

REV UP YOUR WHEEL ACCESSORY SALES

Customers seek wheel skins, spinners, caliper covers and more ... so tap into their sales.

Aftermarket wheels are one of the first upgrades new-car owners look to purchase, says MGP Caliper Covers' Barland. That's good news for companies in the wheel and wheel accessory business. For MGP, the market trend has been strong with domestic cars and trucks — and European models aren't far behind. Female customers should not be ignored, as MGP watched the sales volume in this demographic grow each and every year.

By Phil Sasso

OUR EXPERT PANEL

Here are the "pit crew" experts who participated in our virtual roundtable discussion on wheel accessories:

Mike Barland
MGP Caliper Covers
Chula Vista, Calif.

Andrew Liu
White Knight Wheel Accessories
Norwalk, Calif.

Kurt Kruse
Coast to Coast International
Tampa, Fla.

Aaron Fowles
Pacific Rim and Trim International
Phoenix

When restyling enthusiasts decide to customize their vehicles, they often look at the wheels as one of the most visible ways to enhance their rides. In fact, several experts we interviewed say wheel accessories are often the first upgrade a customer will make on his or her new vehicle. One expert says more than three-quarters of wheel accessory product sales are at the car dealer level. But restyling shops that aggressively promote wheel accessories can still attract a good portion of that market.

Although customizers tend to skew younger and be predominately male, don't neglect the growing female market. Women are starting to spend more on wheels and wheel accessories says at least one wheel accessory company.

There's no average spending pattern for wheel and accessory purchases. Experts were all over the board, saying spending ranges anywhere from \$20 to \$2,500 depending on the wheels or accessories purchased and the customer's budget.

"Our products are an alternative for a cus-

tommer that can't afford to put on a set of new chrome wheels," says Aaron Fowles of Pacific Rim and Trim. "Our price range is anywhere from \$80 to \$200."

If there is one thing our experts agreed on, it's that most restyling shops haven't begun to tap the full potential of the wheel accessory market.

Who is buying wheels and wheel accessories today and why?

Liu: The consumer in wheel accessories is male-dominated. The majority of the demand will continue to come from consumers looking to replace their OEM wheels/tires with aftermarket wheels/tires.

Barland: Aftermarket wheels are one of the first upgrades new-car owners look to purchase. That's good news for companies in the wheel and wheel accessory business. For MGP Caliper Covers, the market trend has been strong with domestic cars and trucks — and European models are not very far behind. Female customers should not be ignored, as



Wheels and tires make the greatest aesthetic impact on a vehicle, and there are a tremendous amount of choices to fit both the different styles and budgets. "Trucks, trucks and more trucks is where the majority of the market is at for us," says Kruse, of Coast To Coast International.

we've watched the sales volume in this demographic grow each and every year.

Kruse: The market is vehicle owners who want to make their vehicle look different from their neighbor's. Wheels and tires make the greatest aesthetic impact on a vehicle, and there are a tremendous amount of choices to fit both the different styles and budgets.

Trucks, trucks and more trucks is where the majority of the market is at for us.

Fowles: For our product line our distribution tends to be 80% dealers and 20% retail and restyling shops. The end users tend to be males in their mid-20s to 40s. They tend to be the guys most interested in customizing. Trucks tend to be the biggest segment, followed by the muscle cars like the Chargers, the Mustangs and the like. When you look at geography, you'll see more muscle cars in the city, and in the country you'll see more trucks.

What types of accessories are they buying and why is that?

Barland: People want to personalize their vehicle and make it their own. Nothing has changed here. People want to separate their vehicle apart from the rest. The number of custom orders we produce each day supports this. We have one production team dedicated to custom orders that require personalized engravings. That team has been staying busy every day. We are custom painting, on average, 50 sets per day, and that number is steadily increasing.

Liu: Lug nuts, wheel locks, spacers, adapters and wheel weights. The reason can stem from replacing old and worn-out accessories to installing a new set of wheels and making sure they will function properly. Most aftermarket wheels are usually never designed for a specific vehicle of a model and make; therefore, you cannot replace an old wheel with a new one and drive right off the lot. If the lug hole in the wheel is smaller, the lug nut needs to

SUBSCRIBE NOW!

restylingmag.com

Restyling



If a potential customer wants to make a change but just doesn't have the budget, wheel skins are an affordable choice to upgrade the appearance of OE wheels, and are quick and easy to install. Photos from Coast To Coast International.

be replaced. If the wheel is unbalanced, wheel weights need to be installed. If the wheel hits the fender because it's bigger and wider, spacers and adapters will correct the issue.

Fowles: Our niche is chrome wheel skins. Basically, you take an OE-based steel wheel or alloy wheel and snap over our wheel skin, which is an ABS chrome plastic, and that changes it to look like a chrome wheel. We do a whole line of hubcaps, too. I imagine we're one of the largest aftermarket sellers of hub caps in the country just because there aren't as many people doing that anymore.

But where you can put a Camry after-

market hubcap on a Honda, a wheel skin will only fit the make and model of wheel that we make it for.

Kruse: A little goes a long way in terms of style once the tires and wheels have changed. An aftermarket grille or grille overlay is the second-most popular route to change the vehicle's appearance. From there, chrome door handles and mirror covers, along with a set of step bars completes the package for many.

Remember, if a potential customer wants to make a change but just doesn't have the budget, Impostor Wheel Skins might just be the perfect option. [These] wheel skins are an affordable choice to

upgrade the appearance of OE wheels, and are quick and easy to install.

What are some pointers to a restyling shop for increasing wheel sales?

Liu: Listen to your customers; talk to them and know the current trends.

Kruse: I suggest in-store promotions. [Set up programs that] let salespeople earn more money and let the customer save extra dollars by adding wheels on their ticket for work being done that day or week. The vehicle is already there. It just makes it a little harder for the customer to say no.



HITCH MOUNTED BIKE CARRIER

- Holds up to 4 bicycles
- Made from powder coated steel
- Hinged elbow for access to gear
- Universal mount fits 2" and 1 1/4" receivers



DEEZEE
The Quality Truck Accessory People

www.deezee.com



Use INFO # 51



Lug nuts, wheel locks, spacers, adapters and wheel weights are wheel accessories consumers purchase, says White Knight's Andrew Liu. "The reason can stem from replacing old and worn-out accessories to installing a new set of wheels and making sure they will function properly." Photo of black lug nuts from White Knight. Photo of assorted lug nuts from McGard.

Fowles: If you can't sell a set of custom wheels, maybe you can still offer something like wheel skins. Make sure you're exhausting all your options. Don't give up on a customer too soon.

Frankly, for our product, most restyling shops aren't aware of — or haven't really looked at our product. Obviously you'll make a lot more money selling wheels. You're not going to make as much money on a skin sale, but you're also not going to lose a lot of possible sales if you consider it as an option.

Describe the best ways to display/promote wheel accessories for a non-tire, sales-oriented restyling shop that might sell wheels, but definitely sells accessories.

Liu: Having an application guide with the POP is crucial. Customers must be able to look up what they're looking for.

Kruse: I'd take some vehicle pictures of the most common vehicles coming into your shop with accessories you sell on them. Also, show before-and-after pictures with and without accessories and with the additional tires and wheels. Know the value of the original equipment wheels and tires being removed and use that to make the sale.

Fowles: I would display some of the top-selling items. It's up to them to understand their market. If you are in an area where the majority of your demographic is driving trucks, I'd display wheel accessories for a Ford F150, a Dodge Ram and Chevy Silverado. I think some guys are hesitant to show it as an option because they want to make the bigger sale.

Barland: Have products on display. Carry inventory — or be able to fill orders quickly.

Sales staff should be well trained on each and every product your company offers. The difference it can make can be astounding. We can compare two different MGP Caliper Cover dealers with a similar-sized store in a similar location with the same POP display and materials. The location with the well-trained staff is moving over 30 sets a month while the other dealer is lucky to move one or two sets a month.

It is very important to make sure that your sales staff can answer your customers' questions confidently and accurately. Displays can be a great selling tool — and as they always say, "A tool is only as good as the operator who uses it."

Give the top two or three points a salesperson should know to help customers choose the best wheel accessory for their vehicles.

Fowles: I'd say when selling our skins it would be: the cost, the look and the quality of the product. It is a good alternative to the more expensive options. More

and more we're able to make our aftermarket products closer to OE quality. And it's something that will last.

Liu: Three technical questions to cover are: Should the wheels be protected with a wheel lock to avoid theft? Do the aftermarket wheels have smaller diameter lug holes, or is the seating of the lug hole different? What is the size difference between the aftermarket wheel and the stock wheel?

Kruse: Qualifying the customer in terms of budget, use of vehicle and style are the three most important factors in helping a customer find the right choice for their vehicle.

Phil Sasso is the president of Sasso Marketing (sassomarketing.com), an automotive aftermarket advertising, public relations and Internet services agency. He's also a speaker and strategist. Get his free marketing tips at philsasso.com/blog. ©

MGP
CALIPERCOVERS
SEMA Booth #48106

"The finishing touch for any vehicle."

Rich Evans
Award Winning Hot Rod Designer, Builder, Painter

- Powder coated finish
- 6061-T6 Aerospace Aluminum
- Vehicle Specific Configuration
- Patented Fastening System
- Reduces brake dust
- Easy installation

Tel 877-995-0003
info@calipercovers.com
www.calipercovers.com

Licensed by GM and Ford

*Available in red, black, satin silver, custom colors

Use INFO # 96