

Co-Founder of Another Mother Runner has Some Helpful Advice for Running Stores.

Building Community Pays Off



By Jennifer Ernst Beaudry

Make your store the hub of a running community, and you'll see the results. That's the message Sarah Bowen Shea had for attendees of The Running & Fitness Event For Women in Chicago, where she hosted a panel, "How To Foster Community – While Growing Your Business."

Bowen Shea, the co-founder and COO of women's running network Another Mother Runner and a running and gear expert whose writing

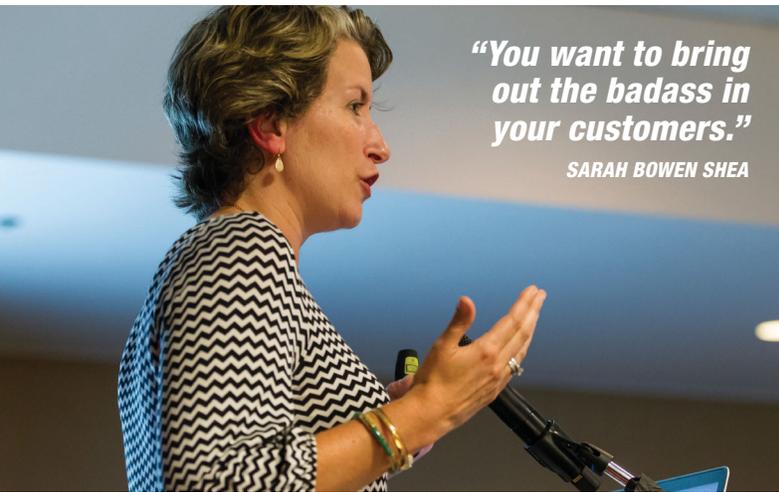
has appeared in publications including *Runner's World*, *Shape*, *The New York Times* and *Self*, knows what she's talking about. Another Mother Runner has racked up more than 44,000 fans on Facebook and thousands of listeners to the weekly podcast Bowen Shea creates in conjunction with co-founder Dimity McDowell. And Bowen Shea said that lines generally spill out the door when Another Mother Runner hosts an event.

When it comes to speaking to women, she said, stores already have an advantage. "Women like to share their

running," Bowen Shea said. "You can hear them coming on the street, right? They're running, they're talking, they're sharing."

To create loyal customers of female shoppers, Bowen Shea said, making a running store environment "welcoming" is critical. Stores should put a premium on hiring approachable, knowledgeable staff members — and train them to talk to each shopper wherever they are in their running career. (No assuming everyone is a beginner; no making anyone feel intimidated or "stupid" about what they don't know.) Making sure your staff reflects

Building Community Pays Off (continued)



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SARAH BOWEN SHEA

your running population helps, too: an employee lineup with a diversity of ages, running levels and other factors helps shoppers feel like they belong, too, even if they're not collegiate all-stars.

And, she said, showcasing those employees — or even loyal customers — in your social media posts helps not only reinforce a connection to the community, it helps shoppers

know that apparel and gear in their size and targeted to their needs will be in stock.

And, Bowen Shea said, making sure you merchandise a variety of sizes prominently makes shoppers feel welcomed. Keep a range of sizes out, and consider using signage in the dressing rooms letting people know you're happy to special order. “Don't just put out the size small sports bras,” she said. “No one wants to yell from the dressing room that they need a bigger size.”

And build on that sense of “welcome” in social media communications, Bowen Shea said. Use Facebook, Instagram and email messaging to share advice and tips — “don't tout

yourself too much,” she said. “Make it less about you, and more about them.”

In fact, she said, making your store a place that solves your shoppers' problems — whether it's a kids area that lets her shop while her kids are occupied, or regular all-paces-welcome running groups or programs that give her a chance to meet a “best running friend” — will net you return visits, as well as referrals.

Making consumers feel like they're part of something great will empower them and keep them loyal, she said: “You want to bring out the badass in your customers.” ■

A photograph of Scott Jurek, an ultra marathon runner, running on a dirt trail in a desert landscape. He is wearing a yellow tank top, black shorts, and a white visor. The background shows a vast, open landscape with sparse vegetation and mountains in the distance under a clear sky.

Congratulations to Scott

for setting the new supported
Appalachian Trail Record!

2,200 miles in 46 days, 8 hrs, 7 minutes!

Scott Jurek
Ultra Marathon Champion
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The logo for Pro-Tec Athletics, featuring a stylized 'P' and 'T' inside a blue and yellow circle, followed by the text 'PRO-TEC ATHLETICS'.