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## What Retailers Want

By Michael Sudmeier

Specialty retailer seeks a partner with commitment, empathy, and a record of favorable dating. Rather than serving as a catchphrase on Match.com, these words summarize what retailers desire most from the brands they back.

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### DISCIPLINED GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION

A brand's growth has often solidified or soured its retail relationships. "Brands need to be careful how they grow and recognize that the specialty retail channel is vital to their future," explains Jeff Ryner of B.C. Surf and Sport. "The number one thing brands need to realize is how important it is to keep their products special and unique. I feel the biggest draw for a consumer to shop at specialty retail is to find things they cannot find elsewhere."

### REGION-SPECIFIC SOLUTIONS

Brands can benefit from better understanding the

unique needs of each region, explains Michael Theines, co-owner of The Youth Shelter Supply in Minnesota. "Brands are flooding markets with too much product for the skateboarders and snowboarders in each territory," he notes. "A lot of brands don't look out their SoCal window to understand each territory properly."

### MORE FAVORABLE DATING

"The snow selling window has contracted with a greater percentage of those sales taking place after the holidays, and therefore at a lower margin," explains Scott Oreschnick, owner

of Minneapolis, Minnesota's Cal Surf. "We need dating and pricing that reflects these facts." Costa Mesa, California's Surfside Sports Owner Duke Edukas, elaborates, "Our invoices are generally due 12/1 at best. On a good year that's hard. We don't even start selling most of our products until then. However, the brands help us out a ton with just about everything else."

*Fortunately, many brands are working to address these needs and they don't need to read Cosmo to understand that communication and adaptation are essential to successful relationships.*

## Four on the Floor Getting the Most Out of SIA



**Scheduling longer times for meetings gives brands a better ability to learn what market trends are developing at each retailer, so the brand and retailer can collaborate on a unique order focused on success instead of just a one-size-fits-all solution.**

—Erich Dummer, Media Director, Academy Snowboards



**The best way [for retailers] to maximize their time is to do sell through reports before they head out to SIA, then they can order exactly the right numbers of gear that their store needs. I suggest retailers look through discounts to do proper orders of gear they can sell, taking into account possible carry over.**

—Michael Thienes, Co-owner, The Youth Shelter Supply, Waite Park, Minnesota



**Brands need to focus on their retailers' needs. Retailers have a hard time selling product and a brand that is not unique. Make your brand stand out from the crowd.**

—Dustin Morrell, Owner, Niche Snowboards



**The show provides a great opportunity to meet not only with local sales reps, but also marketing staff, sales managers and credit folks. Just one productive face-to-face meeting can potentially cover the traveling expense for the whole show!**

—Missy Samiee, Proprietress, Exit Real World, Salem, Oregon



Gigi Rűf enjoying the fruits of his new brand, Slash. Photo: Tanon

## SIA's 2012 Rookie Line Up

**In grade school, being the new kid brings attention. If lucky, you're deemed worthy of acceptance and embraced by friends. If things don't work out, however, you're liable to suffer. For brands debuting at SIA, the stakes are equally high.**

"SIA provides the opportunity for us to formally introduce ourselves," explains

Bon Hiver Cofounder Brendan Walker. The brand is unveiling its Freebase Binding System at SIA.

Bon Hiver and other new brands view the on-snow demo as equally important. According to Oz Owner Adam Browning, it "allows potential retail partners to take our boards out on the slopes and experience for

themselves all of the technology that has gone into our designs."

For a number of folks, SIA isn't their first rodeo. Dinosaurs Will Die, for example, has gained significant momentum since its inception in 2005. "We want to secure our presence as a brand that is here to stay," explains Cofounder

Sean Genovese. Other new brands have a team of industry veterans behind them. NOW's experienced team aims to reinvent the binding with technology inspired by skate trucks. Gigi Rűf's new company, Slash, will reveal its boards at SIA—a year ahead of its initial schedule. Naklin, the brainchild of Kevin Jones

and Mission Six Founder Abe Gilreath, will debut its collection of Merino wool base layers at the show. According to Gilreath, "SIA gathers all the key players in the industry together at one time and if you use this time effectively, SIA is a great way to strengthen relationships and build new ones."

—By Michael Sudmeier



# Anti-Outerwear Invasion



Outerwear was once considered an essential part of a rider's kit. Now, however, more and more riders are abandoning jackets in favor of streetwear. These riders are "shopping at thrift stores, wearing streetwear as outerwear, and getting all wet while doing it," explains Airblaster Cofounder Jesse Grandkoski. To better meet the needs of these riders, many brands are offering collections that blend street style with technical features like moisture wicking fabrics and water-repellant finishes. The resulting collections often include technical hoodies, flannels, and lightweight shells.

"The main goal is to create pieces that don't quite look like typical snowboard outerwear," explains Grandkoski. Bonfire's BSC Collection, for example, aims to bridge the gap between the streets and the mountains. According

to Bonfire Global Marketing Manager Amy Eichner, the collection addresses "the biggest trend happening in snowboarding." It does this, in part, by featuring "Rider-specific functions such as DWR coatings, audio pockets, thumb loops, and adjustable hoods and hems, but with streetwear finishes like antiqued trims and slimmed down silhouettes." Such features ensure technical streetwear is capable of looking as good as it performs.

Brands offering this new apparel are careful to stay true to the aesthetics of the streets. As Mike Thienes, co-owner of The Youth Shelter Supply, explains, "Some customers want tech outerwear, but many just want something less tech and something that they don't look like a kook in." Grandkoski notes that inspiration for technical streetwear often comes from skating and street fashion. "In the skateboard world," he offers, "looking like a futuristic, robot space traveler is not really a huge goal like it is in, say, mainstream mountain biking."

"Technical streetwear is a big focus for us—it's an area we want to grow quite a bit. The cross over of use is very important for us and our customer," adds Airblaster Cofounder Paul Miller. According to CandyGrind Creative Director Austin Paik, technical streetwear is also gaining momentum because "It's a style based in comfort and simplicity." Fortunately for riders, they can enjoy this comfort wherever their adventures take them—be it trips around town, rail sessions, or backcountry missions.

—Michael Sudmeier

## Four on the Floor

What's the best product or collection you've seen on the floor?



"I haven't been here that long, but so far the coolest thing I've seen would have to be the new Anon [M1] goggle with the magnetic changeable lens."

—Duke Edukas, Co-owner, Surfside Sports, Costa Mesa, CA



"The Women's Forum Spinster 143 board graphic of this cute little deer blowing bubble gum out his bum. Great to see some brands cater to female humor instead of your basic pink swirls and flowers."

—Karen Craig, Merchandise Division Manager—Softgoods, Dogfunk.com



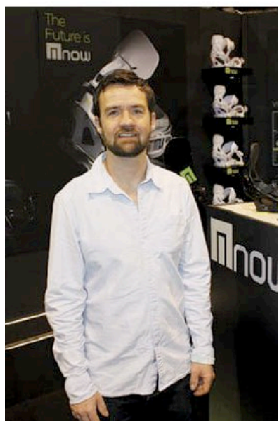
"I'm definitely seeing some nice, new backcountry gear. I'm super stoked to see the splitboard side of things growing . . . it's certainly not going away."

—Matt Gotthainer, Owner, Polar Opposites, Silverton, CO



"The Burton Family Tree—it's cool stuff. Burton's getting back to its roots with new freeride and backcountry gear."

—Warren Currie, Owner, The Easy Rider, Edmonton, AB



## The Time is NOW

For over six years, snowboarding legend J.F. Pelchat has been testing and developing binding designs. Today, he debuted the culmination of his efforts—NOW bindings. Inspired by skate trucks, NOW uses a series of interfacing, pivoting parts to transfer energy and minimize vibrations. "Because the design is essentially baseless, the flex and feel of the board

are uninterrupted," says Pelchat.

Pelchat recruited Alex Warburton to serve as the brand's product director. With a strong background in industrial design, Warburton helped bring NOW to market. Warburton offers that the initial response to NOW has been "Phenomenal. It's exceeded even our most optimistic expectations." He gives a lot of

credit to Pelchat for getting the word out. Over the past few months, Pelchat has been leaking videos and testimonies from riders rocking the brand's new bindings. These videos have been catching people's eyes, especially since they feature living legends Jeremy Jones and Devun Walsh.

Although the videos and testimonies have increased awareness of NOW's bind-

ings, Warburton feels innovation is at the heart of NOW's success. He has seen this innovation secure smiles on "even the most jaded buyers." He and Pelchat have already spent much of their winter hitting the road to put retailers in touch with the brand and get them strapped into NOW's bindings on the slopes. "It's been a blast to interact with retailers—it's something I've never

done in the past," Pelchat explains. For Warburton, seeing the reaction of these retailers "gave us the confidence to step into the trade shows and feel comfortable" debuting NOW. He adds, "People are interested because this is legit. J.F. has created a binding that turns a snowboard better." So far, it looks like these turns are going to make a lot of riders smile. —M.S.



## The Backcountry Boom

As more and more riders earn their turns, it's no longer safe to assume they all love granola and cultivating beards. With diverse interests and needs, these riders are creating new opportunities for retailers and brands.

The reasons for the growth of backcountry riding are as diverse as the riders themselves. Venture Co-founder Lisa Branner offers, "I think there is a natural progression, and that as riders' skill levels increase, they are drawn outside the resort boundaries for untracked snow, as well as all the other experiences and challenges the backcountry can provide." The abundance of resorts opening their sidecountry gates has made this progression even more feasible. Maturing riders are also driving this growth. "I think there are lots of snowboarders in the twenty-five plus category who are more interested in getting out of bounds than riding the park," explains Will Ritter of Spark. "Ten years ago that wasn't so much the case. Recent media attention, including films like Deeper, has opened riders' eyes to the blank canvas that is the backcountry.

New technology is also making the backcountry more accessible and enjoyable. Branner cites Spark's bindings as a catalyst for much of the growth in splitboard-

ing. Recent advancements also include additional binding and hardware systems, boards merchandised as backcountry kits, splitboard-specific boots, and refined accessories like packs and poles.

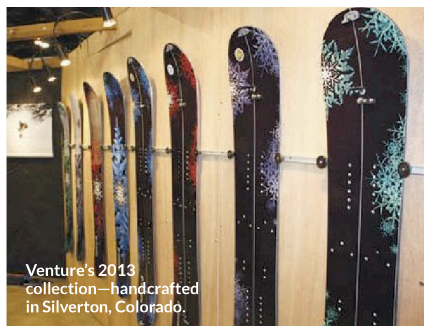
This technology and the growing demand for it have provided new opportunities for retailers. Sean Robinson, owner of Denver's Emage, explains, "The expanded amount of backcountry gear specifically for snowboarding has been well received by our customers. Like anything else, I think the level of success to be had depends strongly on the staff's knowledge of backcountry riding, the equipment, and use of it." Emage is on the same block in Denver as several outdoor retailers. Yet Robinson has found that this has led to collaboration rather than competition. He directs his customers to these stores for non-snowboard specific items and they, in turn, send customers to him for specialty products.

Brands and retailers are also working to ensure that riders

are armed with knowledge—not just beacons, shovels, and probes. The North Face, for example, has partnered with retailers to develop its Know Boundaries campaign, which showcases both products and opportunities to learn about snow safety. This year, SIA debuted The Backcountry Experience. This section of the show highlights backcountry products and features educational clinics led by Jeremy Jones, Mike Hattrup, and Dean Cummings.

Riders are suddenly facing countless choices as to how they can explore the backcountry. According to Justin Lamoureux, K2 development engineer for snowboards, some of these choices will always be simple: "People want to ride pow."

—Michael Sudmeier



Venture's 2013 collection—handcrafted in Silverton, Colorado.

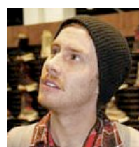
## Four on the Floor

Who has the best booth at SIA?



"Oakley. It pops out—it's different. It's classy and exclusive."

—Simon Elston, Owner, Big Sky Board Sports, Helena, MT



"The Forum, Special Blend, and Foursquare booth is pretty awesome. It's set up really nice for buyability and it's cool—it's the best of both worlds. They also have the

Wet Plate photography exhibit."

—Jacob Allen-Jordan, Manager, Moguls in Mocean, Orangeville, Ontario



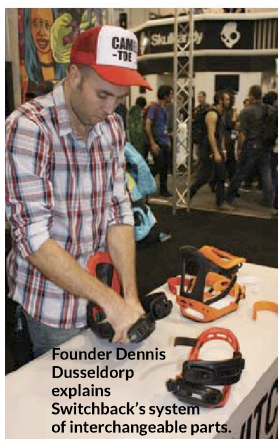
"The Smith booth. It's nice and clean—the product pops off the back fixtures."

—Jessica Milligan, VP of Product Sales and Services, Jackson Hole Mountain Resort, WY



"Burton. They visually tied the booth back to their story: The Family Tree."

—Mat Woods, Group General Manager and Director, R and R Sport, Dunedin, New Zealand



Founder Dennis Dusseldorp explains Switchback's system of interchangeable parts.

## Bindings—The New Rocker

For years, riders and retailers have embraced rockered decks like preteens at a Justin Bieber concert. The resulting camber stories—no matter their flavor—are not going anywhere. The spotlight, however, has shifted to new bindings.

Switchback makes it debut at SIA with bindings built around interchangeable parts and the ability to be ridden without highbacks. Riders purchase base-

plates, straps, highbacks, and baseplate cushions separately. As Founder Dennis Dusseldorp explains, "They can customize the bindings to their ability, the terrain they ride, and the color combo they like. They decide what they want to ride instead of the brand." According to Dusseldorp, riding without highbacks offers flexibility for jibbing and a surf-like feel in powder.

NOW's inaugural bind-

ings can also be ridden without highbacks and feature technology influenced by skate trucks. Burton's Free'd Back binding abandons highbacks entirely. The bindings—like those of Switchback and NOW—feature heelcups that firmly lock boots in place and will be available in an early '14 release model.

The absence of highbacks isn't the only development in bindings.

Bon Hiver offers step-in technology that enables riders to skate into terrain or clip in while on the chairlift. The bindings use conventional strap technology, but the rear binding features a magnetic baseplate that slides sideways into a receiving plate on a rider's deck.

Switchback, NOW, Burton, and Bon Hiver all aim to forge new paths. According to Bon Hiver Founder

Brendan Walker, developing new technology has been challenging, in part, because "We couldn't look at predecessor pitfalls and victories to harness these in our development." Instead, these brands have pioneered technology in solitude and secrecy. With retailers swarming their booths and embracing their bindings, however, they are no longer alone.

—M.S.

