



BY THERESE IKNOIAN



As recreation changes, retailers might also adjust their strategy, and bring in select fitness and training products to boost summer and winter business. But how does this work? Here's some advice we culled from those who know, believe and fuel the trend:

- **Attract new customers.** Outdoor stores can tap into those who want apparel or gear for those softer outdoor activities like bike riding, walking, snowshoeing, trail running or weekly gym workouts. Many general sporting goods stores and department stores don't always carry the products and brands that support these activities. Plus, many fitness specialty stores carry and can sell large pieces

FITNESS PRODUCTS GAIN A **TOEHOLD** IN THE OUTDOOR MARKETPLACE.

LOOK BETWEEN THE WALLS OF BACKPACKS, THROUGH THE GARDENS OF SPROUTING TENTS and around the mounds of climbing ropes and harnesses. Look closely and you may have seen them in recent years—balance boards, walking shorts, yoga mats, running shoes, gym tights and other cross-training and fitness goods.

Mind you, they aren't only at the trade shows. Retailers—small, large, paddle and climbing specialty, and even core outdoor stores—are picking up some assortment for their shelves and finding success in dealing in what you could basically call things you use when you sweat. In return, more outdoor manufacturers are adding these sorts of items to their lines.

Consider this: the so-called cross-training category at REI by far has the highest growth rate of any other category this year, bar none, with clothing leading the charge.

"We saw this as an opportunity," said Julie Baxter, REI director of merchandising for the active sports division, which gained its own identity in spring 2002 and has grown exponentially since then. "We said, 'There's something here.'"

WHY DO FITNESS?

Over the past few years, people have definitely changed the way they play in the outdoors. An outdoor participant may only go backpacking once a year instead of several times a year—and then only for three or four days instead of one or two weeks. Car camping may take the place of roughing it in the backcountry. A day trek, snowshoe trip or cycling outing within an hour of home may replace a long weekend retreat that required a half-day or longer of driving each way.

People have adjusted to accommodate time constraints, family bonds, young kids, increased work obligations (what happened to those carefree college days?), age (ah, we ain't as young as we were), and the desire for less bother, less hassle, and perhaps less expertise while still being able to get out and have fun.

Enter trail running (although that may only mean on dirt roads), mountain biking (on groomed park paths close to home), day hikes the kids can handle, car camping (no time to prep for backpacking after the work week), or B&B reservations on a ski trip. (You can't beat the down comforters and evening brandy.)

You get the picture. And you may just be this very person lamenting it, but doing the best you can with it.



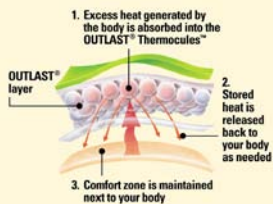
of equipment like home gyms and treadmills, but ignore the accessories and clothing their customers may also want.

- **Supply current customers.** With the trend toward shorter outings, fewer hard-core adventures and more family excursions, your current customers might be heading across town to shop for their other needs, such as workout tights, heart-rate monitors or running shoes. Why lose them?

- **Keep customers fit and help prevent injuries.** You'll see your customers more often if they remain healthy, so you should encourage them to cross-train. They should strengthen muscles, improve balance and flexibility, and build aerobic fitness during the

PHOTOS COURTESY OF (TOP PHOTOS): ASICS/TIGER; (BOTTOM PHOTO) HUGGER MUGGER.

The more I change,
the more you stay the same.



I'm one of billions of Thermocules®— the new technology behind Outlast® adaptive linings. I keep you comfortable by absorbing your body heat when you create too much, and releasing this stored heat when you need it most. I adapt to your skin's micro-climate to buffer against overheating and sweating when you are active and prevent chill when you stop. The instant you touch an Outlast lining, you will feel a cool and fresh sensation as the Thermocules absorb your body heat. For more information, visit our website at outlast.com



OUTDOOR RECREATION IS FUELED BY FITNESS AND THE FITNESS INDUSTRY IS HEADING OUTDOORS.

week, between adventures, or in the off-season. That's particularly true if they go on big adventures less frequently, because they'll need to cross train more frequently. Cross-training and supplemental training can also keep them more fit and more ready to tackle the next outing they do undertake—thanks to you.

• **Bring customers in more frequently.** Cross-training products are more consumable than gear like stoves, boats or packs. That means if your customer knows you also have the latest great running top, shorts or shoes, you'll see them more often. And who knows what else they'll pick up when they swing by?

• **Say Oooooohhhhhmmmm.** Perhaps the largest segment of the cross-training and fitness market embraced in the outdoor arena is mind-body, which includes yoga, but also activities like Pilates and Tai Chi. Climbing companies such as Prana and Stonewear Designs found their apparel crossing over for use in that arena and then began focusing on it.

But such activities aren't just limited to threads. Hugger Mugger, a pure yoga company, attended the Outdoor Retailer trade show for the first time last year. The com-

pany has thrived in the natural health industry and, more recently, the fitness industry where it caters to health clubs and fitness/yoga studios. Stuck in a less-than-desirable booth in the pavilion at the August show, the company got itself all twisted up in a lotus position from the exuberant response and new business it received from climbing and paddling retailers.

One of those taking the plunge is Wichita, Kan.-based, Backwoods, which has placed orders with several companies to open a mini-concept shop for mind-body/yoga in five of its nine stores starting in February, said owner Mike Burns. That area will be merchandised as a complete program and include all the pieces someone would need, from yoga props and mats, to apparel and videos.

"It's new business," Burns said. "It's not like bringing in another pack model or another climbing harness. I get excited because it's new business."

But he and others don't necessarily stop there. Next? Perhaps training accessories. "I think there's something here," added Burns, who is already mulling over adding other training gear to complement his current outdoor customers' needs and bring in new customers, too.

FIT FOR THE NEXT ADVENTURE

With fewer and shorter trips, outdoor enthusiasts do something else during the week to stay fit enough to jump and go when the opportunity arises. That may mean going to the gym, taking a bike to the nearest park, or running or walking a few miles.

Where are they going to get the gear for that? Very likely the sporting goods store across town since it carries weight gloves, running shoes, heart-rate monitors, pedometers, sunglasses, gym bags and all that other stuff users will need all year long. They aren't coming to the outdoor retailer in most cases, but shouldn't they?

Some of this kind of gear is sifting in to the outdoor and winter show halls, but you have to seek out those companies such as Asics since the splash isn't big except with electronics. (Guess that stuff is just techy enough to find broader acceptance.)

"People who are kayaking and rock climbing are training during the week, and that often means running," said Dina DeFazio, for Asics, which after three Outdoor Retailer shows may downsize in 2003.

But there's another side to the training picture. Fitter International showed up at the Outdoor Retailer show last summer with its founder and president, Louis Stack, standing amid a collection of balance and wobble boards and platforms, balls, cushions and other training paraphernalia as he pontificated about his obsession—balance and core strength. His appearance there was the harbinger of what we believe is to come: No matter what you do, you need to be strong, have good balance, good flexibility and great core/abdominal strength.

Says Stack, "Most outdoor sports involve getting to something, somewhere, and that route will involve instable surfaces. Training your balance is insurance."

CLOTHES MAKE THE MAN—AND WOMAN

Then there's the no-brainer—apparel. Everybody needs clothes. But we're talking about apparel for those everyday and shorter adventures. Some outdoor companies, such as Mountain Hardwear and The North Face, have added performance lines in light of the demands.

Another three-layer waterproof/breathable jacket? How many of those does one need each year? But that great new top that you can sweat in? A pair of pants that can go on a backpacking trip or to yoga class? A fleece vest that can move from snowy hilltop to sweater for an around-town walk?

"The lines are blurred more and more and more," said Hind chief Brian Enge.

Outdoor specialty customers, it seems, are asking for this stuff to wear in greater numbers. Hind, for one, has seen its sales to outdoor stores go up 20 percent in the last year. REI says customer demand for apparel has caused the company to strengthen its focus on its entire cross-training line, which also includes hydration, sports nutrition, sunglasses, electronics and performance underwear and socks.

WHERE IS THE MARKET GOING?

Outdoor recreation is fueled by fitness and the fitness industry is heading outdoors. Although both markets have segments, suppliers and enthusiasts that will never meet—nor should they—significant numbers are merging in the middle.

And it's that middle ground where outdoor retailers can meet up with a new customer. With careful planning, merchandising, marketing and community outreach, retailers can transform new customers into regular customers who could fuel sales. Even better, new customers may head outdoors more often, fueling grassroots promotions and outreach for the entire market. ▶



OUTDOOR INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION SAVES YOU MONEY.

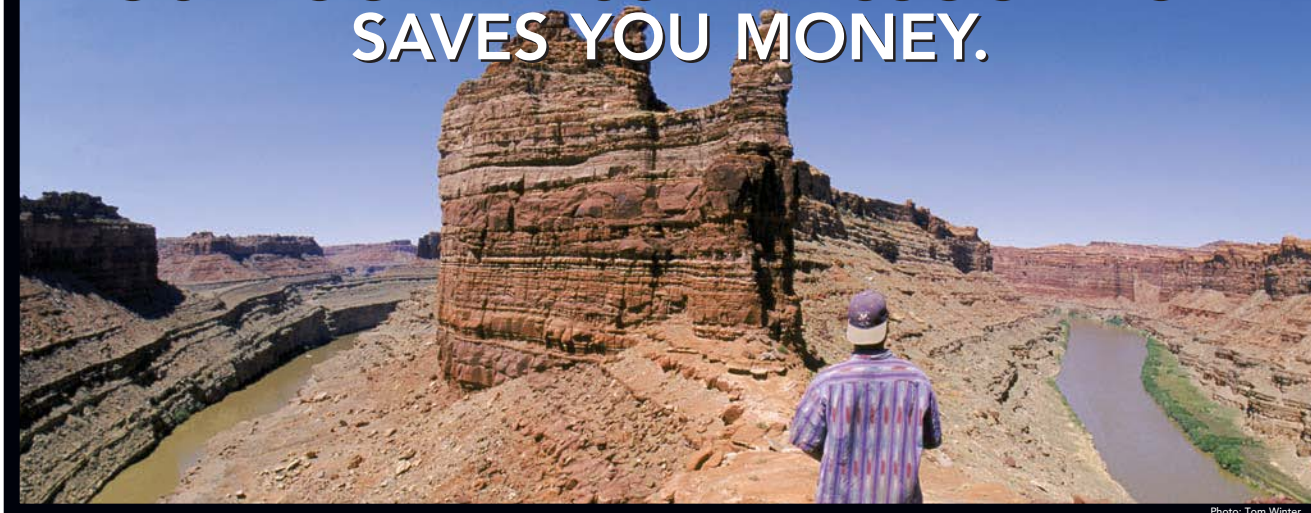


Photo: Tom Winter

HOW MUCH CAN YOU SAVE?

- ★ 20% to 50% on insurance programs
- ★ 55% on market research
- ★ Up to 56% on shipping and freight
- ★ 50% on OIA events

JOIN TODAY!

- ★ Call 303.444.3353 ext. 204
- ★ Or sign up online at www.outdoorindustry.org (Click "Member Benefits")



Promoting and preserving the human-powered outdoor recreation industry.

BONUS: When you become a member you will receive the award winning Outdoor Industry WebNews FREE!

OUTDOOR INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION GIVES YOU THE FACTS.

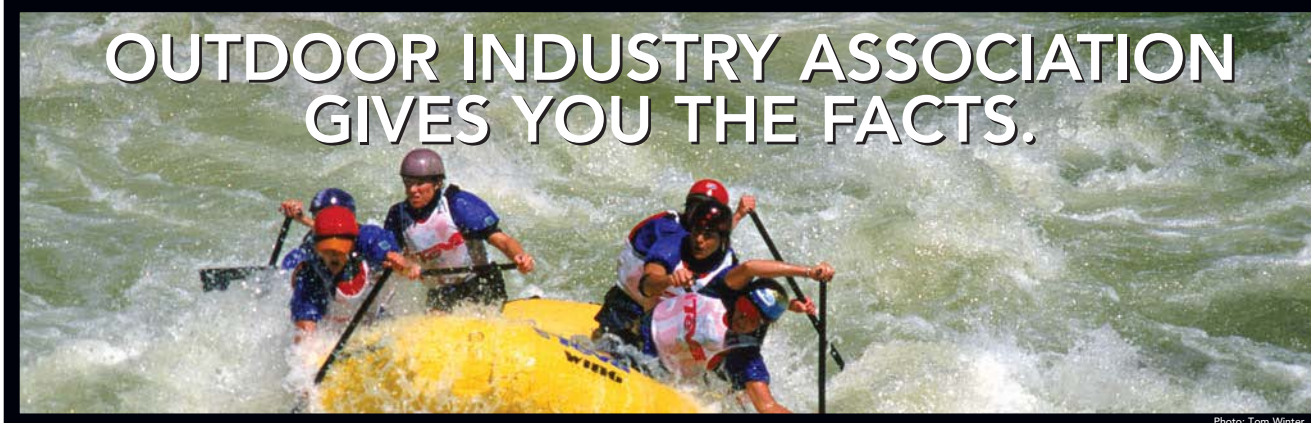


Photo: Tom Winter

THE MORE YOU KNOW, THE MORE YOU SELL!

The soon-to-be-released Outdoor Recreation Participation Study, fifth edition, includes:

- ★ **Five years of trend data** on 22 activities
- ★ Detailed demographic data for each activity
- ★ 16-24 youth market section
- ★ Female-specific section
- ★ Special adventure travel segment

STUDY ACTIVITIES

Backpacking
Paved Road Bicycling
Single Track Bicycling
Wide Track Bicycling
Birdwatching
Camping
Canoeing
Car Camping
Artificial Wall Climbing
Ice Climbing
Rock Climbing
Cross-Country/Nordic Skiing
Fly Fishing
Hiking
Recreational Kayaking
Sea Kayaking
Whitewater Kayaking
Rafting
Snowshoeing
Telemark Skiing
Trail Running
Walking

ORDER YOUR REPORT TODAY!

- ★ \$495 for Outdoor Industry Association members
- ★ \$995 for non-members

Call 303.444.3353 x204



www.outdoorindustry.org

Become a member of Outdoor Industry Association and receive a complimentary copy of the new State of the Industry Report.