

Increase Rink Profitability with Rental Skates

EDGE - JULY/AUG 2005

by Dan Riegelman

You may think you've tried everything to grow your rink's profits. But have you looked closely at your rental skate inventory? This often-overlooked segment of your business can give your rink a major boost.

The value of investing in rental skates

Rental skates deserve your attention because they're the most important part of customer satisfaction among recreational skaters. Providing skates that are old, dull or uncomfortable - even once - could cost you those customers for life.

The success of your rink is greatly affected by the "word of mouth" factor. If customers leave dissatisfied with your facility, customer service or rental skates, word will travel fast. Conversely, an enjoyable skating experience will spread a positive message. Offering quality rental skates gives customers a good reason to advocate your rink.

Rental skates are also a great tool for growing your customer base. They make it easy for parents to take their children skating for the first time. Adults looking for a new fitness outlet can give a skating a whirl. The quality of your rental skates can make or break the skating experience for first-timers like these. If the sport grows on them, they could be back every weekend.

Selecting the best skate mix

Once you've determined the need for new rental skates, it's time to decide what to buy. A good place to start is with your salesperson. This individual is a great resource to help you make an intelligent purchase decision. Weigh their recommendations knowing that it's in their best interest to help you choose the best mix of skates and retain you as a long-term customer.

Know your audience

To determine the right skate models and quantities for your rink, it's crucial that you understand your audience - the customers who will be renting from you. Who are they? What are they looking for?

Look closely at the skating programs and customer behavior at your rink. Is it figure skating- or hockey-driven? Do you offer skating times for schools and church groups? What is your rink's size and location? Do you offer learn-to-skate programs that often require rental skates?

Every situation is unique, but as a benchmark, the typical rink requires 300 to 500 pairs of rental skates. Of those, 65-70 percent are usually figure skates and 30-35 percent are hockey skates. Your salesperson should have formulas to help you determine a ballpark figure for you facility.

Pricing and delivery

The hardest part is over - you've decided on your rental skate investment. Now it's just a matter of getting the skates to your shop. Work with your salesperson to arrive at a fair price and ensure timely delivery. But be aware of freight charges, payment terms and potential back-orders so there are no surprises later.

Have a start date in mind to allow time for lacing, labeling and organizing the skates in your storage system. After that, you're ready to make your new skates available to your customers. Notice how their faces light up when you hand them a brand new pair of skates!

Rental skate maintenance: An investment in success

When you have a new rental skate inventory, upkeep is the last thing on your mind. But if you to start early, it's much easier to keep skates working and looking their best for the long haul.

Start with your blades. Create a regular sharpening schedule to make sure your customers are never stuck with a dull pair. Also, keep an eye out for rust. Be sure to wipe down blades after each use. If rust does appear, a light scrub with steel wool will take care of the problem.

Boots require attention, too. Always pull the tongues forward after each use for better drying. Don't neglect minor upkeep issues, such as replacing frayed laces and missing eyelets, as well as applying polish on occasion.

Remember the importance of creating a positive impression of your skates - it's one of the best ways to keep your customers coming back.

Dan Riegelman is the vice president of marketing for Riedell Skates.