

Bringing Fun (And Women) To The Range

Written By Ashley McGee



Increased levels of buying haven't been a challenge for almost a year, but generating participation — through the fun appeal — will be crucial for the long-term longevity of your business.

Following a tumultuous election year that led to a record-setting surge in firearms sales, ranges across the country are looking for ways to keep the momentum going. The solution should be twofold — attract new shooters while also enticing first-time purchasers to continue returning. And, do so without neglecting loyal customers.

Enter Action Shooting International (ASI), a move-and-shoot sport promoting friendly competition in a relaxed and fun environment, not unlike a bowling league.

ASI was founded in 2014 by three longtime United States Practical Shooting Association (USPSA) and International Defensive Pistol Association (IDPA) participants who wanted something to address a larger audience of firearm owners.

The program emphasizes safety, skill building, camaraderie and fun for those shooters who are not interested, or perhaps not qualified to participate in the elite world of competition shooting. For the more talented, it's a "farm team" for IDPA and USPSA.

Attract More Female Shooters

According to NSSF, women comprised 40% of first-time gun purchasers in 2020; the majority of whom purchased as a means of personal protection.

Connie Hermer, ASI's first female member, initially joined as a way to practice and improve her skills for concealed carry. She was introduced to ASI through her local gun range where she was already a member following an attempted break-in at her home. Participating in the matches helped her improve both speed and accuracy.

Hermer also discovered a passion for helping other women feel welcome in the shooting sports community and was recently appointed ASI's women's program coordinator. The need for a women's program stemmed from a notable amount of female participation at ASI matches.

Currently, ASI has over 700 members in 16 states, and around 20% are women. Hermer's role will be to grow the number even more.

"What makes ASI so welcoming is its low pressure," said Jackie Russo, an ASI women's team founder, match director and range officer in Puyallup, Wash. Russo is also an active member of A Girl & A Gun's Puyallup chapter, founder of the Corgi Nation Pistol Team and match director for IDPA in Washington.

"It's a step forward from stationary marksmanship," she shared. "Not only are you learning to move and shoot, but also how to shoot from cover and make quick decisions and judgment calls."

With fewer rules than other action-shooting disciplines, ASI attracts shooters of varying ages and experience levels. "A lot of couples participate together, as well as many parents who bring their son or daughter," Russo added.

Grow Revenue

Some range owners may be reluctant to host competitive shooting matches because they don't have competitive shooting knowledge and experience themselves or because they're reluctant to allocate shooting bays and staff needed to manage them.

As a former competitive shooter, Brian Hallaq, owner of Norpoint Shooting Center in Arlington, Wash., understands the reluctance.

“Regardless of industry, when you’re a brick-and-mortar store you often lose out to online retailers,” he said. “In our industry, most competitive shooters have decades of experience and already know what products they want. They’ll come to your range for a match, but will opt to purchase ammunition, accessories and other items online versus at your store to save money.”

Due to its unique ability to attract novice shooters, in Hallaq’s experience, ASI results in increased revenue more than any other shooting group. Becoming an affiliate has also led to greater customer loyalty, as ASI participants are more likely to become range members and returning customers.

Diversify Your Customer Base

Robb Wolf of Renton Fish & Game Club, which has the largest ASI, IDPA and USPSA programs in Washington, shared similar insights.

“We’ve been partners of ASI since they started, and not only have we experienced an increase in new shooters as a result, but more specifically we’re seeing increases among historically hard to reach demographics including women, minorities, couples and those in their 20s and 30s,” he noted.

When asked why ASI is so appealing to women, Wolf said the fun, relaxing atmosphere helps counter the intimidation factor.

“When most people think of shooting matches, they think of all these guys running around who look like gunslingers,” he added. “You don’t have that with ASI matches.”

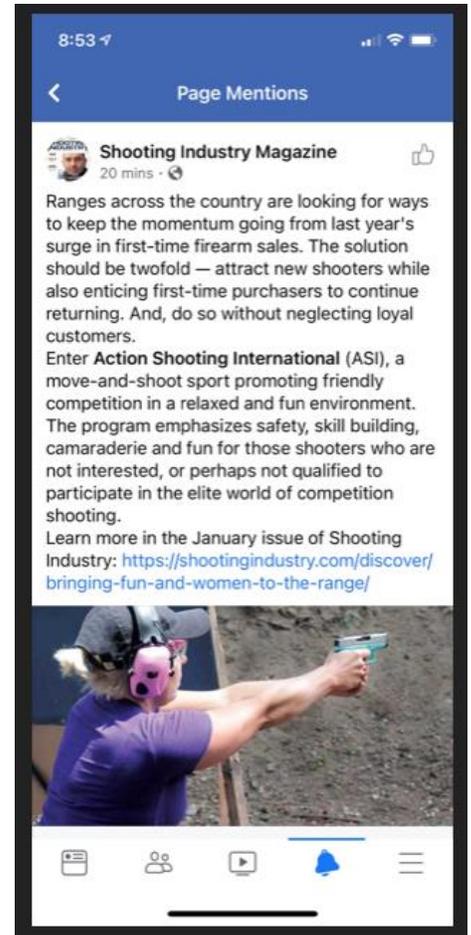
Renton Fish & Game Club hosts one ASI match each month on the second Saturday, and they host informal practice sessions for two hours every Thursday.

“We make money not just on the match fees, but also on increased annual range memberships,” said Wolf. “People often opt for the \$160 annual range membership versus paying \$20 each time they want to visit the range for practice.”

Although Renton Fish & Game Club doesn’t sell firearms, returning ASI shooters have helped drive ammunition and accessory sales.

Give Weeknights A Boost

Josette Severson, co-owner of Prairie Patriot in Mandan, N.D., implemented an ASI program three years ago, shortly after expanding her range to include a storefront.



“For us, it has helped get more folks in the door who didn’t even know we existed,” she said.

Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, Prairie Patriot hosted ASI matches twice a month on Monday and Wednesday nights. Due to the ammunition shortages, they scaled back to once a month.

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Josette Severson, Co-Owner Prairie Patriot, Mandan, N.D.

Like other ASI affiliates, Severson said they are seeing more and more women participate in each match.

“The two questions I get asked the most from women who are curious about ASI are whether the matches are a competition and if it’s going to be mostly guys,” she informed. “What I enjoy most about ASI is the matches are scored and timed, but are not a competition, and I get to practice those personal-protection skills like drawing from a holster.”

Getting Started

For those interested in becoming an ASI affiliate or are on the fence, Hallaq suggests attending an ASI match because the competitive shooting world can be intimidating.

“ASI has made match administration simple, and seeing a match firsthand will help you see this,” he said.

The most attractive feature about ASI is the minimal required equipment and investment for both the range and participants.

The cost to become an ASI affiliate range is \$30 per year, plus \$3 per shooter to ASI following each match. The annual fee gives you access to ASI’s online library of stages including seated, kneeling or standing stages as well as barricades, walls and barrels. ASI also provides affiliate ranges with comprehensive range officer training, all program materials, scoring software and access to online membership forums.

Participants may attend up to three matches prior to becoming a member. Annual individual membership is \$35. Match fees can vary depending on the range. For equipment, participants need only a .22 caliber or above handgun; at least one magazine (but two are desirable); mag pouches or pockets to place reloads; and a case or gun sleeve for transporting the firearm from stage to stage. Most stages are less than 12 rounds and five to six stages per match with each match typically lasting three hours.

“At the end of the day,” said T. Ron Davis, co-founder of ASI, “our ranges have found the participation fees, ammo sales, new range memberships and equipment upgrades can generate a substantial amount of incremental income while drawing in a constant crowd of new shooters and attracting many repeat participants.”



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