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Will the Olympics Deliver Gold and Green to Running Stores?

The Olympics were a big hit on television attracting an average of more than 29 million viewers a night, but will the games give a boost to the running specialty business?

"They Olympics are already having a positive impact," said Garry Gribble of Garry Gribble's Sports in Kansas City, MO. "We're already hearing the buzz from our customers." This is a busy time of year for running stores, with the advent of back to school and cross-country business, but Gribble said the Olympics have generated some additional traffic and he has noticed increased interest in the Nike Lunar racers and trainers. "Some of the Olympic athletes were wearing them and customers have been asking for them," he noted.

Of course, swimmer Michael Phelps was the American star of the Olympics and Gribble noted he had sold more goggles than usual since the games began, a fact he attributed to the interest Phelps generated in swimming.

Mark Rouse of Runners High 'N Tri in Arlington Heights, IL also noticed a big bump in his swim business. "We've seen a 30% increase in swim," he said, "and it's not just us. The local swim clubs are

also reporting a big increase in interest."

The compression category has received the biggest "Olympics boost" in Rouse's store. "Our customers noticed many of the runners wearing compression sleeves and have come in asking for that product," he said.

■ The Nike Lunar racers and trainers.



Runner's High 'N Tri also had a specific connection to the Olympics. George Torres, who ran the men's 10,000 meters, shopped in the store as a high school track star.

Bob Roncker's Running Spot in Cincinnati had an Olympic connection, too. One of its employees, Mary Wineberg, won a gold medal in the 1600 meter relay. "She's a great person and we are thrilled for her," Roncker said.

Roncker said it's hard to tell if the Olympics have had any positive impact on his business yet. "It's

always inspiring for consumers to see what athletes can do and you hope some of that transfers over into increased activity, but we are not counting on a big bump."

Jane Alred of 1st Place Sports In Jacksonville said she sold out of



Nike Beijing 2008 shirts prior to the Olympics, but hasn't noticed any increase since then. "With the economy being what it is, it's hard to see any direct impact," she said. "Our business has been good, our race participation is up 18%, so it's difficult to tell if the Olympics are playing a role in that."

The biggest impact on the games may well be out of the United States. While NBC executives were thrilled with their rating numbers, those figures were dwarfed by TV viewership in China, which reportedly topped 800 million viewers on peak nights. ●

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Saucony Hires Allen as SVP Global Sales

Fran Allen has joined Saucony in the newly created position of Senior Vice President of Global Sales.

Allen comes to Saucony from New Balance Athletic Shoe, Inc., where as Executive Vice President of North American Sales, he was responsible for the brand's U.S. and Canadian sales

operations. Additionally, Allen was responsible for the successful creation of the independent New Balance Retail Store concept, with 170 stores currently in North America.

Before joining New Balance, Allen served in various sales and product marketing positions, including Director of Sales for Foot-Joy and Vice

President of Sales and Product at Puma, USA.

In his new post, Allen will be responsible for strategically building a quality global distribution network that aligns with the goals and initiatives of the Saucony brand as well as defining and implementing Saucony's strategic sales plans. ●

Running USA Board to Meet at The Running Event in November

Running USA will be holding its fall board of directors meeting at The Running Event this November. Running USA is the non-profit, association founded in 1999 to serve and facilitate the growth of all aspects and entities of running and its health and fitness benefits.

Susan Weeks, the former running retailer who was named the group's executive director earlier this year, said the decision was made so Running USA and its directors could seek a tighter connection with the running specialty stores and vendors who attend The Running Event. "We are interested in establishing strong relationships with both of those groups and discussing how we can all work together to grow the channel."

"Holding the Running USA Board meeting at The Running Event is great first step in that direction," Weeks said. She added that the Independent Running Retailers Association and Formula 4 Media, producers of the Running Event, will work together on a retail related



presentation at the Running USA Conference scheduled for Feb 8-10 in La Jolla. Additional information can be found at www.runningusa.org.

The Running Event will be held this year from November 10-13. It is a two-day conference followed by a two-day expo. Additional information can be found at www.therunningevent.com or by contacting Troy Leonard at tleonard@formula4media.com. ●



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Are You Approachable?

By Parker Karnan

At the first ever Running Event held in New York City, Bob Wallace, owner of RunOn! in Dallas, addressed the audience and challenged the group with a million dollar question. He commented, and I paraphrase, "Every specialty store owner has a woman who drives by their store every day. She is 30 pounds overweight, out of shape, unhappy about it, and wants to change, but she has no idea that we are here to help her. She doesn't even consider walking in our door. How do we appeal to her?"

The majority of specialty stores I have visited over the years were founded on the "for Runners by Runners" approach. Most owners have a running background and originally set up their businesses to appeal to like-minded people. As a result their customer base primarily consists of those people who consider themselves runners. The NSGA reports that 20.6 million people in the US identify themselves as runners--less than 9% of the adult population. Over time, most savvy owners have recognized the need to reach a broader audience. They recognize that many people who exercise don't consider themselves runners and as a result, stores have been positioning themselves through educational seminars, clinics, diva nights, beginning running groups, and other marketing tactics to attract a broader clientele. But does marketing that you are approachable make you

approachable? It is the difference between talking the talk and walking the walk.

What prompted me to write this article was a trip I recently took to a shopping destination in the southeast. As I window shopped the retailers on the main strip, I passed by a local specialty running store. The sign in the window made me stop in my tracks. "Help Wanted, Experienced Runners Only".

An approachable staff mirrors the customers it desires to attract. Running experience is a plus but certainly not a mandatory requirement unless a store wishes to confine its customer base to 9% of the adult population. I realize that my comments will rub some readers the wrong way and will be dismissed because in many minds store authenticity is established by having a team that models the running lifestyle. My contrarian position comes from a core belief that at specialty, the aspirational philosophy of establishing authenticity should give way to the approachable philosophy. The aspirational philosophy implies that customers aspire to adopt the attitudes and lifestyles the store presents. The approachable philosophy takes the customer where they are and offers customized solutions suitable for the individual. Aspirational branding works for electronic or automobile companies because it doesn't matter what you look like in order to be a part of the brand. However, the majority of the country believes that in order to step into a running store, you have to be fit. Have you ever delayed your annual doctor visit so that you could lose a few



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■ Are You Approachable? continued...

pounds first? Well, double that for someone who is out of shape and considers walking into a running store for the first time. Although effective for certain brands, the aspirational philosophy can polarize because it has the potential create an 'us versus them' mentality and intimidates those who feel they haven't arrived (most of us).

Intimidation is perhaps the biggest foe of specialty retail shops. It starts with the name of the store. Most have the words run, runner, or running in the store name; others imply quickness by using words like speed, pace, or fleet. The woman that drives by your store every day may never want to run and has no desire to go fast, but you want to help her, and you know you can. I do not recommend that you change the name of your store. I do recommend that you take a hard look at the way you present yourself. Look at your staff. Are they diverse? Look at the products you offer. Do they cover a broad range of athletic abilities and body types? Look at your fitting benches and dressing rooms. Are they comfortable for all ages and allow for

modesty? Look at your store posters, art, and décor. Do they feature health and community or do they feature Prefontaine and 'the lonely runner' brand campaigns? Specialty running shops throughout the country have steadily grown over the years and have helped millions of people get the advice, service, and products they needed, but there are so many others out there who don't know you exist. They drive right by without a consideration that you might be right for them. By taking a hard look at your business and assessing your approachability, you can open up a whole new world of customers and find your own answer to the million dollar question. ●

Questions or comments for Parker? Interested in talking specifically about your business? Keep an eye out for, Karnan Associates open office hours. Office hours are sponsored by the IRRA and are free of charge. Appointments can be made in advance and are first come first serve. Contact Karnan Associates at 206.601.7019, email parker@karnanassociates.com, or visit www.karnanassociates.com. • Parker is accredited by the Institute for Independent Business and is a member of the IRRA. He will be leading a special session for specialty stores looking to take their business to the next level at this year's Running Event in Dallas on Tuesday, November 11.



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Mizuno Van Tour to Visit More Than 100 Stores by Year End

Mizuno is projecting that its Run With Us mobile running tech lab will visit more than 150 stores by the end of the year. The tech lab trailer, which was introduced in late March at the Atlanta Marathon, has been on the road since then visiting stores, expos and races, according to Ron Wayne, Mizuno's national director of running promotions, and has been such a hit the company is considering the addition of a second unit in early 2009.

"We have found that when the Run with Us trailer visits stores, it can help retailers sell 20-30 pair of shoes per visit," Wayne said. The trailer contains two of Mizuno's "Precision Fit" terminals which allow consumers to receive a biomechanical analysis based on their foot type and running needs. The "Precision Fit" procedure determines which type of running shoe best suits the runner's foot, running style, and running goals. Runners are also given a chance to test the recommended footwear, and Wayne says that 4 out of ten consumers who test the shoes end up buying. All consumers who go through the fit process receive a free Mizuno Dryscience T-Shirt.

The truck is staffed with two Run



With Us technicians or RWUTS, Brian St.Onge and Joe Jacobs. St.Onge is a former track coach who worked at Jus' Running in Asheville, NC; Jacobs is a former New Jersey cross country state champion and track coach who worked at Omega Sports.

Initially, the truck visited track meets

and fun runs in addition to stores, but Wayne says the first five months have proven that the best results come with store visits. "We have found that when we park the trailer near the front door of the store and coordinate with an existing promotion like a fun run or a speaker that's when it works best." The average trailer visit runs about three and one-half hours, including a training session with store personnel before the trailer is opened to consumers.

In September, the Run With Us trailer is scheduled to visit Fleet Feet Edmund, OK; OK Runner, The Athletic House and Swag's Sports among other stores. Wayne said any retailer interested in having the trailer visit its store should contact their Mizuno territory manager. ●



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Salomon, Nokia Combine on Consumer Promotion

Salomon is teaming up with Nokia to provide runners with a new high-tech way to track their running adventures and share them with the world. The Salomon XT Challenge awards a pair of Salomon XT Wings and a Nokia Nseries Smartphone to runners who dream up the most imaginative and challenging running routes. The idea is that winners will hit the trail in their XT Wings and share their adventure online, with maps, photos and detailed statistics from their run, uploaded via Nokia Sports Tracker technology.

The goal of the promotion is for runners from around the world to come up with a personal trail running challenge, and submit their plans online at www.salomonrunning.com.



■ Salomon XT Wings

Each month, Salomon will select the most creative challenge. That runner will receive a pair of Salomon XT Wings to wear for their challenge, and a Nokia Smartphone equipped with the new Sports Tracker software to document it. When they complete their challenge, they upload photos and data to the Salomon Running

website, where other runners can check out dynamic maps of their route, complete with pictures that synch up to points on the map, plus every statistic from the run, including altitude, pace, speed and duration.

Some of the challenges so far have included an English runner who's recreating the Central London Tube map on her Sports Tracker map by running all 11 routes above ground, and an American runner who's working on her first 50 mile ultra-marathon on the beautiful and challenging Lake Tahoe course. A French runner challenged himself to run up the Eiffel Tower in less than 20 minutes, while a runner from New Zealand charted a difficult course across a "bridge to nowhere," filled with rugged terrain. ●

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The Athletes Foot Parent Restructures Debt; CEO Resigns

NexCen brands and its subsidiaries have completed a restructuring of its bank credit facility by agreeing to amended and restated borrowing security and related agreements with BTMU Capital Corp.

The amended and restated agreements replace all the prior bank credit agreements and significantly revise the terms of the outstanding loan of more than \$175 million. The restructuring reduces NexCen's payment obligations and enhances the company's liquidity. No additional borrowing is allowed under the agreement.

On the same day the loan restructuring was announced, NexCen CEO Bob D'Loren announced his resignation.

NexCen owns a number of franchises



including the Athletes Foot and ShoeBox stores as well as a number of quick serve restaurants. The company has been aggressive making acquisitions but has

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been caught in a cash crunch as its stock price has tumbled, negating its ability to pay for purchases with stock, rather than cash. There has been speculation that it will sell off either the Bill Blass or Waverly home brands it owns, or divest itself of some of the franchises. The loan restructuring could certainly be seen as the lender minimizing losses while NexCen sells off brands. ●

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IRRA Rolls Out Vendor Program for The Running Event

The IRRA is working with Formula4Media to help drive traffic to vendors' booths during The Running Event this November, and help exhibitors write orders at the show if that is their goal.

This new promotion is available to all exhibitors that are associate members of the IRRA and will work as follows:

Retailers will receive a punchcard featuring all participating vendors. The first 50 retailers who visit all the booths of vendors who are IRRA associate members will receive \$50 gift cards.

To qualify for the gift card, retailers must have their vendor "punchcard" verified by participating exhibitors.

"We recommend that all vendors participating in this program offer a

"show special" of some type," said John Rogers, executive director of the IRRA. "It could be as simple as giving away a trinket of some type, or offering a true special, such as free shipping, 10% off orders written at or soon after the show, or 'buy 10 get two free'."



independent running retailer association

All of these specials will be highlighted on the punchcard which will be given to all retailers as they enter the expo hall. The IRRA has requested that any show special related to orders written at the show extend to November 24, ten days after the event ends.

Vendors interested in participating should contact Samantha Freire at sfreire@formula4management.com. Vendors should tell her they'd like to participate in the promotion and let her know what "special" you'll be offering.

Vendors that are not IRRA associate members, can sign up at www.theirra.com, so their companies can participate in this promotion and receive all other associate member benefits which are detailed on the website. Once companies join, they can contact Samantha at the e-mail above to be a part of this exciting new promotion.

If you have any questions about this promotion or any other matters related to the IRRA, please contact John Rogers at Jr@mainerunning.com. ●



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Running Shorts

There are certain days when running store owners would like to “blow up” their stores. Well Mike Shuman of **Shu's Idaho Running Company** blew up his logo by working with a company called Inflatable 2000. Shuman plans to use the blow up logo at events and expos. “My contact was Chris Porter and he was awesome to work with,” Shuman told *Running Intelligence*. “What I liked about them, over other similar companies was their customer service. When they say they get back to you, they do.” Porter can be reached at chris@inflatable2000.com.

The Running Spot opened its third store last week in Loveland Ohio in a 100-year-old building that formerly housed a train depot. This marks the third store for the Running spot. Owner Bob Roncker, who is known for a shoe museum in his flagship store in Cincinnati will continue that motif in this store. During pre-opening preparations, employees found travel records dating back to 1913 and Roncker plans to display those in the new store.

Diadora America has named Mark Wachter as the VP of Sales. In this position, Wachter



will manage the sales force and oversee all sales functions for the soccer, tennis and running lines. In addition, Wachter will continue his duties as Director of Footwear and Accessory Development. Wachter has been with Diadora since 1991.

Diadora has introduced the Mythos GB running shoe collection developed by Italian marathoner Gelindo Bordin. The Mythos GB is a celebration of the 20th anniversary of Gelindo Bordin's gold medal in the Marathon at the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul. Bordin is the only runner to win both an Olympic Gold Medal in the Marathon and the Boston Marathon. The Laurel Wreath on the

tongue of the shoe is symbolic of this historic achievement.

The Mythos GB collection builds upon Diadora's existing Axeler WI5 technology, by introducing Axeler Propulsion in the forefoot and heel area by further increasing the shoe's shock absorption and forward thrust capabilities. The shoe's upper is made of Diadora's lightweight and durable Air Mesh. The midsole is constructed of molded Elaston EVA foam with Double Action inserts for added shock absorption

Brooks Sports has introduced a new Kids' footwear line designed to stand up to the scurried activity and biomechanical needs of young feet.

The company says the line was developed following extensive research and testing to ensure the kid's footwear provides the necessary level of stability without hindering the natural growth of the foot. The line includes a Kids' Adrenaline GTS and the Kids' Defyance in both boys and girls styles.

Similar to its award-winning parent, the Kids' Adrenaline GTS features Brooks' proprietary Diagonal Rollbar (DRB®), a support device that prevents inward rolling of the feet. Retailing for \$60, the Kids' Adrenaline™ GTS is available in sizes 1 to 7.

The Kids' Defyance is a neutral shoe made for smaller feet still taking shape. Modeled after the all new adult-sized Defyance that garnered Runner's World's coveted “Editor's Choice” award in the June 2008 issue, the kids' version retails for \$55 and ranges from size 10.5—which fits an average four-year-old child—to size 7.

Fuel Belt was named to *Inc Magazine's* 2008 list of the fastest growing private companies in the country. Fuel Belt was number 2384 on the list and 2008 was the second consecutive year the company made the report.



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_____ **Service:** Does the store offer personalized attention? Do they make a special effort to fit your shoes? Was the staff knowledgeable? Were you made to feel special shopping in this store?

_____ **Shopping Environment:** Was the environment stimulating and fun to shop?

_____ **Community Involvement:** Is this store truly part of the community? Do they sponsor races and events? Do they give back to the community in a number of ways?

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TO NOMINATE:

- Email nominations to: vote@50bestrunningstores.com
- Fax form to: 516-305-4712
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