Co. Her prior experience included developing marketing plans and brand strategy for White Birch Armory, an NSSF 5-star rated range and serving as a subject matter expert at SHOT University and Range-Retailer Expo on brand strategies, event planning and social media.

McCoubrey earned a B.S. in marketing from Suffolk University.



T. PIGNATO

SAR Firearms Appoints CEO

SAR Firearms, the exclusive distributor of Sarsilmaz products in the USA, has

named Tony Pignato as CEO.

“Building a community around an amazing company that has been a pioneering and innovative brand for nearly 150 years is exciting,” said Pignato upon joining the company.

Most recently, he served as a key member of the executive leadership team at Staccato 2011 and Staccato Ranch. Pignato also

has 20 years of distinguished service in the U.S. Army; he retired as a first sergeant.



R. RAMOS

ASP Appoints Sales Director

Armament Systems and Procedures (ASP) announced Rene Ramos is now the

director of sales for the southeast U.S. region. Ramos will be responsible for L.E. agency and distributor relationships in a six-state territory.

Ramos joins ASP following a 21-year career in law enforcement. Prior to his time in law enforcement, he served in the United States Marine Corps.



R. ACKERMAN

Can-Am Sales Group Promotes Dealer Sales Manager

Can-Am Sales Group promoted Russ Ackerman to the position

of dealer sales manager. While maintaining many of his account responsibilities, Ackerman will be responsible for developing and implementing a dealer sales strategy to achieve organizational goals and revenues.

“With over 30 years of sales, retail and merchandising experience, I am confident Russ will do a fantastic job leading our dealer sales efforts,” said Can-Am Sales Group President Scott Makway.

Ackerman has 30+ years of experience in the outdoor industry, most recently serving as a senior account manager with Can-Am. He was also the national sales manager for Flambeau Outdoors.



T. TIPPS

C&H Precision Taps Marketing Director

Travis Tipps is now serving as C&H Precision’s

marketing director where he will be responsible for developing and implementing marketing initiatives to further strengthen C&H Precision’s brand presence and drive growth.

Tipps’ experience stems from a variety of roles with companies such as Daniel Defense, Strategic Armory Corps, Norma and Blue Force Gear.



T. KELLER

Coreware Names Compliance Manager

Coreware, a provider of software solutions for the firearms industry, named Tony Keller

as the company’s compliance manager. He will work closely with system developers and customer service leadership to identify and address the compliance needs of Coreware and its customers. He will guide and advise on system use, compliance requirements and best practices to ensure compliant firearms business transactions.

Keller has over 20 years of experience in law enforcement, retail firearms sales, management and compliance roles at establishments such as Tombstone Tactical in Phoenix, Scottsdale Gun Club in Scottsdale and Colonial Shooting Academy in Virginia Beach.



D. EVANS

Sierra and Barnes Hires Digital Marketing Specialist

Dale Evans has joined Sierra and Barnes as the digital marketing

specialist. He will enhance the online presence of Sierra Bullets and Barnes Bullets to drive brand awareness and engagement. He will also develop and implement marketing strategies that align with Sierra and Barnes’ overall brand goals and create compelling content and social media campaigns.

Evans served 10 years in the U.S. Air Force before launching a career in the outdoor industry where he has been involved with the Outdoor Sportsman Group and projects with conservationist Randy Newberg.



D. RIVERS

John Rigby & Co. Welcomes Gunmaker

London gunmaker John Rigby & Co. announced Daniel Rivers as its newest gunmaker. Rivers will

focus primarily on finishing work while also gaining further experience in regulation and actioning.

Marc Newton, managing director of John Rigby & Co., said, “[River’s] dedication to fine workmanship makes him an excellent fit for Rigby. We look forward to the contributions he will make to our legacy.”

Originally from South East London, Rivers developed his skills in design and furniture making before transitioning to the gun trade.



J. HARRISON

Staccato Expands Team

Staccato welcomed Jessie Harrison and KC Eusebio, two of the world’s top shooters, to its team. Harrison joins the brand as training director and brand specialist, and Eusebio joins as director of special projects and business development. They will be focused

on designing and delivering firearms instruction, partnerships and experiences that reflect the fun, family and freedom that the Staccato brand offers through its ecosystem of Staccato 2011 pistols, Staccato Ammo and Staccato Ranch.

Harrison is the first female USPSA Grand Master. She has won over 100 world and national championship titles, including the prestigious Bianchi Cup, the Steel Challenge World Speed Shooting Championships and numerous USPSA National Championships.



K. EUSEBIO



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Eusebio is an Army veteran, 11-time World Speed Shooting Champion and 24-year USPSA Grand Master. He was the youngest USPSA Grand Master at the age of 12. He has also trained many elite law enforcement and military groups in the U.S.



D. WILSON

SAF Welcomes Major Gifts Officer

The Second Amendment Foundation

(SAF) welcomed financial advisor and development professional Dana Wilson as the new major gifts officer.

“Dana’s unique blend of experience in the financial and nonprofit industries, along with her steadfast passion for firearms and the Second Amendment made her an ideal candidate to lead SAF’s major gift efforts,” said SAF Executive Director Adam Kraut.

Wilson has specialized in strategic communications, donor engagement and

fundraising within various nonprofit sectors with a focus on sport and athletes for the past 20 years.

She earned a bachelor’s degree from the University of Wisconsin and is a triple-certified nonprofit executive, holding CNC, CDE and CNE designations.



D. RICE

ANECHOIC Advances Digital Marketing Manager

Titanium suppressor manufacturer, ANECHOIC, announced Dylan Rice’s promotion to digital marketing manager. Rice will develop and implement digital marketing strategies to expand ANECHOIC’s online presence, increase brand awareness and drive customer engagement.

“[Rice] has proven his qualifications through his dedication, work ethic and creativity,” said Miranda Cook, ANECHOIC director of marketing. “We are confident he will enhance

our online visibility and connect with a broader discerning customer audience.”



J. SHEETS

High Speed Gear Promotes Sales Manager

High Speed Gear announced the recent

promotion of Jay Sheets to sales manager where he oversees the sales and customer service team. He will develop strategies to expand the company’s market reach and continue to foster relationships with dealers and distributors.

Allison Mitchum, director of sales and marketing at High Speed Gear, shared, “[Sheets’] level of excellence is the perfect representation of our company and our mission to continue to serve our customers by providing the best gear with the best service.”

Sheets joined the company nearly five years ago. **\$1**



BY MASSAD AYOUB

SELLING EYE, EAR & BODY PROTECTION

Surveys show more customers buy guns today for home and family protection than for hunting or target shooting. The gun is not the only protective element they need. If they're going to develop shooting skills, they need ear and eye protection.

Moreover, the very choice to be armed implies the logical realization they may one day face a violent armed criminal who threatens their life or the lives of their loved ones. It is logical to assume, then, that the perpetrator will likely be sending force in *their* direction in the form of bullets, blades or whatever.

In a gunfight, the bullets go in both directions. Does it not make sense for the armed defender to have something that will defeat the incoming fire?

Yes, I'm talking about body armor — which can provide peace of mind, and a lot more. Just like ear and eye protection, we have good reason to offer the customers “bullet protection.”

And yes, I'm talking about body armor in the same breath as ear and eye protection. It's protection against a predictable threat. Conveniently, a supplier has emerged who can provide you with state-of-the-art merchandise in all three areas.

MEET WarBird

WarBird was recently founded by Matt Davis, the son of Richard Davis,

the inventor of soft body armor that can be worn daily, concealed. Matt literally grew up in the business. He watched as a thousand-some lives were saved by his father's Second Chance brand armor, and as an adult, he founded and led Armor Express, whose vests saved hundreds more.

Richard Davis also founded the popular gun sport of bowling pin shooting, and Matt grew up watching its major national event every year. The occasional bounced-back slug or buckshot pellet taught him the importance of eye protection, and the constant din of handgun, rifle and shotgun fire taught him the fine points of ear pro.

He put it all together with his new WarBird enterprise, in which he sells consumer-direct but also offers *up to 50% discount to dealers*.

He knows, as you do, smart customers like to see and handle a product before they lay their money down for it. He told *SI*, “All prices are FOB WarBird in Traverse City, Mich. (dealers pay shipping).”

Let's look at some of the selling points of these three product types.

VALUE OF BODY ARMOR

Body armor is valuable to the armed citizen in many ways. Keep a vest by the bed. When you hear the kicking at the door or the burglar alarm goes off, it's

◀ Active hearing protectors at the range are not only a comfortable way to enjoy range time, they also play a crucial role in safety — enabling instructors to better communicate with students during live-fire sessions.

quick to put on.

Show the customer they can grab a handgun and aim it toward the bedroom door while putting on a vest. If the straps are fastened on the gun-arm side and open on the other, they won't even lose their sight picture if they use their free hand to slip it past the gun and over the gun-side shoulder. They then can use their free hand to slap the Velcro panel closed on the weak-hand side.

Also, remind the customer a ballistic vest in the house is also a safe backstop for dry-fire. A bullet inadvertently launched through a wall is a humiliation at best and a life-taking tragedy at worst. It's good to have one thing in the house designed to absorb gunfire! A vest on a floor or chair can also serve the same function as a clearing barrel on a police range or at a military base.



In a gunfight, the bullets go in both directions. Does it not make sense for the armed defender to have something that will defeat the incoming fire?

Just as many of your customers who can legally carry actually do so only when they think they're going someplace dangerous, remind them a vest is something to put on when they are “going someplace dangerous.” Anyone can become a stalking victim overnight; it's going to take them a while to get a vest they can wear inconspicuously in public if they don't already have one at home.

Teaching newbies to shoot can be dangerous. Several of the Second Chance

saves were instructors accidentally/negligently shot by their students, even on police and military training ranges. I wear one when I'm teaching anything potentially risky, like shooting on the move: The student's finger is already on the trigger when he stumbles.

Dr. Roger Enoka, the leading physiologist who has studied accidental discharges, reports postural disturbance such as what I described above is one of the main causes of accidental shootings. If your customer teaches, he or she is a potential body armor customer.

ACTIVE HEARING BENEFITS

Active hearing protectors make loud sounds quieter and small sounds louder. In a previous column inspired by one of our readers ("Finding Out What Your Customers Want," Sept. 2024), we discussed the tactical advantages of those features in a home-defense scenario.

The WarBird brand is

rechargeable, Bluetooth compatible and more importantly, directional. Matt specified the wearer should be able to tell where the sound came from. True stereo muffs aren't enough: You sort of hear the sound in the middle of your head and have to look around to see from where it emanated. In hunting, they blunt the devastating report of a .300 Magnum but let the hunter hear small sounds that might have been unnoticed by the naked ear and pinpoint the source.

For long periods on the range instructors, students in long classes and those at all-day matches need *comfort*. I picked up my pair of WarBird muffs at my favorite week-long match, the Pin Shoot in Michigan (pinshoot.com) and for the rest of the match and a 40-hour class I taught the following week, I found them more than satisfactory for comfort.

EYE PROTECTION

Eye protection is, of course,

critical for shooters. I spoke with one of the timekeepers at the Pin Shoot who told me every year her long-term wear of tinted eye pro gives her an eyestrain headache. Not this year, however, because she was wearing the new WarBird glasses.

Matt Davis tells *SI*, "WarBird eyewear incorporates our proprietary 4SHADOW lens technology. The four pillars of 4SHADOW lenses are: 1) Z87.1+ ANSI rated for impact protection [And yes, they have been tested and meet this standard], 2) polarized, 3) 100% UV blocking and 4) high resolution for premium optical quality."

I wore a pair for part of the Pin Shoot and all of a class, and they'll be my default eye pro on the range from here on out.

These three product categories are all potential profit centers for you, and WarBird is basically one-stop ordering for them. **SI**

For more info, visit warbirdpro.com.

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BY NANCY KEATON

WOMEN HUNTERS: WHAT DO THEY WANT FROM A RETAILER?

Reports over the past several years indicate more women are becoming interested in hunting. This can translate into a nice revenue source for you. So, what do women hunters *actually* want from a retail store and what can retailers offer to draw women in and keep them coming back? What brands can retailers carry that seem to connect well with women who hunt? Let's find out.

THE RETAILERS

We asked two retailers what they think women hunters want and how they are enticing them into their stores. Trish Jones, co-owner of Green Mountain Sporting Goods in Irasburg, Vt., shared having women on staff will ease intimidated guests.

"We try to make sure the women who come in feel comfortable asking the questions they may have," she said. "Speaking to another woman often helps because sometimes women can be less intimidated talking with them."

Jones says her team talks with women directly to find out what they want — not what their husband or partner wants — in order to help them find the best fit.

"I've actually personally refused a sale because a husband wanted his wife to buy a .300 Short Mag. hunting rifle, and I explained it was a good way

to turn her off," she shared. "I try to carry firearms that are easily either upgraded or have adjustable stocks. One that comes to the top of my mind is the Ruger American Generation II. It has spacers built into the stock so, if need be, we can take them out to make the length of pull shorter. It fits a wide variety of customers. Savage has done the same thing with their new stocks, and it really helps to fit women properly."

In other scenarios, Jones suggests it's a matter of having the right products on hand to secure sales.

"Some women have grown up hunting their entire lives. They know exactly what they're looking for, so it's just finding what we have or what we can order to best suit their needs," she reasoned.

Jones also reports Green Mountain Sporting Goods' staff have seen more women become interested in archery hunting the past couple of years.

"Vermont allows crossbows for everybody, so it opens the door quite a bit," she observed. "Crossbows have a crank system, so it doesn't take all that upper body strength to pull the string back."

When asked why there appears to be more interest in archery now, Jones offered a thought: "I think it has to do with the economy and the fact that as

◀ Deb Ferns at the conclusion of a successful springbok hunt, taken with a Savage Axis in 6.5 Creedmoor in the Kalahari Desert (Namibia).

long as hunters don't lose their arrows, they can reuse them and they're not having to spend money buying more and more ammo."

Jones believes a welcoming environment is also important to women.

"We remodeled and we wanted to make sure the store is very inviting. It's not highly industrialized; we've got wood ceilings and wood walls. I've got my kids and my grandkids coming into the store and hanging out. I think it helps somebody new to the sport and makes it a little less intimidating," she offered. "It gives them a little more comfort when they see other women behind the counter and being family-friendly. It all gives a more personal feel to it."

Ozark Sportsman in Tontitown, Ark., employs a similar approach to expanding sales to women hunters. Store Manager James LaVergne explained, "We offer a lot of classes to get different guns into women's hands specifically so they can feel them and shoot them before they buy them. Women are mostly worried about recoil, even with long guns, so we also show them the benefit of shooting with a suppressor, which can make a significant reduction in recoil."

As Jones noted, it's important for dealers to share their expertise to fit women to the gun.

"Some women will come in looking for the kind of gun their husband or dad says they should get, but maybe it isn't the best for them. Luckily, we've got a great staff here so we can really help tailor toward that individual," LaVergne said. "But most of the time we're selling shorter-stock guns, such as .243s and 6.5 Creedmoor."

In the archery field, LaVergne says women are more interested in recurves than compounds.

"It kind of varies month to month and as we get closer to the season," LaVergne noted. "We generally see an influx of women wanting products such as the new Eva Shockey Bowtech bows. They have more adjustments and come in nice colors."

THE HUNTERS

Do women who hunt feel the same as the retailers? We asked seasoned

professionals Mia Anstine and Deb Ferns for their insights.

“There’s a shop in my town that doesn’t carry any women’s gear, so I have no reason to go to their shop for clothing,” Anstine shared. “However, I go there for ammunition, hunting calls and game bags.”

Anstine suggests retailers carry women’s hunting gear.

“Where I live in southwest Colorado, most of those shops don’t carry boots for women. I can order those online, but if they don’t fit I have to send them back. If dealers had boots in their shops, that would be awesome,” she said.

Women-specific apparel represents another need, according to Anstine.

“For us ladies, we need layers. However, a tricky thing with women is we’re all shapes and sizes so it’s challenging for retailers,” she acknowledged. “It’s also tough for people on a budget because they may be unable to afford something highly technical that lasts forever. Maybe someone just getting into hunting doesn’t want to spend \$500 on clothing yet, so retailers must also carry something in the entry-level price range.”

A lot of times, retailers will tell a woman that youth models (firearms) will be fine for them, but they really aren’t. Women’s guns have a different cant, length of pull, etc., to help fit women’s curves and so their cheeks can reach the stock. Anstine suggests it would be helpful if retailers carried cheek pieces to help get cheeks properly placed on the stock.

“Those types of accessories are great for men and women because both can have issues with precision eye relief,” she added.

As for a brand that connects well with women, Anstine likes Tikka.

“I have a Tikka T3x — I love that gun,” she said. “The bolt slides easily because it’s designed to work in icy and frigid cold temperatures. You don’t have to force it like some guns, and women can have a hard time running the bolt if it requires some force and strength.”

Ferns leads a lot of women on hunting trips, and her first comment is: “Weight matters. When we’re walking



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four to eight miles a day, a rifle can get heavy. So, retailers need to carry a good variety of slings. They can really help to reduce the weight of carrying a rifle all day.”



I’ve actually personally refused a sale because a husband wanted his wife to buy a .300 Short Mag. hunting rifle, and I explained it was a good way to turn her off.”

Trish Jones • Co-Owner
Green Mountain Sporting Goods • Irasburg, Vt.

Ferns noted it would also be helpful for retailers to make sure a woman tries out the various slings and knows how to use them.

“If she knows how to use a sling, then she can carry the rifle more comfortably,” she said. “Otherwise, she could get tired and toss the gun over her shoulder and then it’s directly aimed at somebody right behind her, which is a big safety problem.”

Ferns would like to see more retailers help women find a gun with a stock that fits them well. They can see if she can shoulder it correctly, if it fits her right

and if her finger reaches the trigger.

“I’ve seen some girls walk out of stores with guns and their finger can’t reach the trigger,” Ferns said with some frustration.

As for a brand that connects with women, Ferns likes her Savage Axis and Ruger American Generation II rifles in 6.5 Creedmoor. Both rifles are lighter weight and more comfortable for women to carry. She contends the 6.5 Creedmoor is a good caliber that will also make women want to continue to hunt.

“I’ve heard some guys say she should ‘go big or go home’ and I explain to them the bigger the caliber the more it’s going to thump her and she’s not going to like it,” she stated.

TAKEAWAYS

The women who hunt and the retailers agree there are three simple strategies to draw women into stores and keep them coming back:

1. A good selection of products that fit women, whether it’s guns, bows, accessories or clothing.
2. Maintaining an inventory of lightweight rifles and bows.
3. A good staff to help them make sure women find what fits them, not just what someone else tells them to get.

Advertise these strategies and a woman who hunts or is looking to start hunting will know she can come to you and trust you to do right by her. **SI**



BY ASHLEY MCGEE

7 MARKETING MISTAKES FFL DEALERS MAKE

While many stores rely on a solid reputation and word-of-mouth referrals, effective marketing is essential for sustained growth and long-term success. Yet, even experienced firearms dealers can fall into common marketing traps that hinder their potential.

Let's dig into some of the most common marketing missteps firearms dealers make — and, more importantly, some practical solutions to avoid them.

1. NEGLECTING DIGITAL PRESENCE

I've been a regular contributor to *Shooting Industry* magazine since 2017, often writing about marketing-related topics. So, naturally, when I search for prospective dealers to interview, one of the first things I look at is their digital presence. More often than not, I find websites that haven't been updated since they were first built in what appears to be the '90s or early 2000s (if there's even a website at all), are missing or have invalid contact information and have unclaimed Google Business Profiles with incorrect business hours.

In today's digital age, having a

strong online presence is no longer optional — it's essential. However, many firearms dealers still rely heavily on word of mouth, traditional advertising or in-store promotions, overlooking the importance of being visible where potential customers are spending most of their time: online. Failing to establish and maintain a robust digital presence can severely limit a dealer's ability to attract new customers and retain existing ones.

Without an online presence, dealers miss out on reaching a broader audience, particularly younger generations who increasingly turn to the internet to research products and services. This digital void can also make a business appear outdated or inaccessible, driving potential customers to competitors who are more visible and active online.

2. INCONSISTENT BRANDING

Branding is more than just a logo or a catchy slogan — it's the entire experience customers have with your business. However, inconsistent branding across various platforms and

marketing materials can be a struggle for firearms dealers. Whether it's a mismatch between the messaging on the website and in-store signage or an unclear brand identity on social media, inconsistent branding can lead to a lack of trust and recognition among your target audience.

When customers encounter mixed messages, they may question the professionalism and reliability of a business, which can ultimately drive them to competitors with a clearer and more cohesive brand.

Define your brand's core values, mission and voice, then ensure this identity is reflected consistently across all channels — both online and off. From your website and social media profiles to the in-store experience and customer communications, everything should align with your brand's identity.

Consistent branding not only builds recognition but also fosters trust and loyalty among customers, making your business more memorable and reputable.

3. OVERLOOKING CUSTOMER DATA

In an era where data drives decision-making, ignoring customer data is a significant missed opportunity. Those dealers who don't collect customer data or fail to use it effectively to tailor their marketing strategies suffer the consequences of generic marketing efforts that fail to resonate with their audience.

Without data-driven insights, you risk marketing to the wrong audience or missing out on opportunities to personalize your messaging. Wasted marketing budgets and campaigns that fall flat are expensive and avoidable. Moreover, failing to understand your customers' preferences and behaviors means you might not be meeting their needs effectively, which can hurt customer retention.

Implement systems to gather and analyze customer data, such as purchase history, preferences and behavior. This data can be invaluable in segmenting your audience and crafting targeted marketing campaigns that speak directly to their interests.

For example, if you notice a group of customers frequently purchasing hunting gear, you can create specific promotions or content that appeals to their passion. By leveraging customer

data, you can make smarter marketing decisions that drive engagement and sales.

4. IGNORING LOCAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

While online marketing is crucial, it's equally important not to overlook the value of local community engagement. Some dealers tend to focus solely on sales and neglect the opportunities that come from building strong ties within their local community. Engaging with the community not only enhances your reputation but also fosters loyalty and word-of-mouth referrals.

Get involved in local events, sponsor shooting sports or conservation initiatives, and collaborate with other local businesses or organizations. Hosting in-store events, such as firearms safety courses or product demonstrations, can also bring the community together and increase foot traffic. By being an active and supportive member of the community, your business can build strong relationships that translate into long-term customer loyalty.

5. UNDERESTIMATING THE POWER OF EMAIL MARKETING

Email marketing is one of the most cost-effective ways to reach and retain customers, yet it's often underutilized by firearms dealers. Many businesses fail to recognize the potential of email marketing to keep their brand top-of-mind and drive repeat business.

Without a well-executed email marketing strategy, you miss out on direct communication with your customers, limiting your ability to announce promotions, new products or special events. This can result in decreased customer engagement and lower sales.

Build and maintain an email list by encouraging customers to sign up during their visits or through your website. Use this list to send regular newsletters, product updates and exclusive offers. Segment your email list based on customer preferences or behavior to create targeted campaigns that resonate with different segments of your audience.

A well-crafted email marketing strategy can keep customers engaged and encourage repeat business, all while strengthening your relationship with them.

6. NOT UTILIZING CONTENT MARKETING

Content marketing — such as blogs, videos and tutorials — is an often-overlooked tool that can significantly boost a firearms dealer's visibility and credibility. There is ample opportunity for dealers to establish themselves as industry authorities by providing valuable content that educates and engages their audience.



A well-crafted email marketing strategy can keep customers engaged and encourage repeat business, all while strengthening your relationship with them.

When content marketing is not employed, the chance to attract and inform potential customers who are researching products online is lost. Ultimately, it can lead to a weaker online presence and a lack of trust from consumers who look to knowledgeable sources for advice.

Add a blog to your website or consider starting a YouTube channel where you can share your expertise on topics related to firearms, safety and accessories. Regularly posting informative and engaging content can attract organic traffic to your site and position your business as a trusted resource in the industry. Content marketing also provides a platform to

showcase your products and services in a non-sales way, building trust and credibility with your audience.

7. FOCUSING SOLELY ON PRICE COMPETITION

In a market with fierce price competition, it can be tempting to focus on undercutting competitors. However, relying solely on price competition can be a dangerous strategy that erodes profit margins and devalues your brand.

Constantly lowering prices can lead to a race to the bottom, where the only distinguishing factor is cost. This approach not only diminishes your brand's perceived value but also reduces your ability to invest in quality products, services and customer experiences. Additionally, customers who are only attracted by low prices may not be loyal and could easily switch to another dealer offering a better deal.

Instead of competing on price alone, focus on highlighting your business's unique value proposition. Emphasize aspects like superior customer service, expert knowledge and quality products. Offer added value through personalized experiences, such as product education, training courses or extended warranties. By positioning your business as a premium service provider, you can attract customers who appreciate quality and are willing to pay for it, ensuring better margins and long-term success.

TAKEAWAYS

Marketing is a critical component of success in the firearms industry, especially for small- and medium-sized dealers competing against larger, more established brands. By recognizing and avoiding these common marketing mistakes, dealers can enhance their marketing strategies, attract new customers and build lasting relationships.

The key to thriving in this competitive landscape is to be proactive, adaptable and customer-focused. Review your marketing efforts and make the necessary adjustments to ensure you're not just surviving but thriving in the market. **SI**



BY PETER SUCIU

SELLING TO

THE HIGH END

Buyers Are Still Willing To Pay A Premium

The past few years have been difficult for many Americans to make ends meet. Two years ago, the country faced near-record-high inflation of

8%, which has only slowly improved. As a result, consumers are paying more for everything from food to durable goods.

Even “luxury goods” such as watches, shoes and sports cars — products often considered “recession-proof” — have been impacted by inflation. These items tend to be what economists describe as “highly elastic” as demand often changes

due to fluctuations in income as well as the availability of less-expensive substitutes.

Firearm sales, which hit record highs during and immediately following the pandemic, have also long seemed immune to inflation — at least until they weren’t.

But with inflation easing, high-end markets could rebound the quickest.

“While overall firearm sales continue to decline from the pandemic high, the market is seeing some shifts toward higher-priced products,” said Nancy Bacon, VP of outdoor analytics firm Southwick Associates.

The high end of the market has quickly recovered.

“Although it is not the majority of the sales, the percentage of firearms purchased retailing for more than \$700 has been increasing,” Bacon told *Shooting Industry*. “The overall average price paid reported by consumers has also increased over last year, primarily driven by handguns and shotguns. Whether this is due to recent price increases or a shrinkage in the number of consumers only willing to spend at lower price ranges is unknown.”

THE STATE OF THE HIGH END

The true luxury end of the spectrum remains strong, but it likewise requires those product offerings to stand out in an increasingly crowded market.

It also needs to be understood those paying with an American Express Centurion Card (i.e., Black Card), or simply don’t bother asking the price value quality above all else. In some cases, those doing the buying — or at least setting it up — aren’t the actual buyers. Rather than a straw purchase, however, these individuals do the legwork for those who have shoppers for their fine wine, watches and cars.

“We don’t expect those customers to generally walk through the door, as they have a ‘point man’ they’re already talking to,” explained Mike Waugh, purchaser and former sales manager for Rifle Gear. “But we do see some higher-end clientele come in and they’re looking for recommendations.”

This is where a well-rounded knowledge base for the retailer is even more crucial. Waugh shared while the shop doesn’t typically sell \$30,000 custom shotguns, they still have clients who have an appreciation for such firearms.

“High-end guests are unique,” suggested firearms industry advisor Miles Hall. “Tending to follow their own path, they’re more about the experience and being treated respectfully — yet quietly. Once mutual trust is firmly established, they will rarely haggle over price.”

“

HIGH-END GUESTS ARE UNIQUE. TENDING TO FOLLOW THEIR OWN PATH, THEY’RE MORE ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE AND BEING TREATED RESPECTFULLY — YET QUIETLY. ONCE MUTUAL TRUST IS FIRMLY ESTABLISHED, THEY WILL RARELY HAGGLE OVER PRICE.”

Miles Hall • Firearms Industry Advisor

These customers may want something exclusive and are willing to pay a premium.

“When they know a dealer handles such special items, it builds a bond between them and the dealer,” said Hall, who was also the founder and president of a firearms retail store and gun range in Oklahoma for 36 years. “Both now feel a bit of

belonging, if you will. We lovingly referred to our high-end buyers as ‘whales.’ Then we found once they were comfortable with the dealer, they would tell their inner social circle. This in turn brings in more opportunities. In the end, this can become a very healthy yet quiet department in the business.”

AFFLUENT CLIENTELE MAY REQUIRE SPECIAL ATTENTION

There are also those customers who might be more readily described as “affluent” rather than “wealthy” — where they work for their money rather than it working for them — but may still need to be courted accordingly. They may not have a point man and will therefore put greater trust in the retailer.

“Some of these higher-end buyers may not know guns as well, and the sales staff needs to keep this in mind,” counseled Waugh.

This includes not risking a long-term relationship for one massive sale.

“You can’t BS a customer

and hope they’ll come back,” he continued. “One big sale isn’t worth driving away a potential return customer.”

Italian shotgun maker Caesar Guerini has carved out a niche in the market by offering a diverse range of products, with a more recent focus being on the higher end of the shotgun market.

“By providing top-quality products, special edition runs and limited distribution, along with an industry-leading warranty and service program, we empower our dealers to maintain stronger margins,” said Tom Smith, Caesar Guerini USA VP. “Our commitment to crafting classic over/under shotguns, while utilizing modern production techniques, has positioned Caesar Guerini as a distinguished name in the premium shotgun market.”

In addition, the company has catered to the market with its lifetime warranty and service program to instill confidence in both its dealers and the end consumer.

“While the premium shotgun market may not be entirely recession-proof, it is less affected by the typical market fluctuations seen in the broader firearms industry, such as seasonal hunting or competition cycles and changes in the political landscape,” Smith added.

THE CUSTOM MARKET

The firearm manufacturers have also been impacted by higher inflation in recent years,



SK Customs has carved a niche with its series-driven, limited edition custom firearms. Here is “Athena,” the fourth edition of the Gods of Olympus engraver series — a custom Smith & Wesson full-size 1911. (Image: SK Guns)

but Simon Khiabani, founder of SK Guns, said his firm has weathered the storm by delivering unique products to the customer.

“We have three divisions in the sales realm,” Khiabani said. “We have your counter guns, which people buy and shoot. That’s about cash flow.”

SK Customs serves as the “second division,” offering limited-edition production runs tied to a particular theme. With multiple handguns in each theme, it can lead to repeat customers who desire all the offerings in a particular series. Then there is its SK Bespoke Collection of one-of-a-kind Colt handguns with hand engravings completed by FEGA (Firearms Engravers Guild of America) Master Engravers.

For SK Guns, quality

has to come first as its customers are about the uniqueness of its offerings, and it has strived to ensure its “limited edition” remains limited. Many companies may claim a product is “limited” but still release it in the high hundreds to thousands.

“We’re not doing that,” Khiabani emphasized. “We do 200 to 300 units in our series, and we’ve seen them sell out fast.”

In fact, because of the demand, SK Guns now ensures those who bought the initial offerings in a series are given the right of first refusal on the next release.

“If you bought into the collection and you want the next one, it’s waiting for you,” he said.

Future themes are already lined up through 2029, so SK Guns has no shortage of releases in the

66

UNLESS THERE IS A COMPLETE ECONOMIC MELTDOWN, THE HIGH END OF THE MARKET IS LIKELY TO CONTINUE TO SEE THE SAME LEVEL OF SALES AS USUAL.

pipeline. But the company is also seeing a need to adjust to the demand slightly.

“We are looking to bump up the number of guns in the production run just slightly while reducing the offerings,” Khiabani explained. “We recently did 14 productions of 200 to 300 units, putting just over 4,000 firearms in the SK Customs line.”

Instead, SK Guns will look to do nine productions with a total of 4,700, which will still keep the total of limited-edition models under 525 units each.

MARKET CONDITIONS & AN ELECTION YEAR

As with the rest of the firearms industry, the uncertainty in the run-up to the 2024 presidential election is impacting sales. In 2020, sales increased before and then after the election, and 2024 could be the same. Yet instead of driving the high-end of the market, it could be softening it as consumers are worried about the future of the AR platform, not over-under shotguns or custom six-shooter revolvers.

“The uncertainty of the coming election may have shifted demand to guns that

might be more likely to be banned than lever guns,” said Greg Buchel, president of Big Horn Armory.

Buchel shared the market has been strong in recent years, but the higher costs of consumer goods have taken a toll.

“Demand for our lever guns has softened some this year, and I suspect inflation plays a large part,” he noted, “especially for our customers who may not have high-end income but would like our high-end quality.”

A GROWTH BUSINESS

There have been fears for several months a recession may be looming, but gun sales at all levels have previously been able to weather the storm. Moreover, unless there is a complete economic meltdown, the high end of the market is likely to continue to see the same level of sales as usual.

It may just be a bit leaner times for some manufacturers.

“I can’t say we’re recession-proof,” admitted Khiabani, “but we’ve been able to keep the same margins, which have never changed for us.” **SI**



Big Horn Armory President Greg Buchel out of the office, testing his company’s products in real time.

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By Bryan Hendricks

GUNSMITH OR *Armorer?*

Different Skill Sets Provide Different Services To Diverse Clientele

Gun store owners need a person who can work on guns, but they should be careful how they refer to that person. Many stores have a knowledgeable person on staff they erroneously call an armorer. Others compound the error by referring to the same person as a gunsmith. Odds

are the gun counter “expert” is neither. Such a casual mistake can cost a retailer credibility and income.

“Armorer” and “gunsmith” have specific definitions. An uncertified associate who can install a scope or a recoil pad is merely a layman able to perform rudimentary tasks. An armorer has a much more advanced skill

set. A gunsmith has the most advanced training.

By definition, an armorer is a factory-trained expert in firearm diagnostics and replacing defective parts to the manufacturer’s specifications. An armorer usually specializes in a certain type of firearm. A gunsmith is an expert in the design, function and repair of any firearm. A gunsmith can do everything an armorer can do and more, including building a firearm from scratch.

KNOW YOUR DESIRED SKILL SET

Kevin Poley, owner of Crossfire Gunsmith and Firearms in Lexington, S.C., is a master gunsmith. He contends a gunsmith has the knowledge and equipment to make parts if he can’t find them for sale. He can blue metal, and he can fit and embellish wood.

Which skill set do you need on staff? It depends on the level of service you want to provide to customers and what reputation you want to cultivate in a competitive retail market.

Because of the booming firearms market, many people of all ages are entering the gunsmithing business, and many find an ideal portal into this lucrative profession with the online programs offered by the American Gunsmithing Institute (AGI).

Gene Kelly, founder and president of the American Gunsmithing Institute in Napa, Calif., has trained thousands of working gunsmiths through AGI's interactive online program that teaches a student to analyze any firearm's operating system, diagnose its failures and malfunctions and perform the repairs necessary to make it function safely.

AGI's lowest level of instruction teaches the design and function of all firearms. Another level offers a machine shop course, including welding, and various customizing courses.

"You're getting training in two additional trades that could make you money in a pinch," Kelly noted.

AGI's Master Level course includes instruction on tungsten inert gas (TIG) welding, certifications on building custom 1911 pistols, custom GLOCKS, custom AR-15 rifles and building custom hunting rifles on Remington Model 700 and Mauser actions. Other courses teach bluing, metalworking and even business success

training.

Because of its "building block" structure and remote learning environment, Kelly said an AGI education enables a student to begin earning money in as little as 90 days.

"It takes 90 days to get an FFL," Kelly informed. "You can start gunsmithing almost immediately. After you've done the first 20 hours of training, you're starting to understand the things you need to know so you can do assembly, disassembly, cleaning, how to mount scopes and how to mount recoil pads. Those are the moneymakers."

A separate division of AGI has 68 armorer's courses for myriad gun families. The limitation is that each course only certifies an armorer to work on a particular type of firearm.

"It offers an education for somebody who wants to work in a gun shop," Kelly explained. "In every armorer's course, we use a cutaway gun to teach design and function on that one particular gun, from old single-action Colts to modern GLOCKS and SIGs."

GUNSMITH: NECESSITY OR LUXURY?

A person with gunsmith training, experience and expertise is an expensive asset that might make many gun shop owners balk. To Kelly, a gunsmith is a requisite.

"Absolutely, for a number of reasons," he confirmed. "A gunsmith can obviously be a profit center. Secondly, for any entrepreneurially thinking dealer, a gunsmith gives you

two bites of the apple. You get the first bite when they bring the gun in, and you get the second bite when they come back to pick it up. That's two opportunities for them to be in your shop where you can suggest upgrades and accessories and interest them in buying some additional firearms. It allows you to survey the full background of a customer's interest."



**A GUNSMITH
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UP."**

Gene Kelly
Founder/President
American Gunsmithing Institute
Napa, Calif.

Your location might determine the necessity of employing at least one full-time gunsmith. Mandi

Sano, president of The Gun Doctor in Roselle, Ill., is a dominant resource in the most gun-hostile region of a gun-hostile state. It's a tough neighborhood for a firearms business, but Sano said her business is flourishing. Her gunsmithing services are widely known, and they're a major part of her success.

"There's not a lot of gunsmiths in northern Illinois," she said. "A lot of stores around us, up to 50, 70 miles away, send gunsmith inquiries to us. We tend to get the trainwrecks, you know, 'Dad's 100-year-old shotgun that needs extensive work and refinishing,' that kind of thing."

The Gun Doctor's reputation is well-established. Sano's father, a native of Japan, immigrated to the United States largely because he could not satisfy his ardor for firearms in his home country. He was certified at a New Mexico gunsmithing school in 1953 and gained proficiency before opening his own business in Illinois in 1972.

"We're a retail shop first and a gunsmith second," Sano noted. "It's worked out pretty well for us. We've had our ups and downs, but we've been fortunate and blessed."

SO, GUNSMITH OR ARMORER?

The answer to whether you need an armorer or a gunsmith on staff again depends on your business model. The expert and advanced enthusiast nature of Kevin Poley's business leaves little need for an armorer.

"You're better off with a gunsmith," he asserted.

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I HAVE TWO
GUNSMITHS
AND ONE
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STAFF. IT'S
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IF YOU'RE IN
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THAT'S WHERE
AN ARMORER IS
CRITICAL.”

Mandi Sano • President
The Gun Doctor • Roselle, Ill.

“If parts need to be made, a gunsmith is more capable of doing that. A lot of people, when they bring in a gun, expect you're able to fix it

immediately. Sometimes this isn't the case. Sometimes it takes time for us to get parts. If we can't find the part, we have to manufacture the part. A lot of people want to drop their gun off on Monday and they want it back on Friday. There are times when it's not going to happen.”

How does a store owner afford such a highly skilled employee? The answer to this question is complicated. Some retailers emphasize sales first and service second. Poley is inverse: Selling guns is secondary to his gunsmithing business.

“Gunsmithing is a lot more profitable than owning a gun store and selling guns,” he said. “Your margin on selling guns is so small. It's so competitive. Some of the big-box stores, you just can't compete with them. If I'm selling a .22 rifle for \$200, they're selling it for \$125. They have the money to do that, and they like to

squash the other people.”

The diverse nature of The Gun Doctor's clientele requires both skill sets. Staffing both skill sets maximizes efficiency.

“I have two gunsmiths and one armorer on staff,” Sano shared. “It's beneficial for business if you're in a position to have both. If a customer wants his dovetail sights changed, that's where an armorer is critical. He can do it in a timely manner, and I don't have to tell a customer there's 1,200 guns in front of you and a 12-week turnaround time.”

A FINE LINE

Like Sano, Jim Jones, owner of J&L Gunsmithing in Chesapeake, Va., is also the de facto gunsmith for retailers in the Tidewater area who don't have their own “smith” on staff. The problem some stores have, according to Jones, is they have armorers who are not capable of doing work

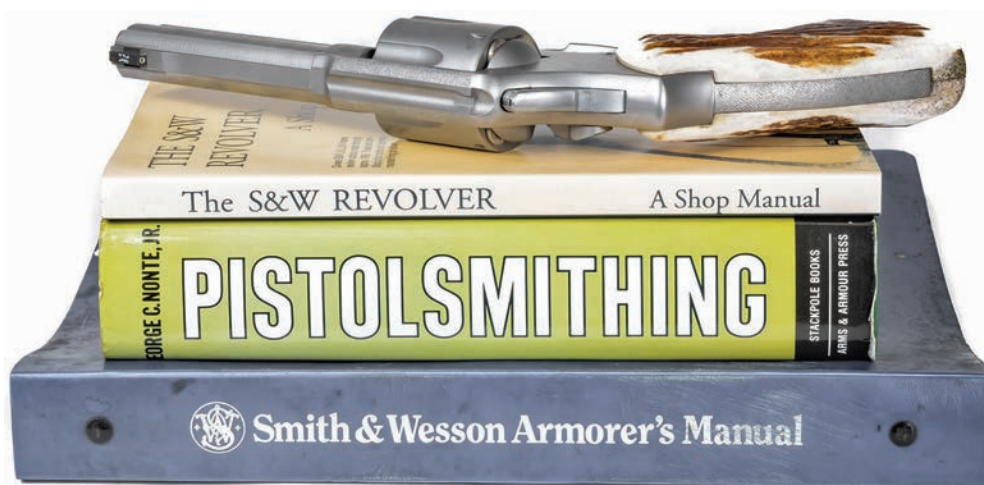
that ultimately requires a gunsmith.

“I won't give any names, but there's more than one store in this area that has armorers, and they're doing okay with those gentlemen,” he said. “They kind of state they have a gunsmith, but when someone brings in something out of their ability level, they bring it to me. I turn it around quickly, and they're kind of the hero. I don't know how informed the customer is it was done somewhere else.”

Misrepresenting your staff's abilities isn't a problem until it is, and then a problem can significantly damage your business's reputation.

“As long as they have access to somebody who can take care of them if they do get in over their heads, then it's not a problem, but it's a fine line,” Jones said.

“There are stores in our vicinity that have armorers, but they send



Classics for any gunsmith or armorer. Per *American Handgunner DIY 2022 Special Edition* Contributor Jeremy D. Clough, “The Kuhnhausen manuals are excellent, and while it's older, Nonte's book contains a wealth of information and provides a window into a time when there was a lot more creativity required for tasks we now consider mundane.” (Image: Clough, in “What Goes Around” from *American Handgunner DIY 2022 Special Edition*)

“
**MISREPRESENTING YOUR
STAFF’S ABILITIES ISN’T
A PROBLEM UNTIL IT IS,
AND THEN A PROBLEM
CAN SIGNIFICANTLY
DAMAGE YOUR BUSINESS’S
REPUTATION.**

their true gunsmithing work to us,” Sano stated, echoing Jones. “There’s a corporate-owned store that advertises gunsmithing, but they can’t work on a 1952 Browning Auto-5, so they send it to us.”

Gene Kelly agrees. He added that misrepresenting a staffer’s abilities can also create legal issues.

“Some people call the AR-15 somewhat of a LEGO you can bolt things onto, but many people can’t make the gun work properly because they truly don’t understand its subsystems,” he noted. “Even armorers can have problems with the platform if

they don’t understand what they’re doing. If you shorten the barrel, for example, you change the whole gas curve.”

He continued, “And now they’re an armorer, but if a gun comes in and they do not know the systems, they can start costing you money in a hurry, and they can create liability.”

If your business model requires a gunsmith or an armorer (or both), you must balance the volume of work available with their experience. Then, as their reputations grow, you might be challenged to retain them. **SI**



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Ending The Year On A High Note

By Hank Yacek

One of the defining trends of 2024 has been the challenge of managing sales volume and profitability in the firearm range and retail space.

The pains dealers have been facing are the last moments of the hangover from the “punch-drunk” days of the pandemic era paired with the sobering fact Americans are struggling with the impacts of the economy and inflation.

Looking at historical data and where the industry sits right now, we’re priming the pumps to have a much better last few months of the year than the prior nine months have given us. The confluence of what is traditionally the peak season for our industry — along with a recovery of sales volume partnered with this being an election year — gives

us options to make Q4 a profitable season.

Let’s talk about how you can plan to take full advantage of this season and act today.

GIFT CARDS

More gift cards are sold during the holiday season than most any other time of year — but how can we maximize their potential?

A recent Deloitte study shows 83% of Americans plan to purchase gift cards for their friends and loved ones during the holiday season.

The key here: make your customers want to buy a gift card! (It starts with having them on hand. Now is the time to get them on order.)

To maximize the use of a gift card, take a visit to your local grocery or electronics stores and see how they are displayed. Typically, they’re either hanging on pegs glued to a backer card or on a perforated plastic two-piece display. This is how people have become accustomed to “what a gift card looks like” — so be sure yours have the same look and feel.

Simple “business card”-sized gift cards stuck in a business card holder near the cash register will go

unnoticed, as many people will think they’re just that — business cards.

(I’ve seen this happen on numerous occasions.) As I noted above, your customers are already conditioned to what a gift card “should” look like thanks to all the other venues they buy them from.

One of the ways you can copy other retailers is using a hanging display for your gift cards. Hanging them on a peg gives you significant flexibility to present them so customers can easily find them. Also, consider swapping gift cards with other retail operations in your area to tap into the potential for new customers.

Gift cards serve a variety of functions: They’re an important avenue to finding new customers, building brand awareness, entrenching customer loyalty and improving cash flow. In addition, a measurable percentage of gift cards are never redeemed and can bring a little free cash to your establishment.

GET SALES PROJECTIONS ON POINT

Along with selling all those gift cards, we need to make sure to have enough goods on hand to sell to the

recipient. Therefore, it's imperative we plan and forecast our sales goals and inventory needs. Make projections based on historical sales data, market trends, political indicators and other signals that can help you make best-guess estimates for each upcoming month.

With lead times often being weeks or even months for the in-demand product, it is important we identify the items, how many of them we will need to satisfy customer demand and get them on order ahead of time. All too often, retailers waded into the holiday/election season without an inventory plan only to find themselves out of stock on key — and profitable — items, with no chance of restocking in time to take advantage of them.

YOUR DIGITAL STOREFRONT

This is the time to lean on your data but also to stop, take a deep breath, clear your mind and put on your “customer hat” and think about it from the perspective of not only your best and long-term customers, but individuals looking for gift ideas for friends and loved ones who themselves have no understanding of the products you sell and need a helping hand on their purchasing journey. This extends both to your physical retail space along with your website.


A 2023 study by American Research Inc. found 80% of consumers shopped online last year. I would expect even more plan to do so this holiday shopping season. Make sure not only your physical store is ready but polish up your website with holiday gifting suggestions to land those extra sales.

This might be a special tab dedicated to “gifts for everyone on your list” on your website or a section of retail space visible from the front door that highlights an assortment of holiday gift items. Be sure to target the sweet spot of \$40 and under for this gifting assortment as this is the typical average gift price for the season.

Knowing this targeted gift price can help on the profitability side as well. Focus on products that afford you extra profits at this price range. Pro tip: If a product ends up pricing out in the

mid-\$30 price range, bump up its selling price to \$39.95. Those extra dollars can really help your profitability while still staying under the \$40 mark.

Consider creating gift bundles of lower-priced items that together hover around this \$40 price range. Cleaning products, flashlights with batteries, ammunition bundles or even just a two pack of \$20 thermal mugs can all help increase the volume and profitability of your holiday sales.


**Remember
to not only
have the
inventory
customers
want but to
let them know
you have it!
Marketing is
essential.**

CONVENIENCE LEADS TO PROFITS

During the last quarter of the year convenience can lead to extra profits in areas you might not have even considered.

Think about buying an assortment of greeting cards, wrapping paper, gift bags and the like to have on hand in your store to make you a one-stop shop for holiday giving. Margins on these products can easily be in the 50–70% category! Go one step beyond and offer a gift-wrapping service, and profits can go even further. Convenience goes a long way not only to profits but also customer satisfaction and loyalty.

In this busy time of year, remember to not only have the inventory customers want but to let them know you have it! Marketing is essential. Use every venue available to you be it radio, print, television, social media, e-newsletters and the like. Get the word out ahead of the competition that you are *the place* to come to get their product and service needs.

Planning now gives you time to partner with manufacturers and vendors to share in the cost of these marketing efforts. Trying to ask a manufacturer, at the last minute, to help fund a billboard you want to buy off the highway will be responded to with a resounding “maybe next year” so make calls and send emails as soon as possible.

HOST AN APPRECIATION EVENT

A parting tip: leverage this nostalgic time of year. Holidays abound and it's important to give thanks where thanks are due. There's no better time than now to have a “Customer Appreciation Day” at your facility.

Take a moment to show how much you appreciate your customers and what they do for your shop ... convert the goods and services you provide into cash and profits! When I owned my shop, our customer appreciation day was on Christmas Eve.

Much of the day was spent reminiscing with customers, delivering layaways and having a nice catered lunch for the employees and customers alike. Not only did customers appreciate the sentiment, but for many it became part of their Christmas tradition to stop by the store, grab some food, buy a few last-minute Christmas gifts and start off their holiday journey on a high (and well-fed) note. Even though the focus was *not* on sales, our customer appreciation day turned into a very lucrative and profitable day.

There's a very real opportunity over the next few weeks to take 2024 out of the red column and into the black. However, the means to getting there is to make your tactical plan now and act on it. If you don't, someone else will. **SI**



“SUPPORTING THE COMPANIES THAT SUPPORT US”

By Carolee Anita Boyles

Companies that back up their products are the backbone of the industry. Those that both back up their products and take care of the retailers who sell those products are gems to be treasured.

Sergeant Paul Bastean, lead instructor and managing partner at Ultimate Defense in St. Peters, Mo., shared SIG

SAUER is at the top of his list.

“Any time we have a problem with a product from SIG, they take care of it immediately,” he said. “They do a really good job of taking care of warranty return stuff.”

Bastean noted Ruger also excels at standing behind its products.

“For both of those companies, turnaround is really fast,” he confirmed. “When you send them a gun, they don’t take months to get it back to you. The other thing they both do is entrust us to know what part we

need, and they’ll send us the part when we ask. A lot of companies say, ‘No, we need to look at it’ — so you end up having to send the gun off and it’s gone a couple weeks or more. But SIG and Ruger both pay attention to the timeliness of repair.”

Bastean mentioned suppressor manufacturer HUXWRX Safety Co. (formerly OSS) also stands squarely behind the products they manufacture.

“Sometimes a customer will put a suppressor on a gun and cross thread it,” he noted. “It causes a baffle strike, which destroys the can. This isn’t a warranty deal; like someone who ran their car into a pole. But HUXWRX will send them a repair can or a new can on a pretty routine basis — they’re pretty phenomenal.”



SIG AND RUGER BOTH PAY ATTENTION TO THE TIMELINESS OF REPAIR.”

PAUL BASTEAN
Lead Instructor & Managing Partner
Ultimate Defense
St. Peters, Mo.



▲ Paul Bastean walks customers through their respective purchases at the Ultimate Defense gun counter. Working with manufacturers that stand behind their products takes some of the burden off Bastean and his staff — especially when they’re willing to interface with customers directly.

“IF YOU ASK FOR SOMETHING, THEY SEND IT — NO QUESTIONS ASKED.”

At Fuquay Gun in Fuquay-Varina, N.C., Owner Clay Ausley shared the company that’s stood behind their products for him the best is Smith &

Wesson.
“When times get hard, many manufacturers change how they operate,” he remarked. “Smith & Wesson does not. They continue turning the product as well as they can, but without changing what the dealers are getting. They’re very reliable about getting product

out to customers during those times. And even during those times, when there’s a problem with a gun, they get it fixed and get it back out.”

Ausley echoed Bastean’s views on Ruger, praising its “phenomenal” customer service.

“They truly stand behind their products and always have,” he emphasized.

One local company Ausley appreciates is DNZ Products.

“This man came to me 18 years ago and wanted me to carry his scope mounts,” he shared. “I’m ashamed to say it, but when he came to me, he didn’t have a name and I turned him down.” Within five years, however, Fuquay Gun was carrying DNZ scope mounts.

“He’s a super nice guy who’s developed a better mounting system,” Ausley asserted. “It’s rare we have a problem with his scope mounts, but when I call him with a problem, he doesn’t send me a solution. He sends it directly to the customer to cut out some time.”

Two other companies that stand behind their products in every way, Ausley added, are Vortex and Springfield Armory.

“My experience with Vortex is if there’s any kind of a repair situation, they send us out a new optic immediately,” he said. “With Springfield, if you ask for something, they send it — no questions asked. They’re a great company to deal with.”

Mike Humphries is the media relations manager for Springfield Armory. According to Humphries, Springfield has made a company commitment to stand behind every firearm they produce.

“Springfield Armory proudly stands behind every firearm it makes with its limited lifetime warranty,” he informed. “This is a lifetime warranty for the original purchaser that protects against defects, and the customer will receive free shipping and handling on the return for repair for any valid warranty claims. The warranty covers any defects in the firearm, but doesn’t cover normal wear and tear, unauthorized repairs, disassembly, adjustments or modifications or use with inappropriate or unsuitable ammunition.”

Beyond its warranty, Springfield also supports retailers through a variety of promotional programs.

“We take pride in running what we believe to be the most robust consumer pull-through programs in the market, particularly through our Gear Up Packages,” Humphries stated. “To ensure the success of these promotions, we take extensive measures to protect existing inventory by allowing online redemptions for all qualifying models already stocked by our dealers. This approach ensures dealers can participate seamlessly, even with products already on their shelves.”

Springfield also encourages customers to activate their warranties.

“Activating the warranty entitles the customer to a 15% discount on a Springfield Armory webstore purchase as well as a free two-year subscription to *The Armory Life* quarterly print magazine,” he added.

Humphries said the company’s stance ensures

retailers can be certain they're selling a safe and reliable firearm Springfield stands behind.

"Springfield Armory will ensure the customer receives a firearm they can count on," he noted. "Both this and our consumer pull-through programs allow the company to support our retailers."

"THEY STAND BY EVERYTHING THEY MANUFACTURE."

Marna Tracy, owner of Tampa Tactical in Riverview, Fla., noted one company that always stands behind their products is Hi-Point Firearms.

"There's also KelTec and SCCY," she added. "SCCY makes affordably priced 9mms. If one of their guns gets lost or stolen and you have a police report, they'll replace it for you. If you have a problem with it you send it in, they'll take care of you."

KelTec's approach is somewhat different.

"If you have a problem with one of their guns and you go on one of their factory tours, they'll fix it right there and hand it back to you," Tracy said. "They stand by everything they manufacture."

Charlie Brown is president of MKS Supply, the only distributor of Hi-Point Firearms.

"Hi-Point guns have always had a lifetime warranty," he pointed out. "New and used, the

warranty follows the gun; even with that we still have less than a 2% repair or return rate. In most cases, we can repair a firearm and have it shipped back to the customer in less than four days."

Brown's background in retail contributes to his commitment to support retailers in their relationships with their customers.

"Having come from a retail gun shop background, I know how hard it is for a retailer when a customer has a problem with their firearm," he recalled. "Whenever possible, we try to work directly with the customer to help take the time and employee



WE TRY TO WORK DIRECTLY WITH THE CUSTOMER TO HELP TAKE THE TIME AND EMPLOYEE COSTS AND HASSLE OF A REPAIR AWAY FROM THE RETAILER."

CHARLIE BROWN
President
MKS Supply



Marna Tracy, owner of Tampa Tactical, reserved special praise for Hi-Point Firearms, KelTec Weapons and SCCY. In a previous issue of *SI*, Tracy earmarked Clenzoil as a valued partner.

costs and hassle of a repair away from the retailer."

Brown highlighted Hi-Point's commitment to supply both retailers and their clients with the ultimate in customer service.

"Hi-Point makes all of their firearms and most of the parts in their guns," he said. "We've made a commitment to stand behind our products. Hi-Point makes the most affordable firearms being sold in the marketplace, and there's a perception the least expensive product is the least quality. That said, we all know there are always exceptions to that price versus quality bias, so we know we must

give the best customer service experience. This way, the dealer can have confidence selling our products, and the end customer can have confidence in purchasing and using our products, as well."

There you have it: companies that produce reliable products *and* take care of their dealers make for fantastic partners. **SI**

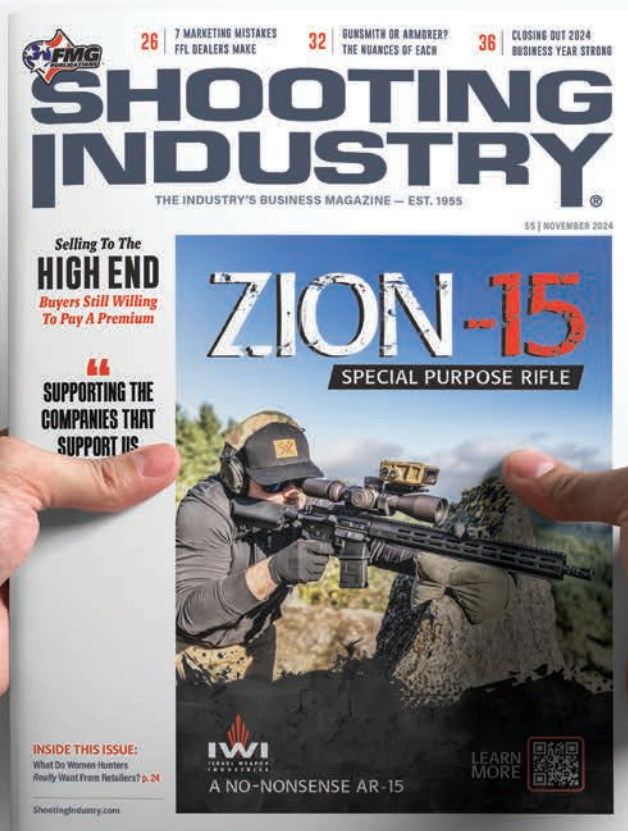
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By Jenna Buckley



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Built for secure ammunition storage, the **SCOUT 25 AMMO CABINET** from Steelhead Outdoors has four heavy-duty, all-metal, full-width, adjustable shelves and can be further customized with additional shelves, door organizer panels and exterior accessories. It is constructed with 14-gauge steel and patent-pending vertical beam locking technology. A high-quality, UL-listed Sargent and Greenleaf Spartan lock are protected by a single layer hard plate. The locking carriage has eight locking points that will lock every few inches along the door and each locking point engages with eight reinforced slots to thwart pry attacks. The cabinet is 25" W x 60" H x 15" D and weighs 175 lbs.

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The manual safety of the **ECHELON 4.5F 9MM PISTOL WITH MANUAL SAFETY** is frame-mounted at the rear of the frame. It's ambidextrous, easy to engage/disengage and matches the pistol's texture. The patent-pending Central Operating Group is a self-contained and serialized stainless steel chassis that moves between available grip modules in seconds. The Echelon employs the Variable Interface System that uses patent-pending self-locking pins that can be positioned to direct-mount to several popular pistol optics. The Echelon with Manual Safety features U-Dot tritium/luminescent sights and a 4.5" hammer-forged barrel. The pistol comes with one 17- and one 20-round magazine (15- and 10-round variants are offered for restricted locales).



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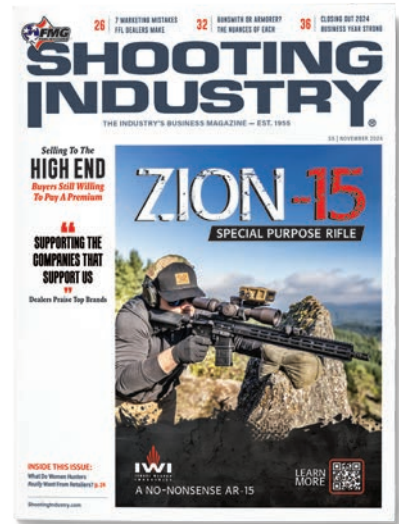
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RCBS introduces two new die sets for reloading the 22 ARC, both of which are ideal for single-stage or progressive presses. The **22 ARC FULL LENGTH SIZER DIE SET - GROUP A** for reloading bottleneck cases consists of a full-length sizer die with an expander-decapping unit and a seater die with bullet seater plug. The **22 ARC SMALL BASE TAPER CRIMP DIE SET - AR SERIES** has a small base sizer die designed for semi-automatic firearms and a taper crimp seater die. The Small Base Sizer guarantees the cartridge will rechamber in AR-platform weapons. The Taper Crimp Seat Die crimps bullets so they will not move during recoil.



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Savage Arms extends its **AXIS** rifle line with five new models: **AXIS XP**, **AXIS 2** (pictured), **AXIS 2 XP**, **AXIS 2 XP HARDWOOD** and **AXIS 2 PRO**. The **AXIS XP** boasts a new look with improved ergonomics and features that are standard on every new **AXIS**, including precision button-rifled barrels and thread-in head spacing. The updated bolt handle helps enhance user control and comfort during operation, especially in adverse conditions like rain or cold weather. All models come with a factory-mounted and bore-sighted 3-9x40 scope.



BY JADE MOLDAE

3 TAKEAWAYS FROM UPDATED FIRST-TIME GUN BUYERS REPORT

One of the defining characteristics of “The Surge” from 2020–2022 was the millions of first-time gun buyers who swarmed gun stores across the country — eager to gain some sense of safety for themselves and loved ones. This demand surge may be a distant memory now, but it brought lasting changes in the market and how the industry engages with end users.

NSSF recently published an update to its First-Time Gun Buyers report. The 2024 edition of the First-Time Gun Buyers report is based on a study of consumers who purchased their first firearm in 2021–2024. (This is the third iteration of the First-Time Gun Buyers study, as there have been some notable shifts in consumer behavior since 2020.)

The study was conducted by InfoManiacs Inc. to obtain current information regarding behaviors and interests in this segment of the firearms market and to determine differences in purchase motivations and behaviors between 2021 and 2024. It also showcases subsequent purchases, training and habits of first-time gun buyers.

There are dozens of unique takeaways from the full 54-page report, but we’ve whittled it down to three for you to share with your sales teams.

1. WHAT’S MOST IMPORTANT

Summarizing the study, InfoManiacs Inc. President Laura Kippen, Ph.D., keyed in on what factors are the most desirable for these first-time gun buyers.

“Practicality, fit, quality and value top the list of reasons first-time buyers selected the specific gun for their first purchase,” she said. “The brand, style, power and features and options are all secondary considerations. Other peoples’ opinions — including those of friends and family and sales personnel are important — but secondary relative to buyers’ perceptions of quality, fit and value.”

She continued, “Features such as look and feel, collectability, color/finish, and uniqueness had little impact on the selection of a first gun. These features may play a more important role if new gun buyers decide to make additional purchases.”

As noted in conversations with dealers and manufacturers alike, first-time buyers in 2020 didn’t have an opportunity to be loyal to a particular brand — they often bought what was in stock. Looking at 2021–2024, inventory levels improved over 2020 but rather than focusing on a particular brand, these customers desired attributes like

◀ If your store can keep the right inventory in stock and sales staff can convey selling points to customers while *listening* for their needs/intended use, you’ll be one (significant) step ahead of competitors who aren’t accommodating.

fit and value — which is where your store’s staff come in, and leads us to our next takeaway.

“

Practicality, fit, quality and value top the list of reasons first-time buyers selected the specific gun for their first purchase. The brand, style, power and features and options are all secondary considerations.”

Laura Kippen, Ph.D. • President
InfoManiacs

2. YOUR PRESENCE & OPINION MATTER

The report revealed some encouraging trends for independent dealers: 41% of respondents purchased their firearm at a local gun store, 30.6% at a big-box retailer and 8.4% purchased through an online retailer.

The vast majority of respondents (more than 90%) purchased one or more accessories for their first firearm, as well. (Which you already know: Accessory sales offer supercharged margins.) Gun-cleaning products were the most popular. Gun storage was a particular growth point, too.

Additionally, the voice of the sales rep behind the counter matters to these buyers — gun shop personnel were listed as the second most sought-after source of information to help with

Continued on p. 45

1911

X

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The SHOT Show® is all about YOU and YOUR BUSINESS. This is your opportunity to connect with the industry's top manufacturers, distributors, and experts who can help any retailer or range, both large and small, better serve its community. Whether you're looking to expand your product offerings, improve your marketing strategies or enhance your range facilities, the SHOT Show has everything you need to succeed.

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