

ZERO IN ON OPTICS SALES

**YOUR CUSTOMERS HAVE THE GUNS.
NOW SELL THEM THE OPTICS THEY NEED!**

Today's array of optics is dizzying — new reticles, new body designs, new laser enhancements, new everything.

Despite all the whistles and bells, the basics of selling optics are the same as they've always been. Know your market, know your products and know your customers. If you keep those things in mind, you can make a substantial profit selling today's optics.

Look At Buying Trends

Start with your customers. What are they buying?

"The optics market has changed in the past five years, and it's continuing to evolve," said Cyndi Flannigan, sales manager for Leupold. "Just like everything else, people like the latest and greatest. Glass and coatings have become very good, and products have gotten much better. Hunters and shooters realize the older scopes they have on their rifles need to be replaced, which is where we see a lot of sales."

Flannigan says with innovation in new calibers and rifles comes the opportunity

for dealers to sell new scopes.

"For instance, when we saw the surge in handguns last year, and to a certain extent, in the 'black gun' market, customers didn't spend money on optics at that time; they were investing that money in the guns. What we're seeing now is people spending money to put optics on those

well, they're going to try to stick with that brand. We're seeing tactical sales increasing every year, and it's not all going to military and law enforcement — it's also the regular guy who wants to put that kind of scope on his rifle."

Flannigan says it comes down to the fact that tactical and traditional scopes work the same way.

"Tactical scopes may be more advanced than traditional scopes, but customers learn to use them very quickly," she said.

What makes many tactical scopes different from "regular" riflescopes? Reticles, finger-adjustable

dials, side-focus parallax adjustments and range estimators, according to Flannigan. Appearance wise, many tactical scopes are matte black, and tend to look beefy and more rugged.

What's Moving Off The Shelves?

The hot thing right now is laser rangefinder-equipped riflescopes. The target demographic for these products is your high-tech,

*Optics have a really good margin.
Plus, people love toys, and optics are
toys from a sales perspective.*

guns," Flannigan said.

Along with increasing sales in the civilian market, there is an upswing in the sales of tactical optics, as well.

"The tactical market is growing a little faster than the rest of the optics market," Flannigan said. "There are a lot of servicemen coming home, and they've used a lot of good products during their deployment. If that product served them



Trijicon AccuPoint Series features self-luminous aiming technology, superb clarity and a crosshair reticle. Visit www.shootingindustry.com/trijicon.html.

gotta-have-the-latest-toy customers.

Although the technology behind laser-rangefinding riflescopes is sophisticated, the principle is simple. The laser rangefinder tells you how far away your target is, and you compensate by holding the point of impact high enough to make a precise hit on your target.

Companies manufacturing these riflescopes include Bushnell, Nikon and Burris.

Additionally, consumers are beginning to understand the importance of good binoculars.

"In the past, many hunters would spend good dollars for a rifle and a riflescope, and then buy a real inexpensive binocular. Today's consumers are much smarter, and they understand the value of binoculars when they're hunting — so that market is growing," Flannigan said.

Spotting scopes are somewhat of a specialized market, when compared to riflescopes and binoculars.

"Customers want spotting scopes to be fairly lightweight if they're packing in," she said. "But the spotting scope market also has been very strong. Again, the consumer likes his toys. Particularly if he's hunting without a guide, he's going to bring his own spotting scope, too."

Display To Sell

The more sophisticated optics become, the more important it is to let customers touch, feel, handle, look through and eventually take emotional ownership of them. Display optics where customers can easily see them, and lay them out in such a way that they're easy to examine.

Although the usual place for optics is under a glass counter, try putting some at eye level, where customers can



For 2010, Minox offers two new Comfort Bridge binoculars, BL 8x44mm and 10x44mm, featuring increased fields of view. Visit www.shootingindustry.com/minox.html.

see them without bending over. Ideally, this should be an open shelf near a window, where customers can pick them up and look outside through them, even if you secure them to the shelf with a cable. Displaying optics in this manner

is a "silent salesman."

One good strategy is to separate products into categories and brands so customers can see very clearly what you have available. Vendors' POP displays do this very effectively.

Weaver Optics Celebrates 80 Years

Weaver celebrates its 80th anniversary this year with a limited-edition K-Series K4 steel-tube scope. The 4x38mm commemorative scope is shipped in a vintage collector's tin with a Timex Expedition watch.

For those shooters who love the K-Series and the nostalgia of bygone years, this commemorative K4 fixed-power scope is a reflection of a timeless classic.

"We know millions of hunters were brought up under the Weaver name. And many of them fondly remember their first steel-tube K4. It was often passed down

to future generations of hunters. The K4 remains a true classic, and was an obvious choice for our 80th anniversary scope," said Tom Knudtson, Weaver's product line manager.

Like the original K-Series scopes, the limited-edition K4 features original styl-

ing, with modern optics technology: steel-tube construction, fingertip-adjustable 1/4" MOA turrets, dual-X reticle and eye relief of 3.2". The scope is 11 1/2" long and weighs 15.3 oz.

Visit www.shootingindustry.com/weaver.html.



Weaver
Limited-Edition K-Series K4



Becoming Too High-Tech?

In focusing on all the high-tech stuff on the market, can you get too far out in front of your customers, and leave your more traditional hunters behind?

Miles Hall, president of H&H Gun Range and Shooting Sports Outlet in Oklahoma City, Okla., says you can do exactly that if you don't know enough about what you're selling.

"Just because you have a Ferrari for sale doesn't mean you know how to sell it," he said. "You have to know what you're selling, and that's a challenge."

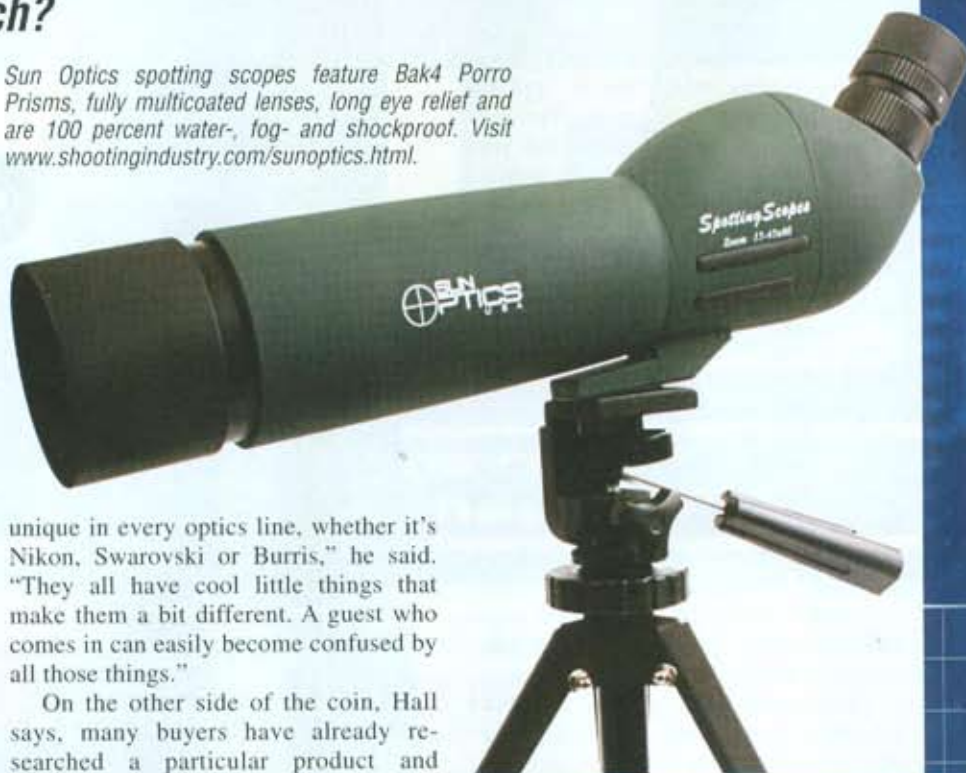
That means it's all about education — yours.

"Retailers can call on their sales reps and vendors to come in and provide training at the dealer level to all their employees," Flannigan said. "The reps may even take the employees to a range and let them shoot, and show them how all the new products work."

Hall agrees that this is a great training tool.

"There are so many things that are

Sun Optics spotting scopes feature Bak4 Porro Prisms, fully multicoated lenses, long eye relief and are 100 percent water-, fog- and shockproof. Visit www.shootingindustry.com/sunoptics.html.



unique in every optics line, whether it's Nikon, Swarovski or Burris," he said. "They all have cool little things that make them a bit different. A guest who comes in can easily become confused by all those things."

On the other side of the coin, Hall says, many buyers have already researched a particular product and

know a great deal about it.

"If you try to baffle those customers with BS, you're going to lose the sale," he said. "You need to have all your team members clued into each product, and know why each one is unique and special, so your team can speak intelligently about them."

Leading Customers

When you reach the point where you're comfortable with what you're selling and know your products, then you're in a position to sell today's optics, Flannigan says.

"As with everything else, the consumer walks into the store looking for advice," she said. "And he wants to know that the guy behind the counter knows the product really well. A lot of new features seem more 'out there' than they really are, and once a dealer explains to a consumer how they work, the consumer will buy what the dealer has to sell."

It's also about knowing your customer — what he is going to use the riflescope for, and how much money

Carson's lightweight 3D Series binoculars have thumb grooves, "just right" texturing and all-over body ergonomics. Visit www.shootingindustry.com/carsonoptical.html.

he has in his pocket.

"You want to lead him in the right direction; there are great riflescopes at all price levels now," Flannigan said. "Leupold recently came out with a Redfield scope, so now we have Leupold quality in the Redfield brand."

In binoculars, Carson Optical fills a nice niche. Besides having a complete line of full-size, zoom and compact binoculars, Carson also offers monoculars and riflescopes. In addition, the company has a number of specialty optics, which dealers can use to help interest youth in the outdoors, including pocket microscopes, magnifiers and youth binoculars.

Alpen and Burris are in a similar price niche with riflescopes, with Bushnell a step above, with items such as their Bone Collector muzzleloader scope and Digital Color NightVision Monocular. Nikon and Zeiss carry high-end optics, including



Zeiss' Victory PhotoScope that integrates a digital camera into a spotting scope.

The bottom line? Optics mean green in your sales drawer.

"Optics have a really good margin," Hall said. "Plus, people love toys, and optics are toys from a sales perspective." ☺

OPTICS MARKET

See Reader Service, page 60, for a listing of optics manufacturers.