

On the Level

A Look at What's Happening at Retail in the Running Market

We checked in with a few retailers whose business is centered around running to gauge what's hot and what's not, and what they are doing to keep their businesses healthy. They each have different strategies and stories to tell, but they all have one thing in common — a positive outlook.

Runners High 'n Tri



According to owner Mark Rouse, the triathlon and multisports categories, in particular have been “going through the roof” for Runners High 'n Tri, which has one store, located outside Chicago in Arlington Heights, IL. Triathlon has always been part of the store's marketing. Three-and-a-half years ago the store moved to its present location and expanded its multisports and triathlon selection. “When we relocated and expanded we really focused on the multi-sport athlete,” says Rouse. “It has really taken off in the last two years.”

Have you noticed any key changes in the way consumers are spending money in your store?

Our business has been very strong, but we have noticed some changes in their buying habits. They are buying a lot of technical gear. We are selling a lot of tri apparel and more expensive, technical type items such as Garmin and Polar heart rate monitors. But basic running clothes and stuff, those sales have tailed off.

How are you promoting key categories and your business overall?

We're doing a lot more in-store events and a lot more electronic media on sites like twitter (twitter.com/runnershighntri). We also do e-mail blasts. We try to think outside the box to get to our core customers. We have a person who we've contracted out to do a lot of that.

Are you involved in more or fewer events than in previous years?

We're doing more. We try to be involved with packet pickups for races and triathlons, and we do a good job of drawing people into the store for the first time whether it is by hosting a guest speaker or a packet pickup for an event.

How important is the female customer in your store? Do you do specific things to target and service women consumers?

It is the fastest growing segment in our store. We do a lot for women with guest speakers. We had Kristin Armstrong, the Olympic gold medal cyclist and Kara Lynn Joyce, the Olympic silver medal swimmer come in. A lot of our guest speakers are females and it shows a positive influence to younger gals. They see what can happen if they follow their dreams.

What's your business forecast through the end of the year?

Double digit growth. And that's coming off of a record year last year.

Do you see endurance as its own category in your store? Does it drive

sales in nutrition and hydration?

It does drive sales. We have customers who do everything from marathons and up, such as ultra running and ultra triathlons. We get a lot of people coming in for the nutrition and accessories products we carry for ultra. Distance stuff is huge right now. Everyone is looking at the next horizon now. They've run a 5k, now they want to do a 10k and then a half and then a marathon and now a 50k. It's the same with tri, from a sprint to an Olympic distance to an Ironman.

What about triathlon/multisport? How is business in that sector?

Wetsuits and triathlon apparel and gear is doing really well for us. There are a lot of people still getting into the sport. Triathlon and multisport is the new 'marathon goal.' We saw and are still seeing tremendous growth in marathon participation and now we are seeing it in multisport participation.

The biggest surprise so far this year has been:

Probably our growth in Newton running. We knew it would be a steady category but we didn't know it was going to explode like this. The brand is booming. They have a select group of dealers and we are fortunate to be one of them. It's our number three brand now behind Brooks and Asics. The shoe helps promote that mid foot strike and a more efficient way to run. With all of the coaching going on about form right now and the talk of different running methods, this shoe helps you get to that. They've done a fantastic job of marketing and the product is excellent. It's an expensive shoe, and it helps our bottom line because it's not something everyone carries. People seek us out to buy it.

At this time next year, I hope:

We're just hoping for continued double digit growth and to help our community stay fit. We want to recruit more runners and help people get healthy and stay healthy. And we want to continue to serve the customers we have.

TrySports



Owner Jim Kirwan has four TrySports stores, focusing on run and triathlon, in North Carolina and South Carolina, including two 3000-square-foot stores that opened last year. “That was kind of scary as things turned out,” says Kirwan. “We weren't aware of what was coming down the

tracks when we signed the leases in late 2007 and early 2008, before the 'you know what' hit the fan. It was kind of a scary time because as we were doubling in size we weren't getting the support from our bank. We had some scary times, but we came through it very well. It was a risk worth taking, and I'm pleased how it developed.”

Have you noticed any key changes in the way consumers are spending money in your store?

In Q1 there was more caution. January and February were relatively quiet