

APRIL / MAY 2012

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BRINGING WOULD-BE BIKE COMMUTERS INTO THE FOLD

BY LAUREL GOLDSTEIN

MAY IS BIKE-TO-WORK MONTH, AND IT'S A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO GENERATE INTEREST IN BIKE COMMUTING. A THRIVING POPULATION OF BIKE COMMUTERS IS IMPORTANT TO THE SUCCESS OF ANY SHOP. COMMUTERS RIDE ON A DAILY BASIS AND THEY'LL COME IN, EVEN IN THE HEIGHT OF THE OFF-SEASON, FOR PARTS, SERVICE, ACCESSORIES, AND CLOTHING. ALTHOUGH THEY MIGHT NOT ALWAYS BE BIG SPENDERS, THEY ARE A STEADY, DEPENDABLE SOURCE OF REVENUE.

For the customer who's thinking about bike commuting, it's important to show them a bike that's going to make them happy, get them riding, and keep them coming back for everything from spare tubes and chain lube to cycling gloves and rain gear. So this spring, when customers come in to your shop looking for the bike they'll be riding every day, you want to find one that fits. This means fitting both their body proportions and their lifestyle. And for an increasing percentage of the population, this will be a folding bike.

Off the Fence and Onto a Folding Bike

Whether in a city or out in the suburbs, the perceived challenges of bike ownership, let alone bike commuting, are enough to keep many prospective bike commuters in their cars, driving to work. But regardless of where you're located, you'll find that a folding bike can help you sell your customer on the idea of bike commuting, and along with it, a folding



commuter bike that will fit their riding needs. So when you're talking to customers about the bike that's right for them, keep in mind the ways folding bikes can alleviate the most common commuting concerns.

Where Do I Store My Bike?

For people who live in larger cities, bike commuting is a great transportation option; it's not only more convenient than driving, but also significantly cheaper and often faster than other ways of commuting.

But people who live in big cities often have small apartments with limited indoor storage

space. This makes many people question the practicality of bike ownership: where can they store the bike when they're not riding it? As attractive as a bike may be, no one wants it as the centerpiece of their living room. It can also be difficult to navigate a bicycle into an apartment building elevator or maneuver it up and around multiple flights of stairs.

By stocking a selection of folding bikes, you offer apartment dwellers the option of a bike that doesn't take up a lot of space. Once folded, it can be stored behind a door or in a closet. It's easy to store a folding bike inside without surrendering the bulk of your hallway, closet or living space to your bicycle.



How Do I Keep my Bike from Being Stolen?

Bicycle theft is a problem for everyone, whether they live in the city or in the suburbs. As ridership has increased, so, unfortunately, has bike theft. Nobody wants to spend money for a bike only to have it disappear on them. And while a good, strong lock and proper locking practice are both important, the fact of the matter is that a bike left locked outside for long periods of time, whether during the work day or overnight, is more vulnerable to theft and vandalism than a bike that is stored inside.

Try suggesting a folding bike (along with a sturdy lock) to customers who are concerned about bike theft. The option of a folding bike can make someone more comfortable with the idea of investing money in a bicycle. Since it's easy to store folding bikes inside, it gives people extra peace of mind and security to know that their bicycle won't just ride away on them.

How Can I Ride a Bike When my Commute is So Long?

For anyone who lives further from their workplace, distance can start to seem like an obstacle to bike commuting. After all, someone who lives 30 miles away from work may not have the time, the fitness level, or the desire to complete the 60-mile roundtrip on a bicycle.

Introduce the idea of a "Park and Pedal" commute with a folding bike. These prospective commuters might live too far from work to ride the whole way in and back, but bike commuting is not an all-or-nothing endeavor. With a folding bike in their trunk, long-distance commuters can choose how far they want to ride: a 30-mile commuter can drive 28 miles and ride 2, or drive 10 and ride 20. For someone who hasn't ridden in many years, a "Park and Pedal" commute is a great way for them to ride every day and gradually increase their riding distance. And if, for whatever reason (e.g. bad weather, schedule change, feeling sick), there's a day when they decide not to ride, the bike is safely in the trunk ready for the next day, rather than on an externally mounted bike rack. It's also great for people who take public transportation, since in most cities, folding bikes are permitted in the transit system, even during peak travel hours.

Consider Full-Size Folding Bikes

Because of their portability and compact size, folding bikes are an attractive option for many commuters. But what about ride quality? Is a bike commuter, who rides every day, going to be comfortable on a folding bike? With the right folding bike, absolutely.

In order to make the most of the bike commuting market, you need to stock a folding bike that will appeal to the customer looking for a real bike that folds. While small-wheeled folding bikes might be the right choice for some, you will find other customers are turned off by the ride and handling of these bikes – to say nothing of the aesthetics! Fortunately, there are options for the prospective bike commuter who wants a full-size bike that can also fold to fit in their trunk or closet.

As more people start to realize the benefits of bike commuting, the demand for full-size folding bikes has increased. There are manufacturers who specialize in full-size folding bikes, and others who have added full-size folding bikes to their product lines. And with this demand, folding technology has improved – full-size folding bike frames are stronger, lighter, and more rigid than ever before, making them stiff competition for both small-wheeled folding bikes and non-folding bicycles alike. Don't let yourself or your customers be put off by the idea of a full-size folding bike either – they're comparable in

weight to small-wheeled folding bikes, and while the folded size is limited by the size of the wheel (26" or 700C), they can still fold small enough, and easily enough, to fit in the trunk of a sports car, under a desk or in a studio apartment.

Folding Bikes: For the Future Commuter

Every shop has limited floor space and limited money that can be put into inventory. But if you're serious about expanding into the commuter bike market, and the number of bike commuters in your area, you need to consider why people aren't bike commuting already. As we've seen here, a folding bike addresses many of the most common concerns about bike commuting, and with the right selection of folding bikes, you'll find that you'll be able to increase the population of bike commuters in your area, as well as the number of cyclists who regularly visit your shop.



Laurel Goldstein is an avid bike commuter and bike polo player who works for Montague Bikes, an industry leader in bikes that fold.



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