

# Hello!

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS

By Britney Booth

### 10 Tips To Make First-Time Female Customers Comfortable

According to a 2018 Concealed Carry Consumer Study Report by NSSF,<sup>1</sup> during the course of a 12-month timespan, women spent significantly more money on ammunition, carry equipment and accessories than men, and an equal amount on firearms purchases. This can be attributed to the fact women may be newer to concealed carry than a large

portion of men, leading them to purchase handguns and the accessories necessary to carry.

With the potential for female customers to make up a large portion of your sales — especially these days — it's essential to deliver an inviting experience when they enter your facility. Here are 10 steps you can take to ensure just that



for women purchasing a handgun for the first time.

#### 1. FIRST IMPRESSIONS LAST.

When a customer walks into the entrance of your location, their first impression is a lasting one, so make it count!

Paige Roux, training coordinator and senior firearms instructor at Shooter's World in Arizona, says all three of their locations have a welcome desk within a retail space that includes apparel and coffee.

"For women, when they walk in, the first

thing they see is apparel — and it's already a dropped barrier because it makes them comfortable in this setting versus being overwhelmed by walls of guns and tactical gear as far as the eye can see. It's a softer opening into our retail facilities," said Roux.

When a customer walks in, something as simple as a friendly greeting and asking how you can help can go a long way. This allows the customer to define their main reason for visiting and be pointed in the correct direction, rather than feeling like they



Photo: Magnum Shooting Center

want to turn around and run out of the store because they don't know where to even start.

Additionally, making sure your location is clean and organized reduces anxiety for someone who may be stepping foot into this setting for the first time. These are easy things to do from a dealer's perspective, but you'd be surprised by how many times they're overlooked.

## 2. DRESS CODE.

At Shooter's World, employees are given polos and button-down shirts to wear along with their own jeans and are encouraged to express themselves through their attire, as long as it's

done professionally. This helps soften the look of the space overall and gives a more laid-back approach to the dress code.

"A female might think, 'Oh my gosh, I don't fit in here' if she sees a group of people kitted out in full tactical gear," Roux explained.

## 3. CUSTOMER SERVICE KEY.

Hiring employees based on their customer service and "people skills" is something Shooter's World focuses on wholeheartedly. Employees are put through extensive training, both on and off the range, which allows them to have individual testimonials about how the facility

helped them transition from non-shooters to proficient and knowledgeable firearms users. When training her employees, Roux noted an emphasis on treating everyone who comes through the door like family — and having fun.

## 4. GENDER RATIO OF EMPLOYEES.

A mix of both male to female employees is highly recommended. For example, Shooter's World employs a ratio of 50% women and 50% men. Roux says it's incredibly reassuring for a female to walk in and see another woman behind the counter. Often, the customer becomes less guarded and more relaxed, which leads to more open interactions.

## 5. FIND OUT THE "WHY".

Melissa Lockburner, co-owner and senior membership manager of Magnum Shooting Center in Colorado, says employees at their two locations like to start by asking the right questions when a female comes in to purchase a handgun. Most importantly, finding out the main goal and function of the firearm — concealed carry, home protection, plinking, etc.

Perhaps their significant other bought them a gun, and they're looking to trade it for something that fits and works better for them. Whatever the reason for their visit, Lockburner lends establishing the customer's goal is the most important thing before making any recommendations.

At Shooter's World, Roux likes to start with the question, "When was the last time you shot?" which is

phrased in this specific way so no matter the answer, you can dig deeper into their level of experience.

## 6. FIND THE RIGHT FIT.

Once you've found the customer's "why," you can walk them through what your facility offers — education, range time, rental guns, classes, etc. Then show them a few handgun options to meet their needs. Next, demonstrate how to properly hold the firearm and explain the importance of grip and fit. As Roux puts it, you're looking for the "Goldilocks feel — just right."

If the customer's significant other pushes for a revolver or micro-pistol, which may not be the best option for a first-time shooter, there are tactful ways to work around the situation, like asking, "Can I help find a gun that's the right fit for you?"

"Just because a customer is a female with small hands doesn't mean she needs to purchase a small gun or a revolver," Lockburner shared.

Instead, she recommends explaining the physics behind recoil by showing the customer two different models of the same caliber and detailing why the bigger one will have less recoil because of its weight.

## 7. REVIEW TECHNIQUE.

For a first-time pistol owner, racking the slide can present an intimidating obstacle. Magnum Shooting Center maintains a good selection of pistols with easy-to-rack slides.

"If a woman is concerned with not being



Magnum Shooting Center has more than 3,000 members who are women. It stages a “Women of Magnum” group meeting twice a month, catering to both beginner and intermediate shooters. “It’s always full,” Melissa Lockburner noted.



Paige Roux takes students through pistol handling basics during a ladies-only introduction to handguns course at Shooter’s World. When a customer walks in the door, she likes to begin with “When was the last time you shot?” — which serves a non-threatening conversation starter.

strong enough to rack the slide on a semi-auto, there are newer handguns on the market that have alleviated this issue, and they’ve been very popular with our female customers,” Lockburner said.

The Magnum Shooting Center staff is trained to offer assistance to customers who may not be

able to rack the slide with confidence.

“It’s important to help them with the technique and show the proper way to rack the slide, which definitely helps make it easier. We try to educate the customer from the time they walk in the door to the time they leave,” Lockburner added.

## 8. KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE.

One thing to keep in mind: it’s crucial not to give *too much* information at once. Roux says she trains her employees to gauge how much the customer can digest and provide them with a custom experience from there. Avoiding information overload will lead to better interaction for your customer, especially if they’re a first-time buyer.

## 9. FEMALE-ONLY CLASSES & GROUPS.

Lockburner says of their 10,000 members, a third are women, which she attributes to how much women are growing in the industry and sport. They offer female-only classes and training, as well as their “Women of Magnum” group that meets twice a month in both beginner and intermediate levels.

“Our Women of Magnum group offers classroom and range time designed for women with likemindedness and common goals to come shoot and learn together — it’s always full,” she said.

Shooter’s World offers a weekly Ladies’ Day, during which women get their first hour of range time and one gun rental for free. Doing this breaks their barrier down by allowing them to come in on a fun day and bring a friend, making them even more comfortable. Shooter’s World also offers women-specific classes taught by female instructors.

“Classes like this are empowering for women. They say: ‘You’re absolutely capable of doing it, and we’re going to show you how,’” Roux said.

## 10. RENTAL GUNS.

Offering rental guns is a surefire way to solidify a first-timer gets the correct gun. Much like test-driving a car before purchasing it, being able to shoot a handgun you’re interested in buying takes away the majority of hesitations associated with a purchase — like recoil management and fit. Of course, be sure to encourage the customer to take a class to learn the basics before they’re offered time on the range.

## FIND SUCCESS, GROW CUSTOMER BASE

Using the tips above, as well as your experience and firearms knowledge, will help women advocate for themselves and make the best decisions based on their needs. In turn, a comfortable, welcoming and safe environment will foster a lifetime of growth and training and a loyal customer at your facility. **SI**

### Footnote:

1. <https://bit.ly/3H5RxVn>

**Britney Booth** is the owner of Booth Media Group, which specializes in communications and PR services in the outdoor and shooting industries. She also serves as the editor-in-chief of the Ruffed Grouse Society.

What other tips would you add? Let the SI team know: [comments@shootingindustry.com](mailto:comments@shootingindustry.com).