

Choosing Vendors That Fit Your Brand: Part 1

February 14, 2025

Posted By: [Jessica Malloy](#) in [CWA Blog](#)



When it comes to choosing products to carry in your indoor climbing gym, you want to make sure you carry items that fit your culture. Whether you are opening a new location or trying to spruce up your facility, you can bring in new vendors, items, and merchandise to increase revenue and add some convenience and excitement for your members.

Article At A Glance

- **Writer:** Jess Malloy, head coach at High Point Climbing Gym. Jess has written about coaching, management, and routesetting for the CWA.
- **Who Should Read:** Senior managers, retail managers, front desk staff, and program managers.
- **What Will You Learn:** Understanding the low-hanging-fruit strategies to understand your customer base.
- **Tie-Ins, Resources, or Further Reading:** We linked it below as well, check out the Bell Curve Calculator.

Not every gym is going to do well with a fully stocked gear store, and over time you may learn that some items sit on the shelves for months (or even over a year) while others seem to sell out faster than you can restock.

Choosing products that match your gym's location, needs, and culture can be a better way of ensuring that you keep inventory both stocked and moving along.

Know Your Members, Collect Your Data

Knowing your membership base can help you choose everything from gear to snacks. If your location has a thriving youth program, choose snacks that are healthy for kids, like protein-rich chocolate milk, and ensure you are consistently in the supply of kids' size shoes, harnesses, and fun, colorful chalk bags.

For example, if you have a big youth program, be the one-stop-shop for young new climbers before and after practices, camps, and other programs.

Look for patterns within your membership base as well as within your sales. Who is coming in? Who is spending? What do members and day users want?

To get a better idea of how to find the answers to these questions we turned to Sasha Schwartz, Director of Retail for [High Point Climbing and Fitness](#). Schwartz recommends looking at data to find the best items for your clientele.

“It’s not a bad idea to poll your member base. To some extent, people know what they want.”

Asking your members is great information to have (though it isn’t the end-all-be-all). Collect the information, cross-check it, and make your decision. It’s also a good idea to make low-risk orders when introducing new products like a new style of harness.

For gyms that use software like [Rock Gym Pro](#), you can look at your revenue for retail items and see what your big sellers are by either a dollar amount or quantity. Schwartz explains that when looking at revenue for the entire gym, a good retail area “would account for 8-9% in the whole if you’re doing well.”

In RGP, you can also look up the highest spenders in the past year. It is common for those names to be parents of youth climbers or well-known members. Look at their buying history and use them to reflect on your community. Does Weekend Warrior Joe refresh his favorite brand of chalk every few weeks? Is he the first to grab the newest gym swag and wear it with pride? Maybe Lily the Team Kid comes to practice straight from school and her mom always gets her snacks for pre-practice fuel and has been buying new shoes every few months during her growth spurt.

Through an understanding of revenue, polling the community, and looking at top spenders, you can help create a larger picture of what your community needs and wants.

Further Reading: Calculate a Bell Curve for Shoe Sales

Editor's Note: Back in 2022, the CWA worked with climbing industry consultant Paul Terbrueggen on how to ensure you're ordering the right number of shoes. In short, you can

never *ensure it* but you can get pretty close. You do this by taking a dataset you already have, and through some mathematical wizardry, predict an average through a visualization called a bell curve.

The below Excel file is a free resource on how to do just that. This can be pretty advanced, so if you stopped comprehending at 'math', we recommend reading the article that accompanies the file.

[☐ Download The Excel File To Create Your Own Bell Curve!](#)

How To Use This Spreadsheet

To prepare your data, you will need to export a full list of all sales by one or more brands into a spreadsheet of your choosing. I recommend doing one brand at a time, so that you don't have to convert EU and US sizes, or account for the slight variation between brand sizes.

From there, you will need to isolate a full list of just the sizes, no gender qualifier or other data. This list should have each shoe sold as its own line item. So if your gym(s) sold 10 pairs of size 39 shoes, you would list "39" as 10 separate rows. All data can be consolidated into a single column, with no header, to then be copied into the model.

NOTE: This spreadsheet will produce percentages for predicted shoe size sales for data input you did not provide. The calculation is making educated guesses based off percentages of the data being provided, and this is how the Bell Curve is formed.

Know Your Location

There can be many differences between locations and gym communities. What works for a gym on the West Coast may not translate to a gym in the Southeast, but this can also be true for two gyms within the same city. No two gyms are alike, and so for a professional like Schwartz, it all comes back to relying on the data you've collected. However, some basics seem to do well at most gyms.

“I think there can be a core lineup in every gym,” says Sasha. “The most palatable in price and style for shoes, offer some sort of ropes, belay devices... These are some basics that each gym will have.”

Essentially, keep the items around that are considered a barrier to entry for the sport. Beginner-friendly shoes, harnesses, chalk, rope, and belay devices with recognizable brands, are safe for most markets. “A general good rule is carrying brands that are reputable, aligned with your vision, and values.”

Come back for part two of this article, where we teach you more about working with distributors and reps.

Want to Learn More About Retail?

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About the Author



Jess Malloy is the Head Coach at High Point Climbing Gym in Birmingham, AL. She has worked in five climbing gyms in the past eighteen years, is a USAC L1 Routesetter, a L2 USAC Coach, and has accumulated years of experience as a climber, coach, setter, yoga teacher, and as a published writer. She is also the Head Coach for Catalyst Sports's Climbing Team for Elite Para Athletes. She is the owner of @yoga.for.climbers, a small business where she can combine all her passions into one. She loves runout slab and trying to find static moves around dynos. She gets nervous on pumpy overhanging sport but can always commit to the last move on tall boulders. When she isn't climbing, she reads books and comics, lifts weights, and does yoga. She also hangs out with her ten-pound rescue pup, Beta, who despite her name is not a good crag dog but is an excellent cuddler.



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