

Joining with Parks & Rec Partners

By Shannon Rikard, ATA contributing writer

If you'd like to reach new customers without buying advertising, consider forging a partnership with your Parks and Recreation Department.

Even shops with decades-deep business roots can't reach every potential archer, especially those too intimidated to walk into a bow shop on their own. Word-of-mouth recommendations are the best advertising you can get. And with interest in archery still growing, Parks and Recreation Departments can be strong links between archery shops and new customers.

Here are four steps to becoming the shop your Parks and Recreation Department recommends.

1) Understand how the department operates with other partners.

Parks and Recreation Departments strive to provide their communities with quality recreational options. In some cases, Parks-and-Rec staff work directly to offer recreation. In other cases, they contract the work with partners.

The department takes a cut for advertising because recreational programs are usually listed online and printed in seasonal guides. When partnering with your Parks and Recreation Department, you'll split profits according to how much each partner contributes. If the department provides the facility and you provide equipment and instructors, consider a 50-50 split. If you provide everything except the advertising, consider an 80-20 split.

John Tidwell, owner of Bear Creek Archery in Denver, partnered with South Suburban Parks and Recreation to expand the local archery program. The partnership began when Bear Creek Archery staff taught Parks-and-Rec staff to become archery instructors. Now, Bear Creek Archery teaches

the Recreation Department's summer classes. In turn, Bear Creek Archery is listed on the department's online calendar and in printed materials and receives referrals for classes and coaching. South Suburban Parks and Recreation charges \$59 to \$64 for summer archery classes and pays Bear Creek Archery \$40 per archer. In this case, Bear Creek Archery's portion of the profits is greater because it provides everything for the classes except the advertising.

Consider offering:

Level I instructor training classes for parks and recreation staff.

Instructors for programs held at parks and recreation facilities.

Equipment branded with your shop's name for use in programs.

Classes and equipment at your facility while the department advertises the classes in its guide.

Taking payments from customers and providing equipment, facilities, instructors and advertising are valuable components of any partnership and they're worth 10 to 20 percent of the profits, depending on individual factors.

Understand how your Parks and Recreation Department operates with other partners and determine how archery fits the community's recreational menu.

2) Introduce yourself.

Once you determine how archery fits alongside soccer, tennis and other community sports, introduce yourself to the contact person at the department. This step might seem oversimplified but before someone can recommend you and your business to their contacts, they must know you and what you offer.

Learn who is in charge of recreational programs like baseball and

tennis in your community, then place a phone call, send a letter or make in-person connections to introduce yourself and your business.

The Archery Trade Association created a customizable letter for ease of letter, phone and in-person introductions. Email Nicole Nash, ATA manager of retail programs, at nicolenash@archerytrade.org for a copy of the customizable letter.

3) Ask and then listen.

After introducing yourself to a contact, ask how you can help the department expand local archery offerings. And then - this step is vital - listen to the answer.

Partnerships aren't one-size-fits-all. The needs of a Parks and Recreation Department that is new to offering archery differ from the needs of a department with its own archery range and equipment.

Kim Meester and his wife, Deb, own Archery Outfitters in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Archery Outfitters' partnership with the Parks and Recreation Department began when the Meesters taught hunter safety workshops.

"We've helped the Parks-and-Rec Department with displays at their outdoor campus, sold them discontinued equipment at a discount and taught classes before they had an archery facility," Kim said. "In exchange, the Parks-and-Rec Department recommends our shop because they know we offer excellent products and service. We have a proven reputation of not pushing people to spend more than they can afford."

Before finalizing any partnership agreements, learn how the department works with partners to strengthen other sports. Don't accept less than other partners receive for similar contributions. If the department registers

and receives payments from customers playing tennis and a tennis shop is providing courts, equipment and instruction for 80 percent of the registration profits, your archery shop should receive a similar percentage for

similar resources.

4) Offer fun experiences.

Providing exciting archery experiences is the best way to earn repeat customers and word-of-mouth recommendations.

Podcasts: A Growing Medium to Reach Archers

Most consumers use social media throughout their daily routine but you don't have to be a social media expert to reap the benefits of podcasts. A study by edisonresearch.com indicates podcasts account for nearly 26 percent of the time spent listening to audio content.

Even more, bowhunting-related podcasts are on the rise, increasing the chance that your shop may have a) customers who listen to podcasts and b) customers who might find added value in your website or social media sites if you consider sharing tips and links to popular podcasts. There are even podcasts developed for the business-minded archery manufacturer or retailer.

Podcasts are online audio-only recordings that require no visual attention. They're easy to listen to while doing something else, such as working in your archery shop. They are presented in an episodic format as part of a larger, ongoing series or uploaded as single posts that stand on their own. Content ranges from entertaining to educational and from interviews to personal testimonies.

Podcasts have increased in popularity since finding their niche in about 2004-05. A recent article

on washingtonpost.com reported, "RawVoice, which tracks 20,000 shows, said the number of unique monthly podcast listeners has tripled to 75 million from 25 million five years ago." The article also considers the intimacy of podcasts, saying, "Podcasters also like the personal connection they have with fans who listen through earbuds or headphones, which can make shows feel more intimate than other forms of media."

The Archery Trade Association has added podcasts to its archerytrade.org editorial calendar for later this year. The group will use the audio episodes to provide tips for how members can maximize store revenue and improve their shops' marketing strategy and brand visibility. In addition, bowhuntingfreedom.com produces podcasts about career and professional achievement.

Podcasts by fmpbowcast.wordpress.com are about hunting and bowhunting. Topics include shooting technique, new products and tips for improved health and nutrition for bowhunters. Alternatively, "Wired to Hunt" is a top-rated deer hunting series available for download on iTunes, with over 280 five star reviews. Finally, early this year, "Meateater" television host

"Engaging programs generate partnerships," Nash said. "If people have fun while shooting archery at your shop, they'll not only promote you; they may also want to help you grow."

Steven Rinella launched his own podcast as hunting's version of National Public Radio. It's a cerebral take on hunting with an added twist of sarcasm and humor.

In other words, podcasts provide entertainment, online tutorials or condensed how-to books. Podcasts update archery business owners on trends and topics their customers may find interesting. Plus, they're a great way to improve your own knowledge base without stealing from an already-packed daily schedule. Podcasts are money. They require no visual attention and are easy to listen to while driving, working out or stocking shelves in your store.

By Taylor Walston

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