



PLAY IT AGAIN

by Philip Hanyok

IF YOU HAVE CUSTOMERS WHO PUT OFF buying a new rod or reel because they don't want to pay the price, maybe it's time you offer to help them sell some of their used tackle. Most shops have regular customers who own several rods and reels that they don't use, and perhaps those customers have not bought a new rod or reel in recent years. If you can help them sell some of their excess tackle, you can make it easy for them to afford that new gear.

Selling used fly rods, reels or other equipment can be as simple as providing a classifieds bulletin board on a wall in your shop, or as elaborate as providing retail space for used tackle, holding fly-tackle swaps and selling on the Internet. Many fly shops sell a few used rods and reels each

year on consignment. No matter how you do it, selling used tackle gives you the opportunity to provide a convenient service for your long-time customers and a way to build new, lasting relationships with new, eager buyers.

A growing number of fly shops have begun selling used tackle in their shops and over the Internet in recent years, and individual anglers can now easily sell their excess tackle to friends and strangers on the Internet's electronic bulletin boards and fishing-tackle auc-

Is recycled gear a good way to make expensive gear, or is it just one big he

tions. Why shouldn't you capitalize on this growing trend in used-tackle sales? Manufacturers say they don't mind, as long as the used-tackle sales are used as a vehicle to encourage new equipment sales. Besides, if you sell your demo or rental rods and reels, you're already selling used equipment.

"Everybody's looking for something used. It's not just antique tackle," says Len Codella, who for many years has sold used and antique fly-fishing tackle through his *Heritage Sporting Collectibles* publication.

WHAT SELLS? Nicholas DellDonne, owner of The Evening Rise Fly Angler's Shop in Paradise, Pa., says he prefers to sell used tackle on consignment, rather than buying the equipment then reselling it, because it doesn't tie up his money. The two dozen or so used rods he sells each year isn't a lot, he says, but it's worth doing.

"Used reels sell real well," says DellDonne. "In fact, they sell 10 times as fast as a rod. I wouldn't hesitate to buy a good reel, they're like jewelry to fly fishers."

Bob Marriott's fly shop in Fullerton, Calif., carries only a few select older rods on a consignment basis. They do it as a service for their customers, but they prefer to refer those shoppers to Ed Pearlman, who buys and sells used tackle.

Barry Beck, who used to own Fishing Creek Outfitters in Benton, Pa., and now gives fly-fishing demonstrations across the country, says his shop sold a lot of used tackle, sometimes with margins similar to those on new tackle. "I think shops are foolish if they don't do it," says Beck. "We actually developed an audience out there for used tackle. If you sell a used rod, very often you can sell a line or reel to go with it."

Don't try to sell too much used tackle, though, because it may cause your shop's prestige to decline. You'll risk becoming known as a used-rod shop, or your customers may put off buying new rods because they're willing to wait for a good used

rod to come on the market. On the other hand, used rods and reels provide low-cost alternatives for traveling anglers who want backup gear.

Tom Keer, an Orvis regional business manager who visits fly shops from New England to New Jersey, says he doesn't see a lot of used tackle sales going on in fly shops. "I discourage the selling of used rods because it cannibalizes new rod sales," says Keer. "They [dealers] will make more margin on a new rod. They might get a 10-percent commission on a used

boost interest in the event. Do it in spring or summer when interest in fishing is high, and hold a fly-fishing class or fly-tying demonstration along with it. You can even turn your swap into an event that your local press will cover. You might even get some free television coverage out of it.

Getting on the Internet or World Wide Web is easy, but it will require some staff time to maintain the site, as well as a modest advertising/promotion budget. The simplest route is to ask a

title extra money while helping your customers trade up to better, more che you'd be better off avoiding?

rod, which is less than the 40-percent industry standard [for a new rod].

"Some rod swaps, trades and exchanges, again, begin to cannibalize rod sales," says Keer. "The ones that do well are the ones that are dealing specifically in high-end products," such as bamboo rods, antiques, collectibles and hard-to-find equipment.

Shops that only sell a few used rods and reels sometimes let customers take the gear for a weekend or a few days to try it out. If you do this, be sure to explain any conditions (like what happens if the customer breaks the gear) and get a deposit before you let the gear out the door.

WHAT'S IT WORTH? Various publications can provide information on the value of used tackle. The best sources are periodicals like *Codella's Heritage Sporting Collectibles* (352/637-5454), and *Adams Angling* from Jim Adams (510/849-1324). Ed Pearlman (818/342-0260) can provide price estimates. Use the prices given for comparison purposes. Books like *Lawson's Price Guide to Old Fishing Rods* by George S. Lawson Jr. can also help. Once you set a price for consignment tackle, don't reduce it without first checking with the seller. If you reduce the price, you risk creating disputes with the seller.

The fly-fishing industry can learn from the ski and golf markets. Many ski and golf shops hold swaps, either at their stores or on the slopes or links. People bring their used equipment to the swap, put a price on it and leave it for sale. The shop takes a percentage of each sale and the seller gets the cash or a credit at the store. Ski shops that hold swaps on the slopes allow potential buyers to test skis and boots before they buy. If you have a casting pond or access to a nearby stream, encourage your customers to test the used tackle before they buy. What angler isn't likely to buy a rod if he or she steps out to the pond and catches a fish?

GET THE WORD OUT. If you promote your fly-tackle swap in local media, you can

local Internet service provider (ISP) to hook you up and build an Internet or Web page where you can post used (and new) tackle for sale. When potential customers see an item on your page that they want to buy or get more information on, they call the shop or send you an e-mail. If you shop around, you can find service providers that can set you up with a site for as little as \$20 per month. Then, you just post items to your site and mention the site in your advertising and promotional mailings. It requires only basic computer skills to maintain the site, but you should check it daily to respond quickly to customer e-mails.

A more complex Web page can provide more opportunities, but that's a topic for another article. If you want a fancy E-commerce site that can provide sales directly over the Internet via credit-card sales, contact a Web-site construction company or one of the several fly-fishing Internet sites, such as the Virtual Flyshop (www.flyshop.com).

It may sound cliché, but the best time to start selling used tackle is now. In recent years, many new fly fishers bought new rods and reels, but the price of the best tackle has risen and it seems fewer anglers are entering the sport and buying high-end rods and reels. These anglers may feel they have the equipment they need, but, deep inside, they probably want top-of-the-line tackle. It's only natural. You can easily capitalize on their desire, without taking advantage of them or selling them something they don't need.

There is no way to accurately estimate how much used equipment is sold each year, but for some shops it's substantial. For most, it is a small portion of their business, but it's a valuable service they provide to their customers. It allows some customers to sell used rods or reels to pay for new ones, and it allows new fly fishers to buy better tackle at a lower price. In both cases, you can meet your customers' needs and strengthen your relationship with them.