

Choosing Vendors That Fit Your Brand: Part 2

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



STOP!

Have you read Part One of this series? If not, skip to the "Tie-ins, Resources, and Further Reading Section below to find Part 1. This article launches straight into content left off from Part 1.

- **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:** How to use the understanding of your customer base to work with different vendors.
- **Tie-Ins, Resources, or Further Reading:** [Read Part One of this series here.](#)

Every gym's retail space can benefit from carrying some of the basic, barrier-to-entry level items in their gym. A core lineup for your gym's shop can include beginner-friendly shoes, harnesses, and chalk, to ensure you have a consistent flow of sales.

Behind your core lineup, you can bring in unique, local products that give your gym personality and show your support of the community and local makers.

Choosing these unique brands is what will set your gym apart and is a way to uplift the community.

Consistent, Solid Communication: Brands to Work With

Local kombucha makers, hand salves, and artists are all ways that you can create a sense of identity within the gym. Director of Retail for [High Point Climbing and Fitness](#), Sasha Schwartz, says it's worth it to carry these types of items for the value of the community. "What's cool is showcasing that you're a communal space. The more you have of that the better. Is it going to make the most revenue— likely not."

Even so, look for the local products that offer personality to your retail space and that members keep asking for.

Even if they aren't your biggest sellers, **they can contribute beyond monetary value.** Schwartz points out, "You want your climbing shop to not only be a place where they grab what they need for climbing, you want to grab them in other ways."

The community enjoys seeing itself represented, and these little touches can increase engagement and buy-in for your brand.

Working with Distributors and Reps

Depending on the size of your gym, you may not have a Director of Retail to closely watch the data on retail sales and keep items fresh. This responsibility might fall on the shoulders of an already busy General Manager, Owner, assistant general manager, or other management-type role.

This is where it's important to foster good relationships with your distributors and reps, and to choose brands based on reliable, consistent, relationships. Within that partnership, you can share the data you've collected on your buyers and membership and make low-risk orders that allow you to optimize your retail revenue.

Use Distributors

If you are looking to bring in food, drink, and snack items, companies like [Racepac Distributors](#) are a good place to start. Racepac makes your job easier by keeping your gym fueled with healthy snacks. Distributors like this often work with multiple vendors to provide a variety of food items that work best for you, whether you're at a large or local gym.

[□ Learn More About Racepak Here](#)

They operate as a point-person to minimize the amount of communication you have to manage. Distributors are there to make your job easier. Whether you have a management role that

oversees multiple gym programs or if you specialize in retail, it can be overwhelming to order from many independent food vendors. Working with a distributor is a way to delegate your responsibilities so you can focus on the bigger picture.

Ask Reps

If you bring data to a rep and ask them for suggestions, they will likely be all too happy to help. It is the job of a good rep to suggest relevant items that they feel will sell and bring your gym financial success; when you do well, they do well.

Reps can also make suggestions on newer items, keeping your retail area fresh, interesting, and ahead of the curve. Schwartz also suggests utilizing these relationships for forecasting and ensuring that your core lineup is always stocked.

These forecast orders are placed six months ahead of time and **usually guarantee that the items will be in stock so that you can get exactly what you need delivered on time.** Forecasting makes the reps very happy (sometimes so happy they'll offer deals or discounts) and it **makes your job easier in the long run.**

Sometimes, ASAP orders happen, but it should be expected to only be able to get what is in the warehouses, and that some items may go out of stock. For Schwartz, this is a no-brainer.

"You're almost guaranteed if you forecast because there's an implied agreement of giving them notice. I'll give a best guess estimate of what I want, as well as units."

Sell Your Own Brand

There's one top-of-the-line product sale we haven't discussed: your brand.

"Your gym brand is a beautiful place to experiment and create a following around your brand." Schwartz points out, "If you work with a local screen printer, you can tote that fact. Over time you can build a cult following with your brand."

It's likely that if your members are climbing at your location, they are proud of where they climb and are willing to show it off. Experiment with different designs and merchandise that represent your brand and culture and take note of what goes flying off the shelves. Your merch is where you can offer styles that appeal to varying ages, abilities, and climbing disciplines.

A well-designed logo or graphic can be placed on tees, water bottles, hats, stickers, and hoodies. Let your members, employees, and even day pass users flaunt their favorite gym with some branded swag.

Choosing the right vendors, items, and distributors for your brand isn't an exact science, and in the end, good sales come down to who is doing the selling.

Schwartz says it best: “The thing about retail is items are cool, but they don’t come to life by themselves. They come to life with the people that interact with them.”

Choose items that come to life through the stoke your staff puts behind them.

Choose items that your staff love and teach them how to work with members and customers to help them find the best fit.

Retail is about anticipating your community’s needs and listening to their interests. If you pay attention, you can get a good idea of what gets them excited, what they keep coming back for, and what comes to life through their interactions.

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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