

BY MARK KAKKURI

4 BRIGHT INSIGHTS

FOR INCREASED FLASHLIGHT SALES

I**F** the shooting industry is known for anything, it's adherence to the rules of gun safety. One of those rules

is to know your target. And one of the ways to know your target is to light it up. It's why the personal/tactical flashlight market has exploded in recent years. Consumers who are serious shooters are of course adamant about proper target identification and, as such, are carrying in-pocket or mounting on-weapon a tactical flashlight. Flashlight manufacturers have caught on and are introducing new and better lighting systems.

According to Keith Swenson, spokesperson for Torrance, Calif.-based Pelican Products Inc., "Features and capabilities of today's flashlights far surpass the

old-school flashlights purchased at a hardware store and have outgrown kitchen drawer/cabinet status." From a utility and personal safety perspective, he says, "Flashlights are a must-have."

The goal of flashlight manufacturers is to help shooters see better (i.e., to know their targets, to see around them, to increase safety). To this end, here are four bright insights — some straight from the manufacturers themselves — for increased flashlight sales in your store.

↑ **DISPLAY AND ADVERTISE THE FLASHLIGHTS YOU HAVE IN STOCK.**

Every manufacturer you represent wants their flashlights on display in your store and appearing in



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your advertisements. This of course helps with customer awareness and comprises the first step on the so-called buyer's journey (which also includes consideration and decision). As a matter of fact, you should want the flashlights you sell on display and in advertisements as well.

Consider the advertisements as a lure to attract and draw customers into your store and

the product display as the hook — which will ultimately help convince them it's time to buy. Sometimes the manufacturer provides advertising support; use it whenever you can! But always back it up with a product display. It's a good idea to have a current, working model available for customers to handle and use in your store. There's nothing quite like actually hefting and working the controls of a light. It's an exercise in persuasion with a keen edge over words and pictures.

To give a customer the full effect, have the demo flashlight in a belt holster he or she can try on and provide a holstered “blue gun” so he or she can practice drawing and aiming while simultaneously using the light. If your customer is after a weapon-mounted light, create one with an actual light mounted to a blue long gun. If the customer's needs are less tactical, why not create a safe and smart “dark space” where he or she can try it out?

“Countertop/point-of-sale aids are a good way to jump-start conversations about flashlights, which of course can lead to sales,” says Tim Taylor, director of law enforcement and sporting goods sales for Eagleville, Pa.-based Streamlight Inc. The key, he shared, is “users can try the products for themselves with the firearms they're considering purchasing.”

Taylor also recommends keeping a laptop nearby so users can access Streamlight's virtual shooting range, which will assist them in selecting the right light for their needs.

The message is simple: Don't just inform your customers you carry flashlights. Create the opportunity for them to discover — in store — a flashlight's features.

KNOW AND UNDERSTAND THE FLASHLIGHTS YOU CARRY.

Personal and tactical flashlights, depending on size and features, have differing missions. Some can survive a drop from a pocket or table and function without any problem and some can continue to shine while immersed in water. Others are for

less demanding duty. How the lights declare their brightness can vary from manufacturer to manufacturer and even the type of light they put out — bright, not so bright, strobe, etc. — can vary widely. Some lights allow you to program how they operate. Some come with a clip, some come with a crenellated strike bezel and most are operated via a thumb switch, which may have multiple functions. A weapon-mounted light may come with a remote actuation switch that actually replaces the tailcap.

Find out what your customer needs. A seasoned backpacker looking for a minimalist light to simply help him get around his campsite or tent in the dark needs a different type of light than the person who wants a tactical light to supplement her concealed pistol. Additionally, hunters may desire a LED flashlight with a green or red light to help them see what they're doing or where they're going without scaring any prey nearby.

For non-weapon mounted lights, Taylor says retailers should highlight the latest trends in flashlight technology, including USB-rechargeable products, which gives users the ability to charge on-the-go from most any USB power source. He says USB rechargeable lights save time and avoid the worry of not having batteries on hand when they are needed most. You can simply connect to a USB port, an AC wall adaptor or use a USB charger that plugs into a vehicle's on-board USB port.

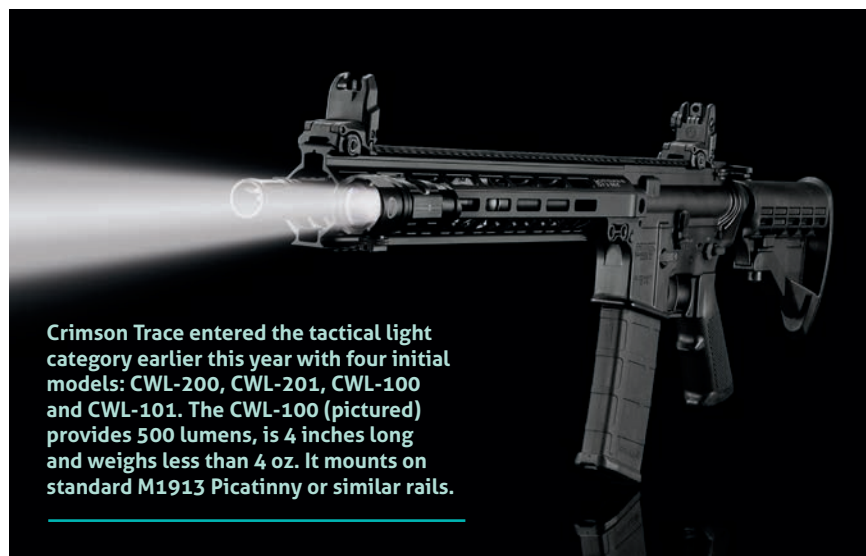
As you know, some flashlights are as simple as “click on and click off.” Many have multiple features, making them more capable for a variety of tasks than ever. Take the time to know each product you sell — which will maximize value for customers.

ADVOCATE PROPER FLASHLIGHT HANDLING TECHNIQUES AND USES.

Encourage customers to invest in proper training in order to use a flashlight effectively. In fact, take this advice yourself and learn from a professional how to properly deploy a light, especially in a self-defense situation. You'll probably learn something you can pass along to a customer as he or she considers which light to buy and why. The training is not only worth it to you personally, but also to your customer as you explain — with know-how gained from an objective, expert source — why it should be this light and not that one. Or why it should be used in this way and not that way.

Across the lighting industry, flashlights exist for a wide variety of applications, but according to Taylor, no one light works well in all situations.

“Flashlight choice depends on intended use,” he says. “Buyers need to consider their applications and how they will be using the light to select the best product for their specific



Crimson Trace entered the tactical light category earlier this year with four initial models: CWL-200, CWL-201, CWL-100 and CWL-101. The CWL-100 (pictured) provides 500 lumens, is 4 inches long and weighs less than 4 oz. It mounts on standard M1913 Picatinny or similar rails.

needs.” As such, dealers need to know the same kind of information. This will also inform what tactics to use to deploy any particular light.

Bottom line: Extra value is extended to your customer — a great form of persuasion — when you provide not just a product, but also the knowledge to use it well.

4 ENCOURAGE CUSTOMERS TO SEE FLASHLIGHTS AS A LIFESAVING TOOL.

Your customers may be gun- or knife-carrying self-defense gurus who need little persuasion in this area. Or, they may be self-defense minimalists who see the value of having a bright and strong light to deploy in the event of an emergency. A bright light is a deterrent in and of itself. If a threat becomes an actual attack, a light can become a strike weapon. It can show the path of escape and become a signal for help. Or it may simply show where to safely walk or help find other tools or implements or even food. All in all, a



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flashlight serving as a lifesaving tool is obvious once we think about it — but we have to help customers *start* thinking about it, also.

Make it a point to think holistically about the flashlights you sell and encourage your customers to do the same. Always point out the myriad benefits of having a capable flashlight on hand, right up the possibility of it becoming a lifesaving tool. **SI**

Dealers, how do you approach and manage flashlight sales?

**We want to hear from you:
comments@shootingindustry.com.**

INSIGHTS ON HOW PLATO BENEFITS MANUFACTURERS, DEALERS & CONSUMERS

By Jade Moldae

The Portable Lights American Trade Organization (PLATO) works to promote the common interests of companies that produce lighting products, including the creation of product performance standards, education, market research and subject advocacy. While it might not have the visibility as other trade organizations — à la NSSF and NASGW, for example — PLATO serves a very important function to ensure companies maintain high standards in this product category. As a result, this organization has a tangible influence on the consumer market.

We had the opportunity to sit down with PLATO President Andy Skoogman, who outlined the organization's objectives and how its guidance provides clarity for buyers and accountability for manufacturers in this segment. In this online-only article, representatives from ASP, Fenix and Streamlight also lent their perspective on the key role PLATO has across several steps in the new product development and marketing process.

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