



channel mastery

Channel Mastery Podcast, 141: Ryan Eittrheim, Sales Director for
Consumer Products for Wintersteiger

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Kristin: Hey there everyone and welcome back to another episode of the channel mastery podcast. I'm so excited to introduce Ryan Eittrheim to you today, who is the Sales Director for Consumer Products for Wintersteiger. Welcome to the show, Ryan. It's great to have you here.

Ryan: Thank you for having me Kristin.

Kristin: Well, I am excited on so many levels to have your expertise here today. You're going to share a lot of great information research and insights on creating a safe retail and rental environment. And we've obviously been covering this in partnership with SIA through their town halls. In addition to what Verde has been producing on the Channel Mastery podcast and our blog. We're basically talking about creating a safe environment for retail and rental guests and the importance. There's like a perception around that. There are things that people are expecting to see, but ultimately we're business leaders and we need to figure out process and systems for our operation, as well as enabling our staff to be trained and feel confident and safe as well. So this is definitely a toothy topic and I'm super grateful that the timing worked out as well as it did that your company, and you have led this effort to create two resources.

One is for retail, one's for rental, and they'll both be available on both your website and the show notes page for Channel Mastery, which we'll get into at the end of the interview so that you know where to download that everybody. But before we get into the meat of the matter, give us a little bit of background on your career in the outdoor active lifestyle markets, as well as your role at Wintersteiger.

Ryan: Yes. well, I suppose I'll start. I grew up in Sun Valley, Idaho ski racing. I started tuning skis and through high school college, I worked at a number of shops and actually managed a shop in Phoenix, Arizona when I was going to school down there. After graduation, I wanted nothing, but to get back to the mountains. So I went to work for a little tool company in Idaho called Spire Cut ski products, which some of the older people watching this will remember it very fondly.

We grew that business quite a bit. Mostly back shop, hand tools, abrasives things for

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tuning skis and snowboards, purchased by a wax company out of Germany that I ran for a few years where I got involved in world cup, race service, as well as you know, just pushing the retail side really.

And then from there, Spire Cuts was purchased by Wintersteiger, where I was the sales manager for the Western part of the United States for all of the machine. Wintersteiger, if people don't know is one of the, is a world leader in ski tuning equipment. And as well as everything rental shop, we do rental software specialized wracking, boot dryers lockers with disinfectant.

A few years back, we purchased a couple of companies. One is boot dock, which produces custom insoles stepping in solos, compression, socks, and foam liners and Hotronic which is foot warmers and heated socks. So since we purchased those two companies, I've been the director of sales for Hotronic and Boot Dock, our retail brands.

And when all of this went down we saw the need for just some guidance, some best practices of how are we going to get back to retail, especially customizing footwear and being able to hand out rental skis with social distancing? And as we started talking with resorts and retail shops and some of our industry partners, we realized people didn't really understand exactly what products were available. So we wanted to put this out to our dealer base, as well as both outdoor and ski. So they're aware of some of the practices we could use.

Kristin: Well, and I love what you've pulled together here because you talk about the evolution that everybody in our markets in our communities are experiencing. And that is the consumer as the North Star. I think for so many years, we have been involved in these industries where so much emphasis has gone toward the point of distribution or the point of retail because the brands have really relied on the wholesale side, at least so much on the retailers to tell their story and provide the brand experience.

And I think to a degree that's still true and it always will be because the brands are tapping into those shops as a way to kind of be authentic and have local dialectic into a community. But at the same time, there's always been a little bit of like wizardry behind the scenes. The consumer may see, you know, a rental operation, et cetera, but I, I don't know if you'd agree with me, Ryan, but it seems like this is, it's not necessarily like a time for disruption because we're dealing with COVID, which was a disruption in and of itself.

But along the theme of modernizing through the COVID era, this is an opportunity for us. And I love that you're here to talk today about how a retailer and essentially an extension of that, a brand, can really, I think up-level their game and be more consumer centric, more mindful of how the consumer is maybe ascertaining their environment when they're in a physical location. And then maybe there's even some education that can be done around the process of fitting boots today or what the products are available today. Cause let's face it like sometimes when a tourist is in renting product at a resort, for example, they're not exactly like sitting there having an experience, they're waiting to get their stuff and get on the Hill this year. It's going to be different. So let's, let's talk

a little bit about what you're anticipating and then let's get into your research here. Like what, what is it that you're seeing right now for winter 2021 in this regard?

Ryan: Well I think for the winter coming up, people are trying to figure out how they're going to get past what are typical pitch points. I mean, we believe that, with what we've seen in the growth of outdoor recreation during COVID in the summer, we anticipate that's going to be the same for winter sports. It may be Alpine skiing and maybe Nordic skiing/snowshoeing. We just know that we're going to see you know, a larger participation base out there. So we're trying to figure out the best way to meet those needs. Be it with rentals. One of the biggest things in the past, we can see most resorts have gone online reservations for the rentals at about 20% for the major resorts, they're looking to change that to 80% online reservations.

And that is a disruption. I mean, that's something different that they haven't, they've always wanted to get to, but the tools have kind of been there, but nobody's utilized them. Now everybody's diving in as quick as they can that - how can they push that along to get more online reservations and be able to handle consumers, be a renters or retail on a one on one basis?

And I think we see the same thing with, with retail. We're going to see a more customized service based solution in the shops. One staff member with one buyer, one customer and taking them through this through the stores. So you're going to see a more personalized experience all the way across the board.

Kristin: It sounds like what you're saying is that it would be like set an appointment. I mean, you're, you're speaking two levels here. You're talking about get the process of the rental going online. So there's less paperwork, less interaction that has to happen in a physical environment. But what about appointment setting? In terms of making sure that people not only get the bulk of the paperwork and maybe payment done online, but also the fit experience where they're actually in an appointment with a retailer or, or a, you know, rental practitioner

Ryan: Yeah, for sure. The, I mean, that's what we're looking at on the retail side of things that there are reservation systems and we can get 90% of the information to pre-set skis where if somebody has reserved, if they know exactly the right boot size and they don't need to try it on they can do the reservation. The rental shops will have a pickup window or even a 10 outside where the product will be staged so that the consumer doesn't actually have to go into the rental shop.

On the same side, on the retail side, we are recommending appointments, especially if you need to buy footwear and have customization buy a pair of ski boots. So you can have that time set with a boot fitter one-on-one and go through the whole process. The, the whole idea here is market the appointment or the reservation systems so we can make room for the walk-ins right.

We do actually to limit the number of people in retail stores. We recommend if someone doesn't have an appointment, you have a greeter at the front desk and you have them wait until you can match them up with a staff member to go through the

store and what they're doing. This is at least for the service part of things, the boot fitting, or ski tuning, a rentals, where is if they want a browse, this store just said, somebody can recommend keep social distancing and maybe have a traffic pattern that they can follow. So you're just not getting a lot of people running into each other.

Kristin: Right. It's going to be tricky too, with like the cold weather outside. What we're experiencing now is like a little bit of a rehearsal, but it's, it's a soft rehearsal. Ryan and I are, I'm recording this smack in the middle of July, but he and I were speaking before we hit record that, you know, people in our world are already in fall and high season in our minds.

And so we're sitting here looking at our, our lab, which is summer retail. We're already seeing some spikes and dips, which is exactly what we were told we would see in terms of like the w multiple W's of recovery. I think we're in another spike right now in a lot of regions. And I, I just get a sense that, like what, we're, what we're seeing now, we have an interesting thing we're looking at. We have a perspective of a consumer in a physical environment, getting trained.

We are also that consumer as we're shopping, whether it's grocery store or whatever it is, we have to always consider how that is being trained, whether it's like buy online pickup in store, or maybe it's more that's happening with Amazon. I've been reading a lot about how eBay and even Etsy and Groupon and all of these different since Amazon's delivery has been compromised, with being the everything store during the COVID era, we're starting to see consumers are getting trained by other marketplaces and other online retailers as well. So it's just, I feel like everything we've been talking for a while, cause obviously you were in the Academy about the changes in consumer behavior, but when we started working together at the end of may versus now, those changes are marked even more.

And by the time we get to our high season, I don't know where we're going to be. Plus we have that darn election to consider, but let's go back to laser focus back on our domain for the people listening today who have tuned in, I have a feeling this is relevant to everyone in the Channel Mastery audience, but especially to retailers, to brands that are supporting those retailers and obviously to rental shops. And again, this is a, it's a little bit of like a micro view, but it's super important in terms of that imprint that we're going to put on a, either a returning enthusiast or a brand new never ever, who just as Ryan was saying, we're going to see an influx of newcomers coming in to experience winter sports and the outdoor benefits of that as well.

So let's talk a little bit about how we're going to take care of arts staff and empower them to deliver a great experience. This overview is 14 pages and he has two of these one's for retail one's for rental. So there's a lot of great information. We don't have to get into all the granularity of it, but at the same time, like this is a really big one, there's a communications piece to it, there's a systems and practice and process piece to it. How would you talk with a shop owner or a rental shop manager in terms of best practices, top lines that they need to watch as we're going into our new season here?

Ryan: Well, certainly I think it's about how it works first and foremost, how we're

going to keep our employees safe. And I hear that the most from the, but we also have to keep our customers safe. On the resort level, a lot of resort operators are concerned that they're going to open up and one case of COVID comes out of participation and they're afraid they may have to shut down. So everything's designed to stay open.

I think as we see these spikes and when we start seeing more mandates. National Retail Federation just recommended that all retail chains recommend masks regardless. And as of today in July I believe Best Buy, Walmart and Sam's Club just did. So those are simple things that are in this that we do recommend staff, especially staff, that's has the opportunity to contact a customer, be it boot fitting or handing equipment back and forth have to wear a mask and gloves.

We recommend that all consumers that come in the store wear masks, but aren't necessarily in need of wearing gloves. Separation as we've seen in most stores that we've gone into, we have plexiglass separators between the cashiers and the consumers and in certain areas.

There are a number of retailers that have already created screen plexiglass screens between a boot fitting or a footwear fitting seat and the staff member who's trying to try shoes on. Keen actually came out with a really cool safety fit screen that has a little gap in plexiglass with a little gap, so you can size people up but trying to be as contactless as possible.

And there are a lot of tools out there that do allow for, for no contact foot analysis, like 3D scanners. And there's some tools for limited or no contact list customizing of footwear are, or making custom insoles. So there's tools out there. We supply them as well as a number of other companies that can make these processes simpler and, and safer for everybody involved.

Kristin: The report that I'm looking at that you pulled together even has like a 2D and a 3D of what it could look like for your shop, so that you can kind of see, you know, some of the best practices that are happening out there as well as implementation, and you're making yourselves available to your shops or like to everyone, or what are you planning on doing webinars? Tell us a little bit about the ongoing resource that you hope to provide.

Ryan: When we put this together, the key was we wanted to be a resource to our customer base. I mean, we really want, we have the knowledge, we have the product we wanted to just put out there the best practices as a resource to help people decide what to do. One of the things we do, because we set up back shop ski tuning, repair shops, we set up huge rental shops, locker rooms, and even retail spaces. We have a 3D design program that we use to lay out all these shops for people when they're opening a new shop or remodeling their shop. And so, we went in and created signage for social distancing, some ideas. And then with that, with that, well, where do we put these? How do we lay it out? So we used our design program to kind of change some shop flows, be it retail or rental.

And we have the ability to help any of our customers or anybody on that stage actually redesigned some flows to help them make that social distancing easier. And it's just a matter of speaking with, with one of our sales reps or sales managers and getting dimensions from the shops and stuff and seeing how we might help them lay it out. We, we do want to be that resource. Usually it comes with looking at boot dryers, which we'll talk about in a little bit and, and where we can place them in and how we make use of those in this situation.

Kristin: Okay. So I'm actually really happy to have you talk about the product that you're helping to offer hoping to offer to retailers as they're following your guide here. But I just wanted to first say, when you download these two resources that Ryan and his team and Wintersteiger have created, keep in mind, they are very strong examples of resource based content marketing. We've talked through the entirety of COVID around the importance of serving your audience, not being transactional only. And we've seen brands have incredible success ranging from some of our specialty brands in outdoor active lifestyle market, all the way up to Nike with this approach where you're not sell, sell, sell, even though we might be, you know, really wanting to do that because we're in a challenged and compromised recession economy right now, but at the same time, what you've provided here feels trusted.

It brings like a full spectrum support to the shop and to the rental manager, which I think is fantastic. And it's not just heavily pushing all of your product. And I just want to commend you 14 pages in just one of these. And there's very little, if any selling, your product fits right into it. So I want to just commend you for doing a great job. And I want everyone in the audience to look at this because it's a fantastic example of resource based content marketing during a time when people are really, really hungry for it.

So with that, let's talk a little bit about the products that you are providing from Wintersteiger, because as we talked about before we hit record, I do think that there's a little bit of like what's happening back there behind the curtain and rental, and even in some facets of retail was with a winter sports. And what you're about to tell us here is kind of some of the evolution that the audience might not be aware of and how that fits into a safety and a kind of best in class experience that we're hoping to provide for customers this year. So tell us what's new.

Ryan: Yeah, well, actually very little is new. And this is the piece we're doing with rental boots and rental helmets that people are putting on daily. We're dealing with retail and boots that people are trying on daily. And when COVID first hit, we thought, well, let's make sure our products meet the needs.

And we did the research, we went through and discovered that the sanitizers that we use for spraying the boots and helmets are approved by the EPA to kill SARS too, which is a virus that causes COVID-19. So it was a matter of, okay, how much can we order now? Cause it's probably going to get thin. So we've been working out a deal so we get a guaranteed amount every month so that we can supply our customers.

The newest thing is just creating a Wintersteiger mask. I think that the new hot promo item, their swag items masks. Now we've always had masks in the catalogs cause we're

working with wax fumes and all sorts of things, but we decided to go out to a friend of ours who was making masks and they have a Wintersteiger mask made.

What was really interesting for us for the rental side...we have a rental software program called easy rep. About two years ago, we redesigned it and introduced the future of rental. And the idea was to make the rental process much more efficient. We started with a, with a program called the Easy Gate, which was digital signage that told people when they were ready, set, having to wait in line in the queue all the time, all day, they could actually sign up, leave and then when they look at the TV and said, you know, "Smith family you're ready, tech bench one," they would go there.

Well automatically that deals with social distancing right there. You're keeping people from, from herding up and hanging around the same spot. Then it goes to a 3D foot scanner, which is a really simple non-mechanical completely contactless camera system that takes a 3D image of your foot, all the measurements and more that we need for fitting a ski boot or a hiking boot or any kind of footwear, that's operated by a tablet. So it's completely contactless. And from there, the customer, we discovered that the customer, the design was to be efficient, so the customer was getting the right boot the first time. So they weren't trying on all these different boots, product wasn't being handed back and forth.

Once a customer puts the boots on, they would typically go to the ski, but the tech bench, have to take a boot off so the technician can fit the bindings for them. And we created a product called size fit. And this actually allowed when the ski boot was scanned, when the customer had it on scan into the system, the size fit would automatically go to the size of that boot, millimeter sole length for setting the bindings without the customer having to take it off.

So at this point, the contact point really is handing the skis and poles, handing the product to the customer and not a lot of back and forth, not actually physically touching the customer. So when we looked at, how do we create a contactless rental system? We have the solution already. We just had never thought of it that way.

So we want to really market that. Then we go into, as I mentioned, sanitizers, obviously that was going to be disinfectants and sanitizers was going to be very important piece. And we have that product available already to the point where I've done some town halls with some resorts. And of course the next day, some of the rental managers or shop managers are calling going, I want 800 bottles of the sanitizer. Okay. It's on its way.

So we have that. But the other thing that we discovered is during the early months of COVID, when Utah and here in Summit County were all in red or orange. The Summit County health department was recommending anybody who tried on any kind of clothing, footwear, headwear on that product, be sequestered for 24 hours off the floor. It had to be in a back room on a special rack.

So it just sat there untouched. Well, as we moved in, that's great, but some of these inventories are limited. You can't just one thing one size and not be able to try it on the next person. So we did a little more research and discovered that with the sanitizers we offer, they typically kill the virus within 10 minutes of on any hard surface. Fabric's a little questionable, but it usually is less time. Then we recommend putting on a disinfecting boot dryer for footwear, or we do have clothing dryer cabinets as well as helmet dryers but it's really recommended to use, have something that uses a UV lamp, ionization or ozone.

Within an hour and a half, we've discovered and know that typically that product is pretty safe to get back out on the floor and try it on again. We're trying to help speed it up. We do recommend that everybody check with their local health departments, just to make sure that they're meeting the regulations for the retail space there, but we're just trying to speed up the process and try to make it as normal as possible when it's really not going to be.

Kristin: You've provided such great information here. Let's say I'm a, a retail shop that has a rental component. I am agreeing and I'm going to be doing as much as I can online. And that would be the opportunity I would think to present here is our process. How could we provide maybe while the consumer is, you know, considering to buy or shopping, or maybe doing more online research that you know, that you're taking the measures that you are in terms of disinfecting product between customers and especially on the apparel side. I, I feel like as a consumer myself, the more that I can read and get comfortable with an environment before I'm in it, the more I am likely to be in it, especially during this time of uncertainty, so, I mean, would that be a special follow up email sequence that you'd send to a consumer who fills out the online component of this, or what would you recommend in that regard? Have you thought through that piece?

Ryan: Yeah, I think you know, one of the pieces just to get started right before you get that consumer in is real resource like this, or even taking this resource as a boot dock dealer, I would love for any of my, my dealers to grab this piece, send it to the local newspaper, a little articles like - Hey, these are what we're practicing, so we can continue to do business to bring that person in.

And with a lot of information - go online, do your shopping online research. If you want to touch and feel, we'll set it aside for you, come on in and we'll work with you on it. And I think we're seeing that happening a little more. And in certain aspects around this, I also believe that on the initial aspect of deciding what to do or where to go shop somewhere, I know I am before we go anywhere, I'm looking it up online. Make sure they're open, see what their regulations are.

You know, the requirements are you know, their hours are their times they're closed and what I can expect. So if I'm already online and there's an opportunity to make an appointment, and I know I'm going to go, I would love to do it that way. Once you have that customer information, as much information as any of us can grab from our consumers, it's only, you know, knowledge is power here.

When they're filling out that, on that reservation piece asks, if they'll be willing to fill out a survey and ask them, what are they afraid of about coming to the store? Why do they want to come to the store? And what can we do to make them feel better about coming in the store?

Kristin: It's a great idea. I love that. And again, every touch point that's like, you know, right on your website, the first place they're going to go make sure you have something, you know, a landing page or some kind of a well-marked place for them to go and read, like the most recent changes in your business practices. This goes back to like day one of the COVID 19 resources we've provided is like more communication over less communication, number one, and then considering your retail shop sales floor, people as points of communication, they're there to disperse the message to.

So the more confident they feel about it and the more best in class they feel their employer is, the better your customers are going to have an experience with them handling that interaction. So there's also, I think a component of this where you can really create a lifetime customer value by going the extra mile and really implementing this entire system that you're recommending.

And also factoring in the survey. If somebody takes the time to submit a survey immediately, thank them. And, you know, potentially there's some sort of an offer, you know, on what they're going to end up transacting within your store, but the fact that you're acknowledging the time that they took to take that survey is also an additional touch point.

And remember, we're specialty, like that's what people expect from us as Ryan was talking about - we're talking about best buy and Walmart and United Airlines was kind of one of the early ones that we were watching at Verde. Like all the airlines everybody was looking at, what are the airlines going to do? I think now it's like, what are media retailers doing?

And how do we make that relevant to our people? Because we're going to have people traveling in to go recreate, they're going to be trained by these larger retailers. So we need to understand what they're getting on that level and make it really, you know, safety and appropriate for them on our level.

So I think that what you've provided here is an exceptional guide. I'm proud to share this with our audience. And again, you can find everything at www.channelmastery.com or the www.verdepr.com websites. You'll clearly see where we have our show notes there, but tell us where the audience can find more resources from Wintersteiger.com.

Ryan: So on the rental and the bag shop side it is at wintersteiger.com.

Kristin: Awesome. And that's globally relevant. I believe like your websites, obviously you're a global company. This is, you know, this pandemic, this whole experience has been a uniter in terms of all of us all over the world, going through this and learning from each other. So I actually feel that the fact that you're a global company makes us even more

trusted and relevant in my mind. So I'm really hoping that this brings value to our audience. What else did I forget to ask you? Because this is obviously a complicated topic. There's lots of different levels. You've made yourselves available.

Maybe put that put the word out here right now, again, like how can people contact you for more information? And did I forget to ask you anything that's cruxy here?

Ryan: Well, one thing I wanted to mention, and I think it's really on the store rental floor or the shop floor avenue here is - I'm really interested in watching, going on these places and people seeing bug sprayers with their sanitizers and, and spraying it.

And you guys, people go into larger retail or resort areas and see people with packs. And there is something that people don't understand is electric static sprayers are very important here because there is, we do recommend in the guidelines, that throughout the day, every couple hours, if you have a gap in customers in the store, you spray everything down. You certainly want to, at the end of the evening with most sanitizers and electric static, sprayer will allow you to spray the sanitizer. And because of the electrostatic in there, it causes it to spread throughout the surface it's on versus a bug sprayer, where it's only gonna put it where it hits it.

So you get them much better coverage when you use electric stack sprayer. And that is what is new in our catalog. We've never offered it before. And, and our sanitizing supplier sent us the info on it and we made it available. It's nice that we can make it available to the people cause they're not always readily.

Kristin: And people may not even know what you just said. And it's a, I think that's a hugely important topic. I'm really glad you brought that up.

Ryan: Yeah. That's some new, I learned about all this when putting this together. But, and on a global piece and this really did start with a conversation from one of my product managers in Austria and our sales manager in Australia because he was trying to get his customers opened up. So we started, started it early on with just a really outline and then it evolved into what we've put together now.

Kristin: It's fantastic. It really is. So thank you so much for sharing that with us here today. And we now know where to get ahold of you, but tell us again, that email address that people can get more information from, or perhaps talk to somebody about this,

Ryan: The main corporate email address to get all our contact information globally is www.wintersteiger.com And then for the boot dock side of things, it's just www.boot-doc.com.

Kristin: Okay, awesome. Thank you so much. All right. Well, we hope to you back as we do hit high season, Ryan, I would love to have you as kind of our resident expert on making rental and retail safe, this coming winter. So I really appreciate all that you and your team are doing and thanks for being on.

Ryan: Oh, thanks for having me and look forward to doing it again.

