



Behind the Counter

by Randy Booth

Categorizing Your Customers

If there is one thing I've learned in over two years of working in an archery pro shop, it's that you can't always pick a bow shooter out of a crowd.

A lot of hunters are obvious: they are decked out in camo and wear Hoyt hats that look like they're about to fall apart. But not all look that way. Sometimes, they can sneak into the shop and just look like they are just browsing the store. In our shop, we see all kinds of people because the store serves all kinds of people. It's a bow shop but it also has a gun room, a fishing section, recreation, hardware, gifts and toys and the list goes on. Just because someone is looking at a bow doesn't mean he or she wants to buy a bow. Sometimes that person really is just looking.

In one particular case, a customer truly stumped me and I will most likely never forget it.

The man, who was most likely in his early 20s, walked in and started looking at our long rack of bows. He was well

dressed and wearing a knit hat. From a quick look, he certainly did not seem like he was interested in purchasing a bow; perhaps he was just browsing, like a lot of customers tend to do as they hike through the store. I approached him anyway to see if he needed help with anything.

He said he was just looking around, so I gave him a little space as I continued some paperwork from before. After a few minutes, he was still looking at a particular bow. At that point, I re-approached him and quickly convinced him to take a few shots in our range.

As it turned out, he used to shoot a recurve when he was much younger and was interested in getting back into the sport. In fact, once I got him on the range, he was an excellent shot despite never having shot a compound bow. He didn't have much money but once I filled him in on our layaway plan, we found the right bow and we put his name on it.

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It wasn't a big sale by any means. It was just a mid-level price package bow that he enjoyed shooting. It didn't have a carbon riser or parallel limbs. But it was a sale: a sale that might not have happened had I taken the customer at face value.

This instance proved to me that I couldn't assume anything in this job. Just because a person doesn't look like he or she is in the market for a bow doesn't mean that person won't be ready to buy that day. It's important to interact with customers, even the ones who are just browsing, to gauge their interest. There is a reason why they are looking. Your job is to figure out exactly what that reason is.

Sometimes it's not just about whether or not a person in your shop wants to buy a bow. Another area in which you should not judge a customer by his or her cover is when it comes to how much the customer plans to spend.

I had a customer a few weeks back who, like the previous example, was just browsing bows. However, it didn't take long to learn he was ready to buy that day. We took a look at a handful of different models, all in the mid-level price range, that he seemed to have interest in. I gave him prices and he seemed to be comfortable with everything. He never really told me what he wanted to spend.

After talking about a few of those models, it seemed that range was where we would find his bow of choice. But after hearing what he was looking for, I decided I would at the very least put a high-priced bow in his hand that I thought he would like. I figured he might not buy it but it might win him over.

As it turned out, it won him over quickly. He decided to buy that \$1,049 bow that day. *Wonderful*, I thought. But I immediately began to wonder about the rest of the bow. If he was going to spend half that price on a bow package originally, what was he going to outfit the bow with?

As I've written about before in this space, I don't believe in outfitting a high-end bow with low-end accessories. It happens, of course but I think there are better ways to fit a bow to an archer. I wasn't too confident that it would all come together in that customer's price range.

So what happened? He grabbed a \$260 stabilizer for the bow. Then a \$150 rest. And then a \$200 sight. Against everything I expected, not only did he buy a great bow but he outfitted it with fantastic accessories. Then, when the bill came due, he didn't bat an eyelash.

While all signs pointed toward a \$500 bow package when we started working together, it was almost four times that when it was all said and done. He didn't know exactly what he wanted at first but he seemed to have no doubt that he had made the right decision when he left the shop. Once again, I made an early assumption about something that played out a lot differently than I expected.

I continue to be surprised in the shop on almost a weekly basis, it seems. Customers can surprise you. There's no one way to read them all. Even if you think you have them pegged, that can easily and quickly be turned around on you.

"Expect the unexpected," as the saying goes. When it comes to selling bows, that's your only option. ←



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