



SNOW VISION



No need to google goggles. Here's the critical info you need to understand them and **SELL THEM EFFECTIVELY.**

according to SnowSports Industries America (SIA), goggles account for about 14 percent of the units sold and 21 percent of the dollars of all accessories. Indeed, at the specialty and chain stores tracked by SIA, goggles are bigger business than helmets, sunglasses, car racks or snowshoes.

As with sunglasses, retail prices of snow goggles run from under \$20 to over \$200—a significant range for products that have essentially the same function—cut glare, stop wind, improve vision. And, as with sunglasses, buying decisions are often as much about style and fashion as technical features and performance.

PLAYERS

While many of the major sunglasses brands are players in the goggles market too, there are also a number of smaller specialty brands that do well manufacturing only goggles. In particular, brands such as Anon, Dragon, Fly Girls and Spy are strong in the youth board-sports markets where it's about attitude as much as function.

It should be little surprise that Oakley is a dominant force in the goggles category—the company has been making snow goggles since 1983, a year before it offered sunglasses. In 2004, Oakley rang up \$39.2 million in goggle sales alone—6.93 percent of its gross sales for the year.

Among the long-established goggle brands, Bollé (1978), Scott (1969), Smith (1974) and Uvex (1975) have strong brand recognition in the ski world. Newer entries in the goggle market include The North Face (2002), Rudy Project (1985) and Zeal (1997). One brand that had second thoughts is Julbo; the company decided to postpone its entry into the goggle market this season.

A relatively new category of sunglass/goggle hybrids has been growing in popularity. Panoptx was an early leader and offers the largest selection. However, brands such as Clic, The North Face, Rudy Project and Zeal also have their own versions of hybrids.

TECHNOLOGY

The increase in popularity of ski helmets has been a boon for goggle manufacturers since many people were forced to upgrade. The frames of older goggles are contoured to the shape of a head, but the greater width of ski helmets bends the frames to cause pressure points, gaps and distorted lenses. To address the problem, companies have added hinged wings where the strap attaches, so the goggles

BY CLYDE SOLES

goggles will work properly with or without a helmet.

One of the major differences between budget and upscale goggles is field of view—more is definitely better. The basic styles produce tunnel vision that can be dangerous on crowded slopes. The best goggles allow an entire 180-degree view to the sides, so you have a better chance of seeing that out-of-control skier vectoring in on your trajectory. The best goggles also don't obstruct upward vision when a skier is in a full tuck, but still allow good downward view for fiddling with a jacket pocket or zipper while standing upright.

When selling goggles, have customers try them on, tilt their head slightly down and look straight ahead. Then have them outstretch their arms to the side, palms facing forward and wiggle their fingers. With the best goggle designs, the fingertips of both hands will just be visible. Decent goggles will require moving the arms forward to about a 160-degree angle to see the wiggling fingers. Mediocre goggles may reduce peripheral vision to 140 degrees or less.

Within the past few years, spherical lenses have become the new must-have feature for high-end goggles. Rather than just curving flat plastic side-to-side, the norm for the past decades, these new lenses are molded with curves in all directions to eliminate optical distortion.

Given the way light can change dramatically in snowy mountains, goggles face a tougher challenge than sunglasses. Often lenses that are dark enough to prevent squinting on bright, sunny days make it difficult to see in overcast, flat light.

While phototropic lenses have been around for a while, their performance has been less than stellar. However, technology is now getting to the point where lenses that adjust to the conditions will be the next big battleground between brands. The Uvex F1 Magic uses liquid-crystal technology that darkens the lens in 10 seconds at the push of a button. Despite the \$210 price tag, they quickly sold out.

At present, rose-colored lenses are the most popular with variations of amber running a close second. A few brands, such as Oakley and Zeal, offer polarized lenses to reduce glare; a more effective technology than mirror-coatings that are very scratch-prone.

Fogging has long been the bane of goggle users, especially those

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who wear glasses. While double lenses are now the industry norm, improvements in venting of frames have been significant in the past few years. In some cases, the venting can even be too good for contact lens wearers who may experience drying.

Most brands now offer optical inserts for goggles; however, this means people have to carry their normal prescription lenses in a pocket (with the potential for smashing them) so they can see when they go inside a building. Still the best option for those who wear eyeglasses and don't want to carry a second pair are the tried-and-true goggles with built-in fans from Smith and Uvex.

ON THE MARKET

Bollé » A veteran in the goggle business, the new incarnation of Bollé is clearly going after the hip snowpark crowd by emphasizing style. The top-end Scream offers a spherical lens and a frame with three settings for ventilation to help control fogging, the company said. www.bolle.com

Oakley » New this season, Oakley is so far the only brand to offer spherical polarized goggle lenses. Available in two tints for the Crowbar, Wisdom and A-Frame, the polarized lenses reportedly offer crisp

vision with minimal glare on sunny days. www.oakley.com

Panoptx » The Venturi is a sunglass/goggle hybrid that offers adjustable venting. Combined with its photochromic Varia lens, this offers a versatile alternative to goggles for warm days. www.panoptx.com

The North Face » Its goggles seek to solve the problem of mirror coatings that scratch easily by putting the flash-coating inside the double lens. While the outer surface can still acquire scratches, they are much less intrusive since the tint doesn't change. www.thenorthface.com

Rudy Project » For such a diverse sunglass brand, it's surprising that Rudy Project offers only two styles of snow goggles. A unique feature of the Klonynx Snow is the detachable nose protector, which can help prevent frostbite on bitterly cold, windy days. The Ekynox Mask is a sunglass/goggle hybrid that is ideal for fast winter sports. www.rudyproject.com

Scott » The Ransom features a unique dual-position strap attachment for a superior fit both with and without a helmet. This system works better than most other frames for the person who doesn't always wear a brain bucket. www.scottusa.com

Smith » The Prodigy goggles offer good ventilation, spherical lenses and superb fit for a variety of facial structures. What really sets them apart is the optional "Hop-Up Kit" that allows users to customize the look of their frames. With eight frame colors, nine lens choices and eight trim kits, all tastes can be met. www.smithsport.com

Uvex » While the F1 Magic has received much of the media attention, the Ultra-sonic is the unsung hero of the goggles world. Compared to most others on the market, this low-volume model is remarkably compact yet provides an exceptional field of view. www.uvexsports.com

Zeal » Currently, Zeal is the only company offering goggle lenses that are both photochromic and polarized; the only trade-off has been they only come with cylindrical lens. Next season, however, the PPX lenses will also be spherical, we're told, offering the best of all worlds. www.zealoptics.com

» Want more eyewear? Check out the GearTrends® Summer 2005 issue at www.gearrends.com/magazines for our detailed look at the performance sunglasses market ("Eye Test," page 104).



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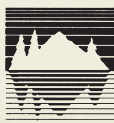
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