



The Mind of the Triathlete™

Summary

The Mind of the Triathlete is the first in-depth exploration of the social, emotional, demographic, and lifestyle aspects of the people who are part of the fastest-growing participatory-sports community on the planet. Nearly a million people each year participate in events that range from sprint-distance triathlons to such well-known races as the Ironman, as well as duathlon, aquathlon, and aquabike competitions. This study was conducted during October and November 2008, at the end of the 2008 triathlon season, in the midst of the global economic meltdown. The TribeGroup, operating under an exclusive arrangement with USA Triathlon, contacted 150,000 race-day and annual members by e-mail and received nearly 15,000 completed responses to a detailed questionnaire. With an average self-reported completion time of 20 minutes, the questionnaire delves deep into what drives competitors' passion for the sport.

Participation

Overall, triathlon is a vibrant, growing sport. By and large, survey respondents not only expect to continue their participation, most also expect to increase the number of races in which they compete. Triathletes' commitment to the sport is also evidenced by the fact that most respondents report that they are planning to enter longer-distance races in the future. The health of the sport is broad based, with regardless of number of races, tenure in the sport, or many other sub segments. Triathletes are also very active in other types of endurance races, including medium- and long-distance running events and specialized multisport races. They reported unusually high rates of participation in certain off-season sports, and many show a willingness to travel to races, including races that require an overnight stay.

Table 1
 "When was the first time you participated in Triathlon?"

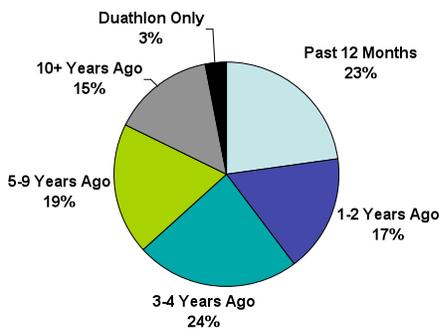


Table 4
 Proportion Participating in 3+ Triathlons
 Past 12 Months vs. Next 12 Months

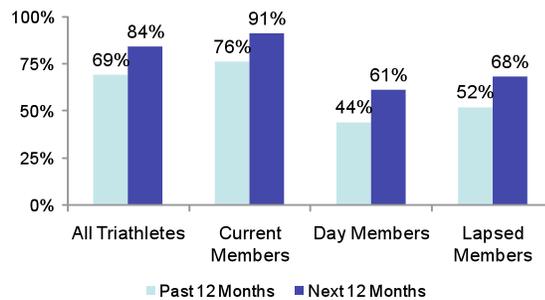
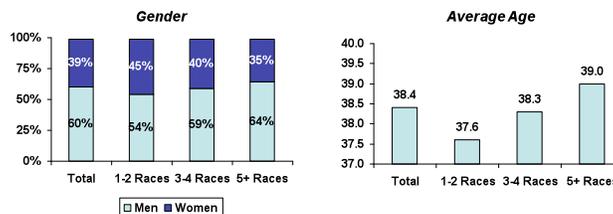


Table 22
 Triathlete Gender and Age
 By Number of Triathlons Participated in Past Year



The many companies and organizations that serve triathlon have the opportunity to grow with the sport, even in these trying economic times. Participants are looking for new and varied

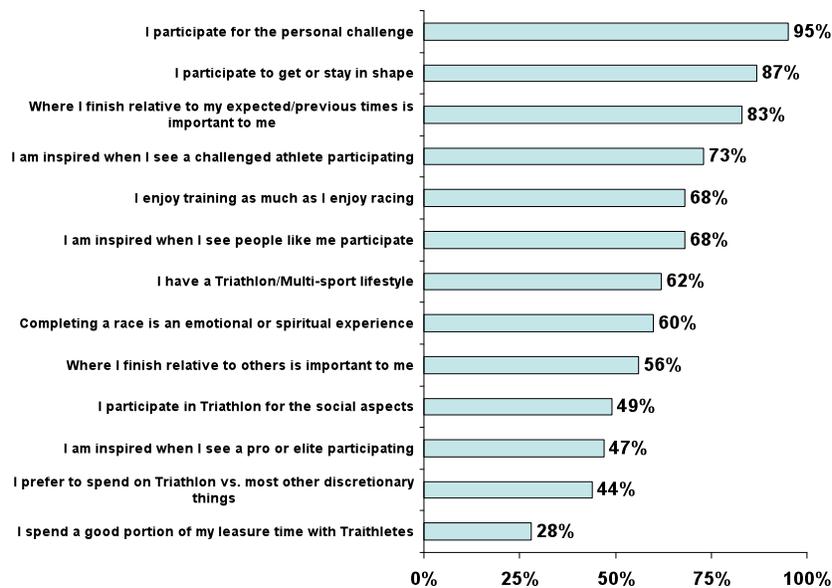
experiences, and their enthusiasm, in and of itself, creates opportunity. Companies should focus on activating triathletes’ intent to increase and diversify participation.

Triathletes, as a group, are advanced socioeconomically. Most notable is the mean income of triathletes, of \$126,000 and the very high percentage of professionals. Additionally, the triathlete’s average age is in the late thirties. Older athletes also do more races. Such a demographic combination may seem more like what one might find among golf or tennis players than among participants in a highly active sport like triathlon. Such a demographic profile raises questions about the level of participants’ engagement and whether growth is sustainable. Triathlon appears robust, and the potential for future growth is quite promising, even in a down economic period.

Segmentation

While responses vary greatly by segment, almost all the triathletes who participated in this research said that they participate in triathlon for “the personal challenge.”

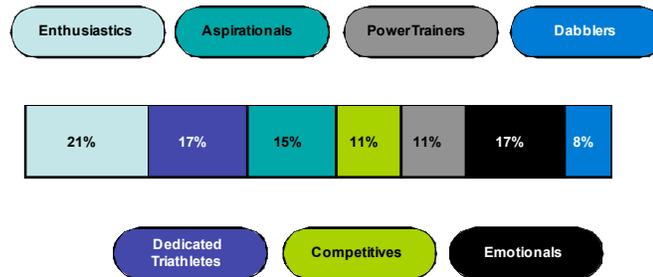
Table 27
Attitudes Toward Triathlon



The study identified seven “segments” of triathletes on the basis of how they approach triathlon, why they compete, and what they get out of it. The above results vary by segment. For instance, 44 percent of all respondents indicated that they prefer to spend discretionary income on triathlon. In terms of the seven segments, however, more than 65 percent of three and nearly 80 percent of another said that they would prefer to spend discretionary income on triathlon. Understanding these nuances is critical to understanding how to foster continued growth in triathlon and serve the needs and wants of triathletes.

The seven unique segments of triathletes buy, behave, and experience the sport in different ways. Targeted approaches to reaching and inspiring them will make a difference.

Table 28
Segmentation



Taken together these findings enhance the understanding of how connected triathletes are to the sport and the strength of their commitment. For companies and organizations that serve triathlon from USAT; race directors, sponsors, and product companies that provide equipment; as well as food and nutrition companies, this information is critical to meeting participants' needs, keeping participants' engaged in the sport, and growing the overall participant base.

Buying Behavior

Triathlon-related spending is a tale of good news and bad news. In the midst of an economic downturn of significant proportion, triathletes on the whole remain highly committed to the sport and expect their participation to grow. The good news is that on an overall basis, spending on triathlon is not expected to change dramatically. In fact, there are more triathletes who expect to increase their spending on triathlon than who expect their spending to decline.

The bad news is that it is clear that triathletes, like most other Americans are trying to find ways to cut back on their spending. The detailed research on specific product categories shows that year-to-year spending in some merchandise areas will fall significantly in this downturn, while others may see modest growth.

Race fees and nutritional supplements are two categories that can expect increases in spending. These findings reinforce the expectation that participation in triathlon will increase, suggesting also that even in a down economy, consumers with high socioeconomic standing spend on items and activities that promote their health and well-being.

Taken together, these findings show that triathlon is a beacon of opportunity for many product manufacturers. For those selling necessities such as athletic shoes, fitness clothing, or nutritional products, the next 12 months may yield success in sales, market share expansion, and brand development.

Nevertheless, for those manufacturers of products in categories in which spending will be restrained, now is the time to build loyalty by targeting segments whose consumers will buy later. It appears that triathletes will remain receptive to buying products they need. They will, however, likely wait longer, making, for example, purchases of new bikes, helmets, or wetsuits, only when they absolutely need to. This behavior varies by segment as well.

When survey participants were asked how they expected their triathlon-related spending to change in the next 12 months compared with the previous 12 months, there were more who said that they expect their spending to increase than there were who said that they expect their spending to decrease.

- Slightly more triathletes (15 percent) expect their spending to decrease by more than 25 percent than expect it to increase (12 percent) by 25 percent.
- Clearly, those triathletes who spend less will be trying to make their dollars go further. So they will likely be very selective about how they spend their money.

The results also reveal that the importance of style, quality, price, and purchase venue varies significantly among the various segments, with implications for advertising, marketing, bundling, and distribution.

Race Experience

The race experience is generally viewed positively, but perceptions vary by segment. In general, triathletes are deeply concerned about certain aspects of race safety that can be improved. For instance, we could envision a new structure to wave management that is *not* based on age. For race directors and sponsors, there are many “enhancers” that could be offered to improve the race experience such as transition area layout, separate male/female bathrooms and spectator friendliness. We believe that those who focus on the right areas can garner a higher share of the racing dollar.

Conclusion

The study shows that the triathlon community is growing, vibrant, and passionate. Triathletes do, in fact, exhibit “tribal” traits such as fierce loyalty, dedication, enthusiasm, and a burning desire to see their sport succeed.

Look for additional articles about the study’s findings in *USA Triathlon Life* magazine and other electronic or web based formats over the coming months.

For more information on the full study which includes more than 70 pages of analyses and charts covering: Participation trends, triathlete demographics and segmentation (social, emotional, and lifestyle), Market trends, Selling to triathletes and the racing experience please contact the TribeGroup at info@tribegroupllc.com or call (877) 716-9422.