

## Making Money in Traditional Archery

For the first time ever, the secret to making money with traditional gear is revealed... The best way to make money in traditional archery is to buy a cheap entrance level recurve bow, some really low end wood arrows with crimp-on tips, and a one-size-fits-all shooting glove. Then, hide it all in a dark corner somewhere and forget about it.

The beauty is that later, when someone asks to try a traditional bow, you're covered! They can shoot a bow not even a mother could love, with crooked arrows that don't have a chance of flying straight, while fumbling with a one-size-fits-all glove - that doesn't. Yep, that's the way it's done. Unfortunately, that's the way it is done in many shops. The same shops that nod their heads knowingly when asked about traditional gear and explain, "Yeah, we tried traditional, it just doesn't sell."

Well no wonder! The true secret to making money in traditional archery is embracing traditional equipment as an important facet of

archery as a whole. You don't have to have a passion for it, but any shop that wants to take advantage of growing their bottom line, especially during tough times, should welcome the increased sales opportunities available to them through promoting and servicing the traditional side of archery.

Take care of yourself first. Talk to a manufacturer or distributor who offers really nice traditional bows. Get a good one because you'll get what you pay for. Talk to Pape's, Kinsey's, or one of the other big distributors and see what good quality traditional bows they have in stock. Sometimes you can even find a deal. At one time Sky Archery had a special program offering discounts to dealers interested in picking up a Sky Bow for their range. There are also dozens of custom bowyers across the country. (I'm sure I'd forget some if I tried to list them all so just go online and search to find a good fit for you in a longbow or recurve.) You probably have plenty of good carbon arrows in your shop so

### About The Author

Todd Smith has been a traditional bowhunter for over 40 years. After learning the art of handcrafting wood arrows in Alaska from his mentor John Dodge, he built arrows professionally for several years. In 2008, after a 19 year stint with 3Rivers Archery, he made the decision to help other businesses grow and currently offers marketing services through his website ToddSmithCo.com.

Todd Smith's Traditional Focus column in *ArrowTrade* is being sponsored in part by Alaska Bowhunting Supply.

you're covered as far as arrows go. Fletch some with feathers and pick up a quality shooting glove or tab and get ready to have some fun. The more you shoot, the more fun you'll have, and fun - personal satisfaction, is the name of the game.

Have fun! One of the best ways to get compound and traditional shooters having a great time together is novelty shoots. Everyone likes shooting aerial discs. Dan Jaquay and Danny DuPuy, owners of Tri-State Archery & Sportsman Center in Kendallville, Indiana invested in a Laporte Archery trap (disc thrower) and you should see the folks line up to shoot when they pull it out onto the field. They're an eclectic mix of compound, recurve, longbow, and even self bow shooters all vying to knock the next disc out of the sky. It's a blast and there are so many close calls that everyone cheers for anyone who connects.

Not only is this kind of shooting a good way to bring the clans together, it can also be a money maker at home and on the road. Every weekend there are thousands of shoots all across the country and not many of them offer aerial shooting. You can travel to the



Shooting discs out of the sky is a great way to bring traditional and compound shooters together. The Phoenix archery trap from Laporte America (see inset) makes it enjoyable.



**John Dodge and Keith Clemmons shooting at a local tournament in the 1980's. Keith had aged out of traditional bows and into compounds.**

shoots and then work out a deal with the host club for how you'll handle the money end of things or you can rent your machine to the local clubs themselves. Either way, there's opportunity in the air.

I've also heard of a few shops that offer a traditional-only night at their indoor ranges once a month. They come up with fun novelty targets and events like shooting swinging ping pong balls on strings, team competitions shooting clay pigeons on a target, and there's even a system of rigging a shop-vac so it will keep a ping pong ball floating above it. These kinds of contests are great stress relievers. They give the guys a break from the intense concentration of highly competitive indoor leagues, and they positively reinforce how much fun traditional equipment can be. Try it and see how much more traditional equipment you sell.

The times they are a changin'... It's no longer "us" and "them." I come from the traditional side of the archery industry having been professionally involved since about 1980. Back then I worked with John Dodge, owner of Bighorn Archery in Fairbanks, Alaska hand crafting wood and aluminum arrows. In the mid to late 1980's traditional archery was enjoying tremendous growth. The traditional archery mail-order company I worked for in Ft. Wayne, Indiana doubled in size every year for the first eight years of being in business. It was a magical time of innocence, the pioneering spirit, and passion. Everyone was excited about tra-

ditional archery and business was fantastic!

Back then there was a more definite line in the sand. You were either a stickbow shooter or a compound shooter. Many shooters on either side turned their noses up at the other. It seemed there was no middle ground. It's a lot different today. The gap that was once quite wide has now become like the brackish waters where salt and fresh water converge. Today we see quite a few compound shooters picking up traditional bows and many traditional shooters migrating to compounds. Shops that are on to this are servicing both markets and enjoying the lift in sales.

We're also seeing many older traditional shooters getting to a point where they can no longer shoot a traditional bow. For them it's a compound or nothing. Many are making the transition. Sometimes they still get their stickbows out and shoot a few arrows for old times' sake, but they shoot mostly compounds now. They're happy to still be able to draw, anchor, release. As the baby boomers age, we're going to see more and more of this.

Back in the 1980's I saw Keith Clemmons shooting a compound at one of our Golden North Bowhunters tournaments. Keith was one of the old-timers; he had even been in a few of the old Fred Bear movies from the late 1950's and 1960's. I asked him about switching to the compound and he readily admitted he hated to



**Tri-State Archery owners Dan Jaquay and Danny DuPuy understand the benefits of embracing traditional bows and compounds.**

have to retire his Bear recurve bows, but if he wanted to shoot at all, he had to shoot a compound. Keith was a bowhunter through and through, and for him giving up the bow altogether was not an option. I admired his decision and wondered if that day would ever come for me...

The point is, there are thousands of bowhunters now who shoot both compounds and traditional bows; and why not? Just as compound bows continue to improve, so do traditional bows. Today we have recurves and longbows shooting IBO and ATA speeds that rival the speeds of the first compounds to hit the market. Like the old saying goes, "This ain't your grandpa's bow." Recurves and longbows are faster than ever, the new materials available today have certainly helped us make them faster and more efficient. Some of the latest ILF (International Limb Fitting) bows now use compound grips and offer incredible adjustability so what's not to like? (We'll report more on the ILF phenomenon in a couple of issues.) We now have high-tech, super-fast traditional bows that appeal to compound shooters, long time traditional shooters migrating to compounds, and they're all getting along quite well. Why not address those needs?

There's a local shop near me, Tri-State Archery that always seems busy. Whenever I stop by there's a steady stream of customers coming and

going. The last time I was there I noticed a healthy mix of compounds, recurve bows, longbows, and even self-bows. Everyone was getting along and having a great time. Why? My guess is that it's because both owners have an in-depth knowledge of compound and traditional bows. They shoot both, work on both, and encourage everyone to shoot whatever they prefer. They exhibit an attitude of, "It's all bows and arrows, let's just have fun."

The equipment is overlapping. Now, arrows and broadheads that once were thought to be for traditional only set-ups are commonly used by compound shooters. A perfect example of this are the many single bevel cut-on-contact fixed blade broadheads on the market. Initially you could only get them as glue on heads but now manufacturers are offering them in quite a few screw-in styles that appeal to compound shooters as well. Or take the Hero\_Shot, a slick little unit that screws into the bottom of your camera and then slips over the nock of an arrow stuck in the ground. Everyone wants to get pictures of their trophies, right? The lesson here is that there are many products on the market that sell well to both compound and traditional shooters. Identifying those items and keeping them on hand goes a long way to increasing the bottom line.

Garrett Schlieff of Alaska Bowhunting Supply shared this with us, "Ten years ago our customer base was probably 95 percent – 99 percent traditional. Now, that more and more compound shooters are learning the advantages of higher FOC, more mass weight, and single bevel broadheads, we're looking at more like a 50-50 compound to traditional split."

Stock equipment that appeals to compound and traditional shooters, because then your bottom line

**PHOTO LEFT:** Look for items with universal appeal like this Hero\_Shot camera mount.

will be glad you did.

Be an early adopter. When you identify a hot new item, bring it in house. Especially keep an eye out for items that attract both traditional and compound shooters. When you're on top of the latest trends you know what's hot and what's not. One of the best ways to stay informed is right in front of you now. *ArrowTrade Magazine!* *ArrowTrade* is the only trade magazine with a traditional section in every issue. Each column covers some aspect of traditional archery and the January issue is always dedicated to the latest trends in traditional archery, the new products, new bows, new developments in arrows, broadheads, etc.

You can't sell from an empty wagon. It's true; you've got to have traditional archery gear in stock to sell it. You don't have to tie up much of your inventory budget, though. Keep at least a small inventory on hand with sample products that your customers can try. If you'd like to add traditional but don't want to tie up many of your inventory dollars, buy from a distributor like Pape's, Kinsey's, or some of the traditional suppliers. They stock traditional items and offer fast shipping so you get your supplies in a timely manner.

Profit is GOOD! Look for good margins. Ten years ago it was frustrating for pro shops to order from the mom and pop suppliers of traditional equipment. Most of the gear was handmade and in short supply. Delivery was inconsistent even if the quality was good. Today many traditional suppliers can offer you excel-

lent margins and reliable supply. Gone are the days of being locked into high price points and tight margins. Look around and compare, there are suppliers out there offering very profitable returns on traditional gear.

Acres of diamonds in your own back yard... Not all craftsmen are created equal, some are better than others. Some local craftsmen are fantastic to work with and dealing directly with them can be profitable for all. You might be able to find a local craftsman making quality leather goods, Flemish strings, or even custom bows. Try keeping a couple samples on hand and taking special orders. Eventually, if it all works out, you can become a stocking dealer. Whatever you come up with, if you work with them, you can come up with a mutually profitable arrangement where everyone wins.

Don't forget the kids. Get kids involved. The popularity of the NASP (National Archery in the Schools Program) and the "CenterShot" youth programs across the United States shows us that kids are drawn to archery like moths to a flame. Most kids don't really care what kind of bow they shoot, as long as they get to see arrows fly. Give them options. Maybe they can't afford to enter into the sport with a compound. Maybe they don't want one: Some kids prefer traditional bows. Give them a choice. Sky Archery is introducing a new recurve for the younger crowd called the "Sky Breeze." It's priced aggressively to help more kids get involved in archery.

Teach your children well. Kids are



**This young lady, an excellent shot, feels comfortable shooting at this shop because they've taken an interest in her success. Notice the self-bow shooter in the background.**



**This shop prominently displays both compounds and traditional bows and encourages the customers to try both.**

naturally competitive, they're all about having fun, and they're the future of our sport. Offer shooting lessons, equipment classes, and even competitions just for them. Competing with their peers is a great way to keep them sharp for their NASP tournaments or just any shooting they want to do. Remember, kids need bows, arrows, gloves, tabs, quivers, just like mom and dad.

Note: If you see someone in your area with extraordinary potential, take some extra time to mentor them. Who knows where their archery skills might take them? Did you have an

**PHOTO BELOW: Sky Archery offers a quality recurve bow for young shooters that won't break the bank.**



archery mentor? Well, maybe it's time to return the favor.

Show me the money! If you concentrate only on the money, things sour quickly. Invest in your customers and they'll invest in you. Have fun at your shop while taking care of your customers. Work,

serve, help, learn and the money will come. Build an atmosphere of TOTAL ARCHERY, all facets of archery. Mix traditional and compound shooters. Help them all gain an appreciation of the benefits each discipline has to offer. Take time to really help them. Get to know them and strong mutually beneficial relationships will develop. Come up with events that foster good sportsmanship but encourage

friendly competition. Work hard but enjoy your work. It has been said that "If you enjoy what you do, you'll never work a day in your life."

It's up to you. Another of my favorite sayings is: "Even if you're on the right road, you'll get run over if you just sit there." No one cares about your business more than you do. No one is going to make it happen for you. It's up to you. The question is - what are you going to do about it?

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** For more information about the archery programs or businesses mentioned visit their websites:

- alaskabowhunting.com
- centershotministries.org
- kinseyarchery.com
- laporteamerica.com
- nasparchery.com
- papesinc.com
- skyarchery.com

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