

Buy Local Now gains favor with suppliers, retailers

By Matt Wiebe

BLOOMINGTON, MN—Amazon Prime members are as smug as instant gratification allows one to be. But SmartEtailing's Mark Graff thinks the company's Buy Local Now program can go Amazon one better.

When a bike consumer finds the product they are looking for on a supplier's website and they click the "Buy Local Now" button, up pops a list of bike shops near them that have exactly that product in stock.

Amazon may have numerous ware-

houses, but it doesn't have the reach or variety of inventory held at 4,000 bike shops around the country.

"Driving a few minutes and picking up what you want is not only convenient, but it is immediate gratification," said Graff, SmartEtailing's co-founder with Barry Brenner.

"Plus if you have any trouble with your order the shop is there to provide further advice, installation or allow easy returns or exchanges," Graff added. A self-confessed Amazon Prime user, he thinks the potential of Buy Local Now is well suited for specialty retail.

The program, first announced at last year's Frostbike, went live at Interbike 2012, and since then more than 100,000 people have clicked Buy Local Now buttons at participating suppliers, and participating stores have been regularly getting sales through their websites—some of which are picked up in-store.

Purchases are also likely to have been made in the stores but these cannot be tracked via Buy Local Now, Graff explained during two seminars he presented at Frostbike.

"We sold a \$300 pair of shoes the other day with Buy Local Now. I don't think we could have got that sale without it," said Jeanette Thorpe, a buyer at Bike World in Austin, Texas, who attended the Buy Local Now seminar.

Bike World is no stranger to cutting-edge Internet retail technology, and the retailer is behind the program, but there are still details to work out. Those include things like how Buy Local Now is going to impact results on Google searches and how orders for small items such as tubes and smaller parts are going to be handled.

"Like REI, we have quite a few customers who prefer to shop online but pick things up in store and save on shipping costs. Internet retail is changing so quickly, so we have to stay out in front of new developments like this," Thorpe added.

Not all shops have the track record of Bike World on the Internet, but Downtube Bicycle Works in Albany, New York, is quickly coming up to speed.

"A year ago we had no POS system, no email, no website and no Facebook page. I was brought in to change all that," said Becky Puritz, Downtube's "queen of IT."

"We already have more of our customers emailing their orders into the shop for pick-up, and I hear much more interest in buying things locally," Puritz said.

Puritz sees the potential for Buy Local Now to drive more local online shoppers into the store to pick up orders and is going to be following the program closely. Downtube Bicycle Works is not currently participating in the program.

Supplier participation in Buy Local Now is free, as is the basic listing for

retailers. Retailers may also subscribe to link their point-of-sale inventory system to Buy Local Now, which allows consumers to know their in-store inventory.

In addition, retailers can report warehouse inventory from brands, distributors and vendors they do business with. This allows nearby shoppers to know what products they can have on their shelf in a day or two. A shop with virtual inventory is identified differently in the Buy Local Now shopping map.

Suppliers with Buy Local Now buttons active on their sites include Cane Creek, CatEye, Civia, Buzzy's, Park Tool, Problem Solvers, Saris, SRAM and Surly. Suppliers that will be adding buttons soon include Banjo Brothers, Bellwether, Burley, Clement, DT Swiss, FSA, Lizard Skins, Michelin and Profile Design.

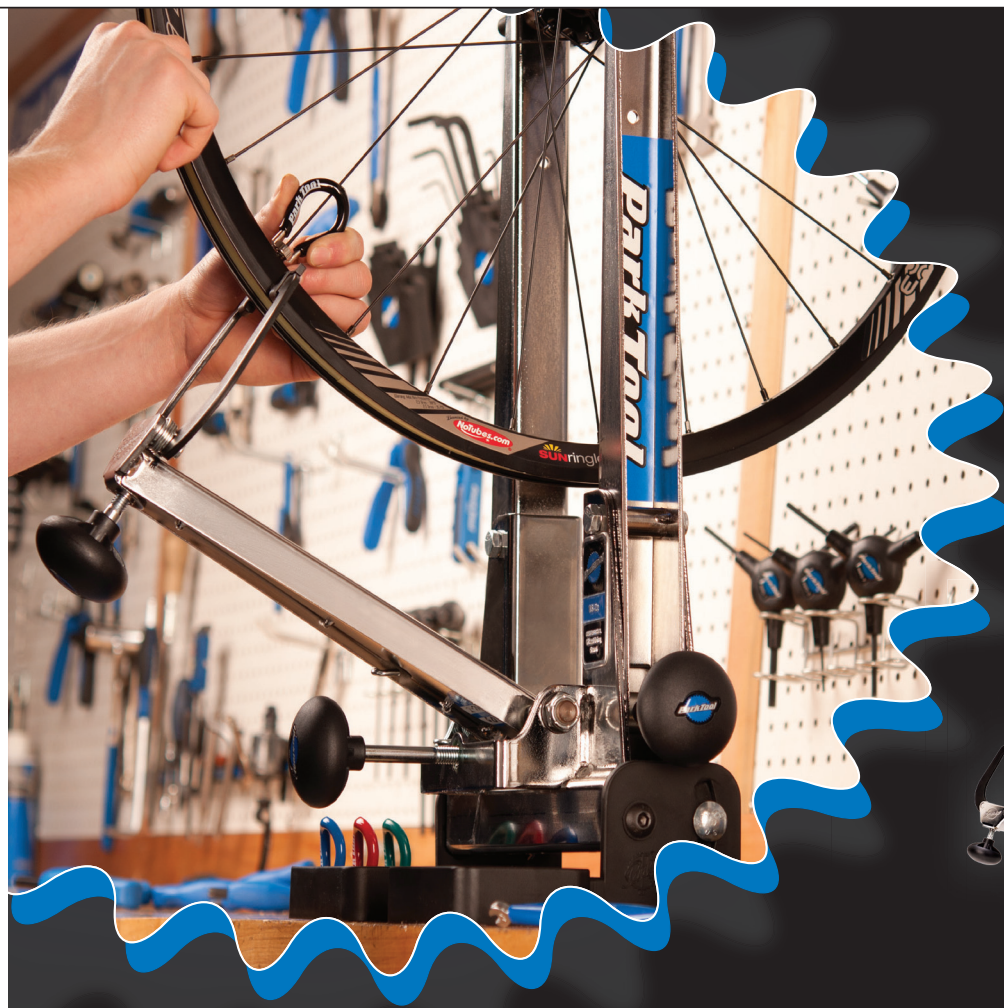
Suppliers including Saris/CycleOps use Buy Local Now buttons concurrently with a Shopatron cart, and they plan to evaluate the differences between systems.

Buy Local Now is unlike commonly used dealer locator applications on suppliers' websites, which identify dealers that may no longer be associated with the brand, and may or may not have the product desired.

Because Buy Local Now uses a shop's POS inventory data, it can tell a potential customer if the product they are after is in stock at local bike shops. **BRAIN**

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—Jeanette Thorpe, buyer, Bike World of Austin, Texas



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