



Sportago has been in St. Helena, CA. for 22 years. We have gone through a shift in product several times since 1983, but the core fundamentals of our store have remained the same. We have settled on an active lifestyle approach to the outdoor industry, which our women clientele find practical and accessible. Our store is 2000 square feet and located off the general shopping district. Over 40% of our clientele is from out of town, which makes it imperative that we create a positive first shopping experience that will inspire return visits. One bell that rings true for us; women are more likely to return if they feel welcome and satisfied with their shopping experience.

Products That Fit A Varied Lifestyle

What we've attempted to establish at Sportago is a sense of versatility in the outdoor lifestyle. You can find this theme in our product selection and merchandising throughout the store. This is particularly favorable to our women customers who are not necessarily in the upper echelon of hard-core athletes. We sell to pre-teens because it's cool to have a Patagonia fleece, to retired women who are hiking the Inca Trail, and to mothers who need to pick up their kids after yoga class. They are creating an active approach to every day life in which they need apparel that is as varied as they are. Not only are we looking for merchandise that fits this idea but also products that fit well, and that are fashionable. If their product is ugly or doesn't fit well your customer will not have a positive impression of your store when they pass by the piece in their closet. There has been an emergence of fashion forward apparel in the outdoor industry that really excites our female customers and us.

Companies like Victorinox, Water Girl, and Napapijri have sold well recently because they fit this ageless, female customer. For example,



Sportago merchandizes around a core item with a variety of lifestyles in mind.



an ideal product would be something you could work out in, take trekking in Nepal or wear out to dinner. It's important to think outside the box pertaining to the potential of each piece. Repeat sales will happen more often if the customer can wear the item for all aspects of their day, rather than a piece that is sport specific.

Create An Atmosphere For Woman

An important part in the conception of this idea is creating an atmosphere in which the woman shopper is comfortable and can clearly relate to the activities or lifestyle being portrayed by your product. At first glance our store looks more like a women's boutique than outdoor store. Our fixturing is clean and unique and represents a variety of ways to wear a particular core item. Our displays mirror the diverse women that we are marketing towards. One thing we aren't afraid to do is mix things up.

A classic example is a black stretch nylon pant that can be worn with a cute dress shirt and jacket for a night on the town. To continue to place this item with snow shoes or burly hiking boots is cutting its' potential in half and eliminates prospective buyers. The other half of the deal is the atmosphere in which your product is being sold. Small things will establish repeat women customers and take no special technical training or involvement. Starting a dressing room for them or providing a three way mirror are classic examples that will leave them once again looking around to make sure they're in an outdoor store. One thing we hear from our male customers time and again is "this is the only store I enjoy shopping with my wife." Hearing this we know we've created an inviting environment for all our customers.

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Our staff is trained to listen to women customer's needs and then start pulling items for them, even as they're in the dressing room. The shotgun effect is quite effective here (in the dressing room) and will represent your staff as knowledgeable and empathic. A fundamental way to improve how your staff relates to your female customers is by having them try on and use the merchandise.

"By being able to suggest a different, but similar style because of the way you know a garment fits is essential and will tell the woman that you know exactly what she needs."

We are still able to do this effectively with a staff that is mostly male, so don't think women need to sell to women and visa-versa. We also encourage the advertising of local events like fundraisers and charity walks and races in the store. We have a bulletin board where our customers can bring in their recent trip pictures, and get ideas for their next one. Our staff

is dialed into the activities available in our area and are always able to suggest something to do. All of this is informative for our customers, but more importantly it nourishes a family-like environment in their shopping experience and keeps us in tune with the needs of our community. One more thing I can't emphasize enough is your choice of music. Having conducive shopping music that isn't overbearing or generation specific will have an amazing effect on your customers, especially women. I've never seen anyone leave a store for playing mellow music. It is impossible to train your staff to accommodate every situation or activity that walks through the door, but teaching them to adapt what they do know, from their own experiences to a variety of situations, is the best thing you can do for your customers. Creating this seamless shopping experience is instrumental in developing a strong female clientele.

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