



By the readers of ArrowTrade

## Using deer contests to increase traffic

Operating deer contests is one of the ways sporting goods stores and archery pro shops increase traffic after the season opens. The popularity was reflected in the strong response to that topic for this column. More than 50 retailers took the time to share their views on what works and what doesn't when it comes to deer contests.

(We're hoping dozens more dealers will send in their ideas about encouraging year-round shooting and finding and keeping good employees. If we use any of those comments, we'll send you a free Buck Wear T-shirt. See page 80 for details.)

Mike Conover, the shooting sports manager at Harry's Army Navy Store in Robbinsville, New Jersey, brought up a basic tenant of retailing. When customers feel good, they're more likely to spend money. So what's more natural than to bring them into the store after they've taken game with their bow, by letting them know well in advance that you want their entries.

At Spring Valley Sportsman, Delhi, New York, Patty Finne charges a \$25 fee to enter the store's bowhunting contest, and makes you sign up before the season opens. Last year 120 customers did that, and were treated at season's end to a banquet. Prizes are substantial, including bow packages and deer mounting by area taxidermists. The evening includes a seminar: last year's guest speakers were Ralph and Vicki Cianciarulo, and sales reps are invited to come and set up new product displays.

Dave Dubrawka of Seneca Outpost, Senneca, Pennsylvania is another that favors using a free taxidermy job as a prize in a deer contest. Since pictures are taken of entries, he said that draws in a lot of people who

stop in during the season to view those, and may end up buying scents and calls while they are in the store.

Amy Powers is looking at running her third deer contest this fall, as the owner of Hunter's Archery in McElhattan, Pennsylvania. Deer heads are scored at the store, and the high scoring rack will earn the owner a new Mathews bow, supplied at a discount by the rep. Drawings will win others arrows, hunting packs or gift certificates.

Mitch Denison will run his first big buck contest this fall at Razorbak Outdoors, Reading, Michigan. To keep things simple, Denison will base the contest on which rack has the widest spread. The \$20 entry fee will go toward the top prize of a whitetail hunt.

At Shooters Highland in Valatie, New York, customers have several ways to win. Bow technician Chris Peters said there are cash prizes for most points, widest spread, heaviest buck, heaviest doe and smallest buck. "The entry fee is usually around \$25, and the contest provides 100 percent payback. We have a great bunch of guys and gals that always enter."

There's no cost to enter the hunting contest at Jay Peake Archery in North Huntingdon, Pennsylvania. Prizes are correspondingly modest: Peake gives a hat for the heaviest doe and a set of arrows for the buck with the most points. Still, the contest works for him because it attracts a lot of people he wouldn't see in the store once deer season was open.

At Palmer's Archery in Bouckville, New York, Donald Palmer charges a modest \$5 entry fee. The best-scoring rack wins a free mounting job, while the second place buck, and the two heaviest does, earn those hunters

each a half-dozen arrows. The deer have to be brought to the pro shop for weighing. The store hosts an antler scoring session for interested hunters, and the racks are scored by a Pope & Young certified scorer.

A \$5 entry fee is also charged by Buck's Archery in Lockport, New York. There both the highest scoring buck and the heaviest doe win a complete bow package from owner Steve Buckwald. A five-spot was also the fee charged by MC Archery in Mt. Joy, Pennsylvania, which also awards a new bow package. "We have had quite a few super bucks shot by our customers," salesman H. Phil Myers, Jr. told ArrowTrade. "I think the average hunter stays interested because he gets to see what might happen."

By August customers are coming into Bucks Valley in Sellersville, Pennsylvania, to put their \$5 down to enter the annual contest. The racks come in with capes still attached. They go by an overall total inch measurement to determine the winner. Elio Spadafora gives a new Martin bow as his first prize, a taxidermy mounting job as his second. Third is a treestand, but he gets to choose the model, while 4th and 5th place winners get cash prizes.

New York retailer Tim Mandell of T&T Outdoors in Corning, favors using the New York State Big Buck Club scoring system. Top prize in both archery and gun categories is \$50 in cash, while second place earns a \$25 gift certificate good at T&T.

Nathan Jacobus also does business in Corning, and the owner of Jacobus Archery offers an interesting twist. While honoring the biggest buck, he store also recognizes the heaviest doe and the first buck registered in the contest. "That keeps the

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average guy, who will shoot smaller bucks, coming back in.”

Rick Gilliland of Troy, Pennsylvania awards prizes for the highest gross scoring rack, and the lowest, from among those who paid the \$3 entry fee. “That keeps it interesting to everybody. “ While he doesn’t advertise it, Gilliland always does something for the top junior hunters, like awarding a \$25 gift certificate or doing a free antler mount. In the main contest, “The biggest scoring buck, from archery, rifle or muzzle-loader, wins a free mount. I am lucky to have my own bow and taxidermy businesses, they feed off each other.”

In Middleburg, Pennsylvania, Barry Ulrich registers bucks shot with a bow purchased there. He awards an embroidered store jacket for the largest buck, a gift certificate for the second and a store shirt for the third. Like Gilliland, Ulrich also rewards hunters who don’t wait for a big one: the first deer entered wins a prize. No one dominates the contest because you can win top prize only once. Those winners see their names go on



All dealers who were quoted in this article received a free T-shirt, courtesy of Buck Wear. We’ll send your choice of the styles above to any retailers whose comments are chosen for the September or November columns. Look over the topics below, then fill out the Dealer-To-Dealer Card after the next page. You can also send your comments in letter form to ArrowTrade, 3479 409th Ave. NW, Braham, MN 55006 or by email to atrade@ecenet.com.

**Finding and keeping the right employees.** How and where have you found the best employees for your store? What are some ways to spot who might become a good employee from among your customer base? If you’ve got a promising person on board, what are some of the ways you train them to be successful in sales or service? *September issue-Responses Due July 10*

**Encouraging year-round shooting.** Tells us ways you encourage customers to shoot year-round. If you’ve got indoor or outdoor ranges, what improvements have you made to them in the past few years and how do you keep people using them. Have you considered adding a video range or pop-up 3-D range. *November issue-Responses Due Sept. 10*



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a trophy kept at the shop, a recognition that extends well past their golden season.

Several of the retailers had categories for the human part of the equation, to widen participation. At Hog Wild Archery, Belleville, Michigan, you enter as an adult male, adult female or youth. Within each, there are categories for buck and doe. Body weight and the number of points (for bucks) goes into the scoring. Adult winners get cash while the youth winners get a trophy.

Owner Howard Smallwood makes sure a photo is taken of everyone’s entry at Hog Wild Archery. “Pictures posted in the shop bring people back to see who got what, and what was taken where,” he said. Just having the contest, he noted, helps

hunters feel welcome at the store. Smallwood goes beyond what most other stores do in using the contest as a store promotion. He uses the \$10 entry fee for adults (youth are free) to help cover the cost of giving each person who enters a T-shirt with the store logo.

T-shirts are awarded to the first 75 shotgun hunters and the first 25 archery hunters who enter their deer at Sinclairville Superette in Sinclairville, New York. And everyone who entered last year received a stainless steel mug with the contest logo on it. Owner Scott Dibble went through three gross of them (432 mugs) in 2004. People have had plenty of time to learn about the contest, which goes into its 17th running.

Dibble detailed the multiple cat-

egories which help attract such a large number of entries. You enter in archery, junior archery, or shotgun. In the two adult categories, you can win for heaviest buck, heaviest doe, first deer in, biggest rack by points and spread, most points, widest rack. You can also win by being lucky-because there's a drawing for that.

"The junior archery prizes are for heaviest buck, heaviest doe and first deer in," Dibble continued. "At the end of our deer season we have a game banquet where all the food is prepared by our local hotel. Participants pay only for beverages, which gives the hotel something for their efforts."

Robert Sirnic has been running a big buck contest for about as long as Dibble, 16 years, and took the time to detail the simple and fast rack measuring system. R & M Sport Shop of Jeannette, Pennsylvania, counts all points at least 1 inch long from the main beam plus the width of the outside spread. "For instance, 8 legal points and an outside spread of 15 inches equals a total of 23."

Sirnic has customers pay their \$5 entry fee before the season opens, then matches the total from his own funds. When they pay four deep, the top prize is 40 percent of the total cash, 2nd is 30, 3rd is 20 and 4th is 10 percent. "The contest has worked very well because there is usually a lot of entries which makes the winner's total a nice payoff."

Dale Barton of Left Wing Archery, New Berlin, New York said a larger first prize, perhaps a \$1,000 store certificate, may be tried for that store's second contest this fall. The initial one ran well, he said, but didn't seem to draw anyone from outside the existing customer base.

Scrubby Buck Archery of Clyde, New York is also gearing up for a second contest. It will keep one top prize for biggest rack, a second for the "scrubbiest buck" as determined by women attending the banquet. The largest buck received a free taxidermy mount, while the scrubbiest won that hunter a new BowTech bow.

You'll have to register at least one day before you plan to hunt at Allegheny Crossroads, Kane,

Pennsylvania. It costs \$10 but you're going to get a gift back worth the same. First prize is a \$300 gift certificate, second is a deer scouting camera and third is a dozen arrows. Prizes are awarded in buck and doe categories, and also for the smallest deer. "Successful hunters get their picture taken and placed on our bragging board," Wil Antrim said. "We give the 'smallest' award as a way of encouraging every hunter to have his picture taken. We also enter the junior hunters in a separate category with separate prizes."

Here's another idea for going beyond the "biggest rack" approach. Due to customer suggestions, Tim's Arrow Shop in Wolcott, New York is adding a category for best buck captured on camera, and has already seen that increase sales of minerals and scouting cameras.

### The Down Side

About one of six retailers responded that they had problems with contests. Carl Creek of New

Creek, West Virginia stopped doing a contest because he believed deer were being shot with spotlights in an attempt to win his top prize bow.

M i k e Johnson of M i k e ' s O u t d o o r s , Dobson, North Carolina also believes it encourages rule breaking to offer prizes for the biggest buck. So he encourages customers to bring their deer or turkey by the store so he can photograph them for the "bragging wall."

Lebanon Bait in Lebanon, New Jersey had trouble with people entering deer that had been entered in other contests. Jody Welgoss said it was also hard to make sure multiple employees were all measuring exactly the same way.

"We have found out a lot of people will do anything needed to win a contest," Sam McKinnney said from Mason, West Virginia. "We try to run a shop with a Christian attitude so we don't present anything that would entice a person to cheat."

Here's one possible way to remove the temptation, and still use a contest to build store traffic. Jeff Lambert, of Indian Creek Archery, Marshall, Michigan, is running a drawing where winners will be determined by chance. "There are two ways to enter: buy a new bow or bring in a picture of the deer or turkey you shoot. The customers really seem to like the idea of a drawing. That way everybody has a chance to win, not just the one who takes the biggest."



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