

Merchandising Cutlery: Look Sharp!



Above: Tinker 9th Century Viking Sword replica from CAS Hanwei

BY MARK HAWVER

Knives, swords, multi-tools and other cutting devices are core items for almost every army/navy store.

Yet unlike the knife specialty store, a niche retailer that is in decline, the army/navy store must dedicate selling and storage space to a daunting variety of products across a wide range of product categories.

That makes it more difficult for the army/navy retailer to determine where, how and how much space to devote to cutlery products in the store. It also requires help from cutlery suppliers in terms of display and presentation cases and in the need for selling tools such as posters, catalogs, signage and other sales aids.

Further complicating matters are the broad range of categories within the cutlery market; sporting, tactical, utility, collectible, tools, pocket knives and a host of swords including martial arts, fantasy, military, ceremonial and decorative.

There are some common sense rules for the display of knives that help the retailer narrow his choices as to location within the store.

For example, since safety and pilferage

are always issues with knives, the products must be physically separated from direct contact with customers except under direct supervision. This makes an enclosed display case or countertop display a must, and knives that are not shown in this manner should be individually blister carded or clamshelled, to prevent direct contact with the blade.

Safety and pilferage issues would also seem to drive the choice of location to areas near the point of sale, where store personnel will most likely be present to help customers with knife selection and to monitor customer interaction with carded or blistered product.

Metal under glass

The most common display vehicle for knives is the glass display case, either the floor-based type or the countertop-based version. The latter provides eye-level viewing of the product for the cus-



Glass display cases provide an ideal viewing experience for the customer while also providing protection against handling and pilferage.

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tomer, but also usurps valuable countertop space, especially if located at the checkout counter.

The floor-based glass display case is usually short but wide, yet offers plenty of display space with multiple layers of glass shelving to maximize the viewing area to an even greater extent.

It does not present as optimal a viewing angle for the customer as the countertop display, though.

Blister carded or clamshell packaged knives has become a more popular presentation mode for low-to-medium cost knives. It is also a popular choice for display in big box or general merchandise stores rather than in specialty stores. This is partially due to the ability of individually packaged knives to feature selling points on the packaging, reducing the need for employee-customer interaction.

It is not an ideal selling vehicle for more upscale knives, since customers would be far more likely to require handling and inspecting the product in their hand before spending a fair amount of money on a knife.

At Mickey's Army Navy in Warren, Ohio, knife sales specialist Kim Wilson oversees a large

- Rugged full-tang construction
- 20" plasma-coated high-carbon blade
- Kraton handle slabs

- Excellent value - MSRP \$169
- Call for Dealer Program

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assortment of knife products and accessories. She utilizes many display cases, both floor-based and countertop, to display the store's vast selection.

"We house our knives in seven floor display cases, with smaller countertop cases on top of those," Wilson noted.

Some of the countertop cases in particular are supplied by knife makers such as Victorinox. The cases are not offered free of charge since they tend to be expensive, but most makers offer merchandise buy-in deals to offset the cost of the display.

"The displays are usually a throw-in with the purchase of a full display's worth of knives, or it is purchased through the use of co-op advertising dollars," she said.

Most of the higher-end knives include attractive gift cases and/or sheaths. Wilson sells sheaths as an accessory, with sales of cordura nylon sheaths more popular than leather sheaths.

Folding knives seem to be outselling fixed blades these days, according to Wilson. In any case, customers who request to handle knives are closely supervised to prevent injury from mishandling and to prevent pilferage.

Wilson emphasizes the importance of accessorizing knife sales, especially with items such as sharpeners and sheaths.

Swords are not as big sellers in Wilson's cutlery mix, and those that they do sell are wall-



mounted towards the back of the store, where there is more room for slower selling items that take up more physical space.

Jessica Hall of Hallmark Cutlery advises retailers to promote cutlery as add-on items to the sale of tactical or outdoor apparel or gear, or for other special or seasonal sales.

"A free or discounted knife can be used as a bonus with the purchase of \$100 in hunting apparel, for example," Hall said.

Knife display case at Brother's The Police Store in Farmingville, New York.

She also recommends cross-merchandising cutlery and sharpeners into non-related areas of a store to create accessory lines.

Hall also suggests keeping vendor catalogs available for special orders in stores where lack of store merchandising or inventory space is an issue. She noted that her company, like some others, does not maintain order minimums so that retailers can order one-offs from a catalog to fulfill a customer request.

Rack 'em up

Frank Levy of Compass Industries advises retailers to place knife displays at customer eye level. His company offers countertop spinner displays that allow for maximum product selection with minimum counter space consumed.

He suggests carded knives for stores in which customers are more likely to require less sales assistance.

"Blister-packed knives also are safer for the customer to handle and not as easy to steal," Levy offered.

Barry Ross of CAS Hanwei notes that his company's new line of Rock Creek knives will be supported by attractive gift packaging and retailers will be offered sales literature and special merchandising aids. ✪

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