



## Collaboration

*We All Communicate ... How Many Of Us Collaborate?*

**S**uzuki and Kawasaki are working together. Why? They understand that neither has the wherewithal to go it alone against the two giants, Honda and Yamaha. If they were to survive and prosper, they needed to join forces if not physically, at least intellectually. Although it hasn't always been smooth, behind the scenes it has been surprisingly fruitful on the sourcing side.

More recently, Sears put together a deal with K-Mart. Why? Wal-Mart is the 800-pound gorilla that neither of them could afford to ignore. Acting separately there was little they could do to gain the strength, buying power and retail expertise to successfully compete against such a goliath. Leveraging each other, they have a much better chance. Each knows it must now come up with new ideas to woo consumers away from the big gorilla.

We should learn from these giants and the others who have recognized the power of collaboration as the new paradigm of the 21st Century. The dictionary's definition of collaboration is: "To work together, especially in a joint intellectual effort." I find it interesting to read the words "intellectual effort." By definition, collaboration is now a global movement enabling companies to work closely with other, possibly even rival companies.

When the major powersports OEMs began to create joint ventures with the emerging Chinese companies, they did so with the understanding that they had a window of opportunity to alter their supply chain despite the cultural differences. China is now a world power recognized by all the other industrialized countries.

When U.S. dealers began to recognize the value of working with each other and formed 20 clubs, they too accepted the positive aspects of collaboration. Dealers continue to collaborate to this very day despite philosophical and cultural differences.

In Thomas L. Friedman's book *The World Is Flat*, he consistently speaks of the flattening of the world economy due in large part to the Internet and the ability to collaborate across borders. By the way, I urge you to read this wonderful book. It will give you a new point of view, and by reflecting on current history, you'll be able to see what the future will bring to those willing to accept new ideas.

Advances in technology, medicine, manufacturing, along with "shorter" supply chains and increased access to information are all the result of collaboration. With the Internet bringing people together from all corners of the world to exchange thoughts and create new ideas, it becomes obvious that we either need to learn how to collaborate, or we'll be left behind.

Just a few decades ago American scientists found it very difficult to collaborate with their overseas peers. Now, again thanks to the Internet and broadband communications, scientists from around the world are all working together in real time. The results are being felt as their discoveries become part of our reality.

Another part of that reality says the "Made in America" label is losing its strength with consumers. The textile mills of the Carolinas that once supplied both the U.S. and Europe have now been replaced by high-tech mills in China. So too have many other U.S. industries which are now migrating to China.

The new China supply chain is now part of the powersports industry, too. As dealers, we are powerless to alter these changes. Even if we could, I'm not sure it would be a good idea.

We've all heard of the 80-20 rule. It says that 20% of any organized activity is responsible for 80% of the results. It also means that 20% of the motorcycle dealers are responsible for 80% of the sales of motorcycles. Even closer to home, 20% of a dealer's staff is usually responsible for 80% of the beneficial activity within that dealership.

So just what is collaboration? According to the front page of *Sage* (a monthly newspaper magazine for women), collaboration "is a sign of the times — the wave of the future. It is built on individual clarity that gives you a stronger voice together. It starts with deep listening. It is more than working together. It is thinking together. It is shared conversations to build a vision."

When I saw that cover, it became the genesis of this article. It hit me hard. I've spent my life in this industry and have mourned the fact that few dealers are members of their state dealer associations. And these powersports dealers, unlike their automobile dealer counterparts, continue to distance themselves physically and culturally from each other.

The second thing that led me to write this was a call from a reporter with the *Sacramento Bee*, a California newspaper. This reporter wanted to talk about the buzz of a new concept, where a motorcycle mall is being created in that city that will feature independent motorcycle dealers in separate stores in a common mall. She asked if I was familiar with the concept. I told her I wasn't. We talked about car dealers who wanted to be as physically close to their competitors as possible, but that motorcycle dealers seemed to shun that proximity.

Why is it that everybody immediately grasps the synergy of the "mile of cars" concept of multiple automobile brands, but will fight tooth and nail to keep a competing motorcycle or ATV brand as far away as humanly possible?

As are all new concepts, collaboration is a social experiment shunned by our current political

leaders, but embraced by industry. Believe it or not, there is little to lose and much to gain by accepting the reality that no one person has all the ideas, assets, talents or information to go it alone.

Take the consolidators in our business for example, like America's PowerSports led by ex-Mazda exec Clark Vitulli, a man who clearly understands the power of collaboration. He has leveraged the shops to build a formidable and profitable entity. The collaboration now consists of 15 separate dealerships nationwide with more than 450 employees.

On a personal note, I've been consulting for Lightspeed, the DMS provider, for more than a decade. During that time I've seen them go it alone, then as part of Bell & Howell and later ProQuest. Their growth was strong, but not dynamic. Now that ADP is sharing their resources and collaborating with Lightspeed, their growth and strength has gone up to the next level ... and there's more to come.



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who have recognized the  
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Some form of collaboration should be your goal if growth and continued success are to be part of your future. We all know that we live in changing times, so here's how to start. First, since it is shared conversations that build a vision, start that conversation with your co-workers. Don't just work together, think together. Start with deep listening. By the way, deep listening is not just waiting until he/she stops talking so you can chime in. It's listening for small grains of usable ideas that may need to be further developed.

What can you, as an independent dealer, do? Join our industry's organizations. I would urge you to join the AMA, MIC, a 20 club and your state's dealer association (If you are a member, congratulations!). Then become an active member. Participate. Share your ideas and listen.

Let's find a way to break the 80-20 rule. I'd applaud the day when it becomes the 20-80 rule. To make that happen, all you have to do is become a willing and active participant. 