



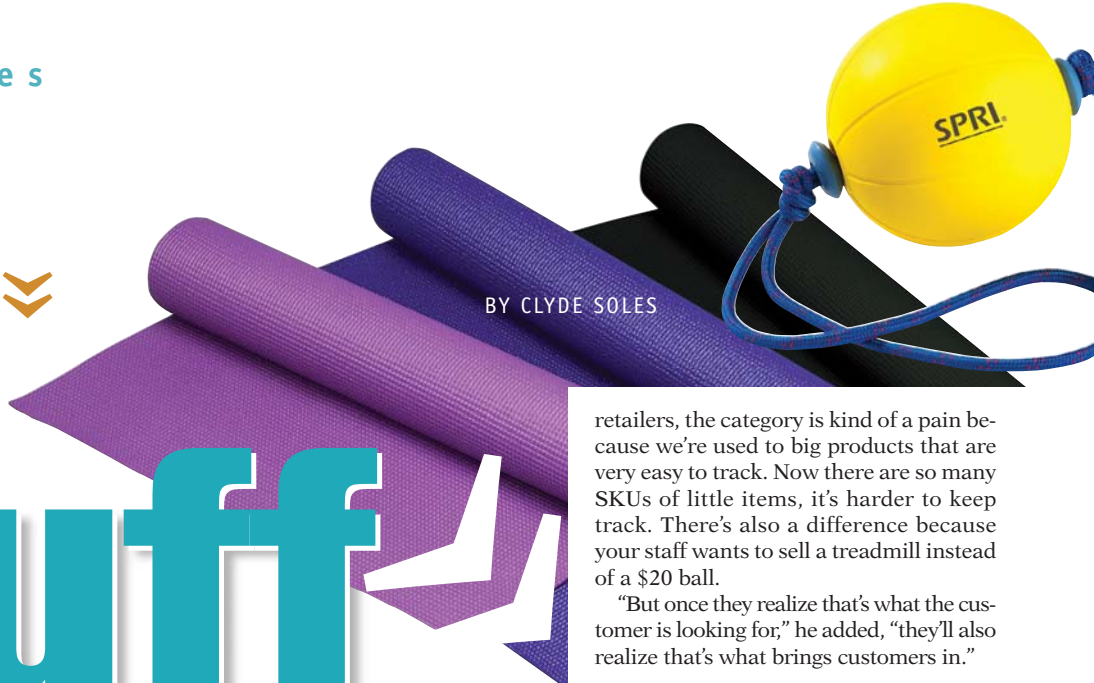
≡ mind

the ≡

small ≡

stuff

BY CLYDE SOLES



Selling a treadmill or home gym for \$2,000 may seem like it adds a heck of a lot more punch to the bottom line than sales of a few small gizmos. But think again about the worth the small stuff can bring you. Treadmills, home gyms, stationary bikes and all those other big things require the most floor space and financial commitment, not to mention they often return lower margins.

Think of fitness accessories as The Juice that can pump up every sale and your store's overall revenues too. There is good money to be made in the little things, plus they demand minimal investment, require no maintenance and take up very little space.

Beyond just making add-on sales, a good supply of premium accessories helps separate your store from the one down the street. Offering a better selection of higher-quality products is a tried-and-true technique for competing with others: If you can't match 'em on lowest price, beat 'em with service and better product.

Well-trained salespeople that patiently explain the differences between a \$9.95 weight-lifting glove and a \$29.95 model or can clearly run through the features on various heart rate monitors do more than make a sale—they plant the seed of customer loyalty. Months later, that same customer may be shopping for fitness equipment and is more likely to return to that "friendly store with the helpful staff and all the gadgets."

As Ken Latham, owner of Exercise Equipment Northwest in Portland, Ore., puts it, "I think accessories are going to take over a larger and larger role. For

retailers, the category is kind of a pain because we're used to big products that are very easy to track. Now there are so many SKUs of little items, it's harder to keep track. There's also a difference because your staff wants to sell a treadmill instead of a \$20 ball.

"But once they realize that's what the customer is looking for," he added, "they'll also realize that's what brings customers in."

ACCESSORIZE THE ACCESSORIES

When it comes to selling fitness accessories, simply stocking a mishmash of products and tucking them in a low traffic area with poor lighting—practices all

FROM BALLS AND CDS TO HEART RATE MONITORS AND BALANCE BOARDS, ACCESSORIES CAN TRANSLATE INTO LARGE MARGINS AND INCREASED PROFITS.

too common—will ensure mediocre returns. In the 2003 SNEWS® Fitness Retailer Survey, most fitness stores stated that accessories accounted for about 5 percent of sales (some only eked a paltry 2 percent); the figures didn't change much by the second annual survey this year (*check out the SNEWS® Retailer Fitness Survey on page 50*).

But put a little effort into finding what your market needs, locate the products where customers will easily find them and display them smartly, and you may help the number inch upward. Several survey respondents stated that accessories were 10 percent (or more!) of sales...and, no, they weren't slacking on the big stuff either!

In Oklahoma City, Fitness Equipment World told GearTrends® it has done very well with accessories despite two other specialty retailers and several full-liners in the market. "We do good business in



Photos Courtesy of Spry and Harbinger

FITTER. FUNNER. FASTER.



FITTER.

Fling the X-Bike's handlebars from side-to-side against adjustable resistance as if powering up a steep climb or sprinting to the finish. This simple and true-to-outdoor bike design naturally engages your upper body, back, core abdominal muscles and stabilizers, and of course - your legs and lungs. The X-Bike enhances your ability to simulate real cycling movements while the X-Biking interval-based training programs enhance your fitness.

FUNNER.

X-Bikes: You can jam on 'em, coast on 'em, swoop the bars from side-to-side, and most remarkably, climb and sprint as if riding outdoors. The interval-based X-Biking™ workouts with custom music tracks mated to workout maps are motivating and immersive; featuring natural, full body cycling moves that challenge you with 30 'mind-blowing' minutes of riding.

FASTER.

30-minutes. Do more if you like. But you don't need to. The X-Biking interval based endurance workouts are designed by our Olympic cycling coach and world-class athletes. Quite simply, this is a real bike that comes with progressive, varied, and goal orientated training programs that are really fun to do.

RENAULT  **Team**



X-Bike and X-Biking are the only indoor cycling products endorsed and used by the world governing body for cycling (UCI), the Renault Formula One Driver Development Program, Motocross Champion Ricky Carmichael, active world champion cyclists, and elite cycling coaches.

www.x-biking.com

Trixter North America, Inc.
Redwood City, CA, USA
Tel. 650.364.7525





BEYOND JUST MAKING ADD-ON SALES, A GOOD SUPPLY OF PREMIUM ACCESSORIES

machine attachments from Troy, as well as gloves and belts from Schiek and TKO,” said owner Robert Grider. Though the store’s been around only since late summer 2002, he is already looking to double the size of the showroom.

Latham in Portland said stability balls are bouncing out the door. “I started carrying stability balls and, wow, I couldn’t keep them in stock! I realized there was a market for products I didn’t know much about, so I started looking at trends and at things that traditional big boxes don’t carry—for example, Bosu, Xerdisc and foam rollers. I’m seeing there’s a niche the big-box retailers don’t cater to. I get people who can’t find it anywhere else.”

Not all are so lucky, despite still doing a reasonable percent of sales in accessories. Carmen Cacopardo has seen a decline in accessory sales at his two Universal Fitness stores in New Jersey. “We’re still doing decent business, perhaps 8 percent to 10 percent of sales, in accessories like machine attachments and higher-quality fitness balls,” he said. “But that’s down from a couple years ago due to several big boxes opening in our area.”

BACK TO THE BASICS

It doesn’t take long for a home gym owner to figure out that the standard cable attachments that come with some products are often lacking in comfort as well as variety. A good assortment of higher-quality accessories (think Troy, TKO, York, Body-Solid, plus those from other suppliers), as well as lifting gloves, straps and belts (e.g. Schiek, Raw Power, Grizzly and Harbinger) can separate you from the crowd.

While stability balls are more commonplace, the medicine balls and kettle bells of yore (at least balls with grips like the Power Grip-Ball and CorBall) are now making a comeback as “functional,” “core” training and back-to-basics workouts have grown in popularity. Similarly, balance products such as bongo and wobble boards, and inflatable or soft balance discs and mats (Aeromat, Bosu, CorDisc, Airex and others) are becoming favorites with trainers and their clients. Then there’s rubber re-

sistance. Those simple lengths of tubes and bands may be old hat (although still in high-demand), but wait til you see all the new configurations geared toward more specific training (such as Spri Xertubes in rings and figure-8s or bands by Bell Sports). Since they are widely used in many training and rehab programs, the public is more inclined to look for them for home use too after they’ve used them in a clinic. For some, a simple weighted bar, such as the Body Bar (\$30 to \$50—also used often in group-exercise classes) can add another dimension to a home strength program and easily be sold along with benches or gyms. Body Bar has also just introduced shorter weighted bars called “minis” (\$23 to \$35) for mind-body, martial arts and other workouts.

For all of these products, it can be helpful to carry instructional media, such as books and DVDs (most companies have companion educational media to accompany their products). Also look for mini-books called “Great” handbooks by Productive Fitness, which are sort of CliffsNotes-like, how-to workout booklets succinctly covering the basics. Those can help customers get the most from their purchase and endear you to them for helping them figure out what to do once they get the gear home. Also be sure to stock the little things that tend to get lost: pumps for fitness balls, collars for barbells, pins for weight stacks, even batteries for CD players or headphones for the gym.

Of course, all those exercising customers may need a little recovery aid occasionally too. Keep those on hand, and that can also put you in good graces with those who train hard. Popular and inexpensive (\$5 to \$40) massage products include the Body Back Buddy, Reflexballs and The Stick. At the higher end, percussive massagers like the Thumper Mini-Pro2 (\$260) cost more than cheesy vibrators but really work. Also stock some good products for icing an owie or strain, such as Contour Pak FlexWraps and the Cryocup, which are sometimes hard-to-find despite offering easy use for your weekend warriors.

THE BEAT GOES ON

Heart rate monitors (HRM) and pedometers have become popular tools not only for athletes, but also for those seeking to lose weight or just get healthier. Indeed, these gadgets are so widely hyped in magazines and at gyms, that they have become almost synonymous with fitness. Many classes, such as some indoor-cycling and boot-camp-type workouts, even require that students



use an HRM. Even McDonald’s freebie “stepometers” that began as a promotional item packaged with its adult Happy Meals in May 2004 can be an impetus for those who now want to move beyond the level of “toy” for their walking and fitness programs to a pedometer that is more reliable.

Although pedometers aren’t very useful for runners, they are good incentives for walkers, especially novice exercisers. Those freebies from McDonald’s are good teasers since they are very basic, are overly sensitive and won’t last. More sophisticated digital pedometers in the \$20 to \$30 range (by companies such as Accusplit and Sportline) are an easy sell that will please your customers for a long time. When a \$5 to \$10 pedometer breaks, it’ll probably get tossed, but your store could take the blame for selling junk. Higher-priced pedometers are also fine if someone wants to add features like radios, headphone attachments, calorie counts, alarms or have one that talks.

There are now dozens of HRMs on the market from at least 10 manufacturers. The best-known brand, Polar, once had a commanding lead on the market but now faces serious competition from Cardiosport, Nike, Reebok, Timex and others such as Ekho, Mio and Nautilus. For demanding athletes, the new T6 by Suunto (another Amer Sports company like Precor) is arguably the most sophisticated HRM available, albeit for a hefty price (\$500), with enough bells and whistles for the most discerning technogeek. While a wonder of technology, most consumers will be better served by an HRM that retails for about \$60 to \$150.

MEASURING UP

Given all the uproar over obesity, many consumers are getting the wrong message that they need to lose weight. Of course, anyone in the fitness industry knows losing excess fat and adding more muscle is the goal. A weight scale alone doesn’t do a lot to help assess how to reach that goal.

One of the more useful—and saleable—fitness accessories is a body-fat scale, such as the models offered by Tanita that retail between \$65 and \$150. These are very convenient and are, in fact, pretty accurate for tracking trends in body-fat percentage. Educate your customers about the difference between weight-loss and fat-loss and the scales could be an easy add-on to a sale. A

Photos: Courtesy of Spri and Harbinger



HELPS SEPARATE YOUR STORE FROM THE ONE DOWN THE STREET.

slightly less expensive alternative using the same principle (bioelectrical impedance) is the Omron Analyzer (around \$40), with the main advantage being portability.

The AccuFitness FatTrack (\$46) is a digital caliper that is easy for customers to use on themselves (manual calipers are too complicated for most less-educated home users). This summer, the company is introducing a pro model (\$120) that uses seven "pinch" sites (instead of the less accurate three) for finding someone's body fat, and it tracks 50 clients—could be a good sell for families, clubs or especially trainers. The company also offers its new MyoTape digital tape measure (\$20) for those tracking the dimensions of particular body parts.

REGIONALIZE INVENTORY

Store owners and buyers should not only look at their competitors but also at the recreational activities popular in their region. For example, if backyard swimming pools are common, it makes sense to stock a variety of accessories for water exercise such as flotation belts by the likes of AquaJogger or Speedo, accessories like water


"noodles," or the newer HPI Winged Water Walker (\$70 to \$90), a foot accessory to increase resistance in the pool.

Look around at all the golf courses in your neck of the woods. Golfers are renowned for their fanaticism and will leap at opportunities to improve their swing. Assuming you are already carrying stability balls, then the FitBALL Power Golf package (book and video with specific routines, \$30) is a logical offering. The Spri Power Swing Trainer Golf Gym (\$42) is another inexpensive item that probably won't be found at the pro shop or the big-box retailer.

Many cities have a large population of runners, yet surprisingly few running shops carry fitness accessories for that clientele. For example, calf muscles and Achilles tendons can benefit from a good stretching device like the ProStretch (\$30). Another nifty accessory also by AccuFitness is the Hydryx towel (\$20), which SNEWS® called in a July 2003 review "not your mother's workout towel." It's a soft chamois that you store wet and, once you take it out of sealed storage, it cools down for a nice refresher after an indoor or outdoor workout. The

company has just introduced Hydryx arm-bands, sweat-bands and wrist bands also, in various combo packages.

In areas with lots of rock climbers or tennis players (especially since a lot of larger clubs may also offer both), it may be worth carrying inexpensive (\$6 to \$17) grip-training products such as Gripmasters, Gripp Balls and Metolius GripSaver.

Who's to sneeze at a few extra bucks coming in the door, especially when they can add up? "It's cash-and-carry with no maintenance and very little overhead," said Latham at Exercise Equipment Northwest. "On a slow day, having sales of five to 10 small products can be a big boost." 

» To become a free GearTrends® trade member or to give us feedback, go to GearTrends.com.



SHE'S IMPRESSED



Never before had she felt like her body was in position to perform the exercises for maximum benefit. Like being one with the machine. The butterfly arms conformed automatically to her flexibility. The press arm adjusted with the flick of a finger. The cushions were comfortable. And the guys were right — all exercises felt really good. How can a machine be so sturdy and tough...and yet so beautiful? Another convert.

Let Vectra help you impress YOUR customers.

All Vectra machines — 1,2,3 and 4-stack — are designed so that all exercises are done in a biomechanically correct manner, whether you're lifting 200 pounds or 20 pounds.

Superior engineering ► Superior weight machines

VECTRA FITNESS

Vectra Fitness, Inc. / 7901 South 190th Street / Kent, WA 98032 USA
Tel: 425-291-9550 / 800-2-VECTRA / Fax 425-291-9650 / www.vectrafitness.com

