



DRESSING ANGLERS for SUCCESS

Anglers have enough decisions to make when on the water. By choosing the right clothing and footwear up front, we are able to concentrate on the fishing instead of what we should have been wearing.

Today's angler knows the importance of dressing smart for his sport. The last thing we want is to be distracted by being uncomfortable while on the water, or have to cut a day short because of sunburn or cold. Anglers have more important things on their minds, and that is fooling fish. When asked what his secret was for success, you are very likely to hear about a favorite lure or tactic, but not what he or she was wearing.

But, that doesn't mean anglers underestimate the importance of being prepared for the elements, whether harsh or mild. We pay good money for those very important pieces of gear, if only to be able to forget about them while pursuing our sport. The right clothing and footwear are imperative and anglers know it.

And when it comes down to it, what's

good enough to wear on the water is often what we put on our backs and feet when not on the water. Anglers wear their passion day in and day out and tackle retailers shouldn't overlook this fact. Nor should one ignore the consensus among retailers carrying clothing or footwear that the profit margins for these items are markedly higher than most non-apparel goods. Chris Pardue, Director of Product Development for the Calcutta brand and Big Rock Sports says that on a margin standpoint, retailers should expect to be making 45 to 50 percent and even more on these soft goods items.

Performance Fabrics

Performance fabrics are still leading the way as far as popularity and growth. These include the many styles of shirts and t-shirts

that are made for quick drying, have an SPF sun-protection rating, and incorporate an anti-microbial finish for odor control. "Long sleeves and protection from the sun are key factors right now," Calcutta's Pardue said.

Ted Sakai, Product Manager for Shimano backs up the sentiment. "We see continued growth in EVA (Ethylene vinyl acetate) materials as it is super-lightweight, comfortable all day, and holds up to all fishing conditions."



Tanner Sutton



Haddrell's Point Tackle in Mt. Pleasant, SC sells a lot of the long-sleeve bamboo shirts made by local company Free Fly Apparel. Anglers prefer the performance bamboo for sun-protection and comfort.

Clothing made from bamboo seems to be getting more attention these days. The main attraction with bamboo is its incredible softness and it is light weight. "We created our bamboo clothing to fill a void we felt was missing in the fishing industry—a REALLY comfortable shirt that had a (purposeful) simple design and functioned really well on and off the water. We are encouraged to see a good sell-through of our apparel in specialty retailers around the country. Beyond the buttery soft hanger appeal, bamboo will always keep you dry, comfortable and odor-free on any fishing excursion," said Tanner Sutton, Founder of Free Fly Bamboo Apparel in Charleston, SC.



Key West Bait & Tackle and Haddrell's Point Tackle in Mt. Pleasant, SC both say that customers like the bamboo apparel. The shops order their bamboo performance wear from Tasc Performance out of New Orleans, LA and Free Fly Bamboo Apparel.

Another natural material used for outdoor apparel is wool. Icebreaker uses merino wool from New Zealand sheep and has adapted it to all-season garments that are cooler in summer and warmer in winter. The wool is soft, not itchy like its predecessors, breathable and doesn't retain odor.



Flying Fisherman's SunBandit is made of lightweight 100-percent polyester. They are breathable, so less likely to cause glasses to fog up. The masks only stretch horizontally, so fit comfortably without being confining.

Face Masks

Flying Fisherman is known for its sunglasses line and also sells clothing, including its most popular item, the SunBandit face mask. "The face mask category has grown and expanded tremendously for us and with the retailers in the last couple years," said Linda Sheldon, Vice President of Flying Fisherman. Sheldon noticed a difference at a recent trade show where retailers were purchasing the masks after selling out of them, compared to last year when many were hesitant to order them for their shops.



Linda Sheldon

This type of product was first introduced in the southeast and mainly used by guides in the fly-fishing community. "Now we see it as a trend that is just blossoming everywhere, even out west, up north and in the Midwest.

Now they are everywhere," Sheldon said. They were designed for sun protection, but are just as popular for cold-weather use.

Technical Gear

The company Frogg Toggs, which specializes in technical gear for fishermen, relies on their original technology in materials that have brought them success with their rain wear. They founded the company in 1996 with their non-woven polypropylene material that is 100-percent waterproof, breathable and wind resistant, but retails at a very affordable price.

Expanding on their original technology, Frogg Toggs has introduced other lines of products such as Toadz, which combines the non-woven waterproof inner lining with an outer polyester shell adding durability and performance. Their upper-level line of rainwear, the Pilot Series, is actually made from a lighter version of their best breathable wader material. The company also offers a full line of boots and waders.



Most retailers that carry Frogg Toggs rain gear also carry at least one of their women's garments.



Will Fowler

Frogg Toggs products are available in sizes for women and children. "In the rain gear category, the women's sizes are a large part of our sales. We have several new pieces for women and they are styled, cut and sized for women," Frogg Toggs' Director of Marketing, Will Fowler said. "Most of our retailers carry at least one type of women's garment in their store."

Footwear

“Footwear is a fairly new category for us. We’ve always sold t-shirts, hats and sunglasses and we felt like this was the one area that we didn’t offer anything to complete the ensemble,” said Chris Pardue of Calcutta. “The biggest need in footwear in the fishing and boating industry is to offer a good non-skid and non-marking sole.”

Shimano’s line of Evair boots and shoes are popular with retailers and customers. The Evair Marine Fishing Shoe is a waterproof sandal that is fashionable and functional. It is extremely lightweight, weighing less than 9 ounces. It’s constructed of one-piece molded EVA that absorbs shock and reduces foot fatigue. “The key selling point for these shoes to our market, the fishing consumer, is that these shoes were made by anglers, for anglers,” said John Mazurkiewicz of Shimano. “They have a high-traction sole that won’t mark up a boat.”

How Can Apparel Sales Affect Your Business?

“Let’s put it this way. We wouldn’t be in

business if we didn’t have it. There’s just no way,” said Chris King, co-owner of Key West Bait and Tackle. This is a strong statement from a retailer who is located in the Florida Keys, one of the best fishing venues in the U.S. “Clothing sales are very important. I would guess that clothing accounts for 20 to 25 percent of my overall sales, maybe even a little more. I sell hats, T-shirts, performance shirts, shorts, bikinis, board shorts and a few shoes. Profit margins are more significant than anything else and the turn-around is better. We don’t carry a lot of shoes, but we sell a good many of the Shimano Evair water shoes and Calcutta flip-flops. And for whatever reason, we sell a lot of cheap flip-flops.”

Donna Cox of Jerry’s Bait Shop in Rockwood, Tennessee agrees that apparel sales account for a big chunk of their total sales. Jerry’s sells Walls insulated coveralls, Under Armour

and Drake insulated clothing. Cox estimates that 30 percent of her sales are apparel and footwear related and agrees that the profit margin on these items is greater.

Merritt Gilbert of Valley Rod & Gun in Clovis, California says they sell a lot of the Bassaholics line of clothing and does fairly well with a local line from Hard Core Bass Fishing. The 8,000-square-foot store consists of about 60 percent fishing-related products with the remainder hunting and has been in business for 25 years. The sales of camouflage in the hunting side of the business accounts for the greater bulk of clothing sales. “We have tried different lines of clothing over

the years in the fishing department and the computer tells me what items to carry or discontinue,” Gilbert says. He estimates fishing-related clothing to be less than most stores at only 4- to 5-percent of his total sales. “We stick with what we’ve had good luck with, and Bassaholics is probably the only one that we really consistently sell on an even keel year ’round.”

Bright Future for Apparel

“We see a trend in tackle stores carrying more and more clothing. Footwear is part of that trend and continues to grow as anglers are looking for items designed for their specific needs,” said Ted Sakai, Product Manager for Shimano.

Judging from their sales, Will Fowler of Frogg Toggs views the health of the fishing sportswear industry to be strong. “We’ve grown steadily for the last seven or eight years,” Will said. “I’ve seen an expansion of our retail base, which has grown at the same rate as our sales, which is a great thing for us.”

“I would say that fishing apparel is a hot trend right now, whether it’s t-shirts, headwear or performance wear,” said Chris Pardue of Calcutta. “The sportswear industry is very healthy.” As far as Calcutta’s most popular apparel item, Pardue says their original skull and crossbones logo t-shirt remains their day-in and day-out top seller. ■



Chris King of Key West Bait & Tackle estimates that around 70 percent of his business comes from tourists. Often customers aren't prepared for the hot sun or the fishing and this fact boosts his overall sales of clothing, hats and shoes.

An advertisement for Gary Yamamoto Custom Baits. The background is a light-colored wooden surface. Several fishing lures are displayed, including a large white crankbait with a green and yellow lure attached, and several smaller crankbaits in various colors like red, green, and white. The text "Spring was made" is written in a large, stylized font on the left. At the bottom, it says "for crankin' and rippin'" and features the Gary Yamamoto Custom Baits logo with a fish illustration. The website "WWW.BAITS.COM" and "CIRCLE NUMBER 016 ON READER SERVICE CARD" are also included.