

Communication Is Key



Pruett



Fox

Tactical gear and accessories continue to be strong sellers at Marine Corps Exchange (MCX) outlets. The categories pack a powerful punch, providing Marines all they need to be properly prepared for combat. Marine Corps Military Clothing Sales Store (MCSS) sales activity in 2011 has built on recent years of double-digit growth with solid percentage increases.

Robin Pruett is the exchange service's headquarters-based buyer handling tactical products among her numerous buying responsibilities, and Wanda Fox is the military clothing buyer, Retail Merchandising Branch, Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) and Business Operations Division.

SALES ACTIVITY

Pruett reported that tactical gear sales during fiscal 2010 were \$14.48 million, a 12.9-percent increase from the \$12.82 million in sales accrued a year earlier.

Through May, fiscal 2011 sales were \$5.62 million, an 8.2-percent jump from the same period dur-

ing the prior year of slightly less than \$5.2 million.

"One of the biggest challenges I continue to experience with managing this category is ensuring our model stock levels are accurate and making sure we have the goods on our shelves when our Marines need the products," Pruett said. "We are often unaware of troop movement until the last minute, so it is extremely difficult to forecast goods and determine the right receipt flow, as it is very fluid and constantly changing. This often leads to suppliers not being able to keep up with the demands, as many manufacturers don't stock an excess of inventory in their warehouses."

Price increases have also been impacting sales activity, as Pruett said these increases are due to increased commodity and transportation costs. "We have experienced some delivery issues as a result of

MCX Fiscal 2011 Top-Selling Retail Tactical Items By Units

ITEM	UNIT SALES
1) Staedtler Correction Pen	8,160
2) Ira Green Duct Tape (2 in. x 10 yards)	6,970
3) BAE Systems Break Free Liquid Bottle (.68 oz.).....	6,490
4) Rite in the Rain All Weather Pen (black).....	5,820
5) Vector U.S. Military Whistle	5,287
6) Hunter's Specialties Camo Compact Make-Up Kit (3-color)	5,155
7) Rite in the Rain All Weather Spiral (3" x 5", tan)	4,932
8) Rite in the Rain All Weather Spiral (4" x 6", tan)	4,892
9) Rite in the Rain All Weather Field Book (tan).....	4,767
10) Hydration USMC WXP 3L Hydration System	4,606

Through May 28, 2011.

Source: MCX

these increased costs as well," she said.

Nonetheless, the MCX has been able to post impressive sales of tactical gear during the recent months. "Our commands are very active in communicating the specific needs of their customers, which has contributed to our strong partnerships and ability to achieve our common goal of taking care of our Marines and their families," Pruett explained. "We also rely heavily on our vendors to communicate information on new products and innovation in a timely manner."

Fox noted that commercial military clothing sales during fiscal 2010 were \$51.73 million, a 5.7-percent dip against prior year. Through May, fiscal 2011 sales of \$16.31 million rebounded with a slight 0.4-percent increase against the previous year.

A similar performance has been registered by government-issue clothing sales. Fox reported that during fiscal 2010, sales were \$24.44 million, down 7.7 percent. Fiscal 2011 sales through March were \$6.55 million vs. nearly \$7 million, down 8.8 percent.

"Having good information concerning troop movements, class sizes and events in a timely manner is key to being in stock and having what is needed for our troops," Fox said. "Communication with the field managers is essential, and I have a great group of managers and sales associates that I work with. They all do their very best to let me know

MCX PHOTO



MCAGCC Twentynine Palms, Calif., Camp Wilson store is one of the top stores in dollars sales for both fiscal 2010 and year to date fiscal 2011.

what is going on in their world so that I can provide them with the support they need to keep their customers satisfied.”

Fox told *E and C News* that an increase in sales is generally seen during the late summer through the fall, from September through November, due to the seasonal uniform change and the Marine Corps Ball season.

“March also is a big month with the change to the summer uniforms, and June is also a big month for uniform sales as we receive two of our largest classes for the Officer Candidate School at Quantico, Va.”

TACTICAL, UNIFORM TRENDS

Pruett said that field equipment continues to be a big trend, with fiscal 2010 sales in this category up 24.2 percent through May.

“We have also seen strong results in knives and tools this year, with a more than 9-percent sales increase,” she reported. “Hydration has been flat year to date, where last year at this time this category was trending down.”

In military clothing, it is more than trends that impact sales, it is where troops are stationed at any given moment, Fox said.

“Sales in military clothing are impacted by troop movement,” she said. “If the Marines are on base, they are getting ready for the next deployment. If they have just returned, then they are often replacing worn items.” Fox added that recent uniform inspections have also driven sales slightly higher during fiscal 2011.

TOP SELLERS, TOP TACTICAL STORES

Products from such manufacturers as ESS, CamelBak, Rite in the Rain and Officers Equipment Co., as well as from other popular brands, lead the top-selling charts by dollars and by units in MCXs.

Marines purchasing these products and many others made the Hadnot Point Annex, MCB Camp Lejeune, N.C., store the top-selling site in terms of tactical items in the entire MCX system during fiscal 2010, followed by the main store at MCAGCC Twentynine Palms, Calif., and the Area 52 Branch Store, at MCB Camp Pendleton, Calif. Through May 28, the top-selling tactical stores in the system include the Hadnot Point Annex and C-Store, and the Twentynine Palms Camp Wilson outlet.

NEW ITEMS

On the tactical side, Pruet said several new items have recently been added to the assortment.

“We have added two new tactical lights from SureFire, the 6PX Pro LED light and the G2x Pro LED light,” she noted. “Both these lights have higher output and are at a lower price than comparable items we have carried in the past.”

Pruett said that these items have been immediately popular. “We have sold 190 units of the G2X and 102 units of the 6PX lights YTD through May,” she said, adding that another variation of these items, the G2x Pro in the tan coloration, has just delivered.

The tan coloration is also becoming popular in the MCX’s key ESS eyewear styles, CDI and Crossbow. “We added these items to our basic assortment this spring and have sold 111 units year to date,” Pruet reported.

Other new items recently added to the tactical assortment include weapons accessories from Magpul, such as grips, grip kits, both front and rear back-up sights, and rail panels, with Pruet reporting that since April, 263 units have been sold; the McNett Samish Knife, an item that Pruet said has sold 253 units since launching in the President’s Day ad; and the Grunt Line, also from McNett, which launched at the same time and has since sold 174 units.

The MCX is testing several other items, including the Frag Bag II and 15- and 17-in. computer bags from Sandpiper, which the buyer said were in the June tactical ad and are being tested, “and if the results are strong, we will add these programs to our auto-replenishment program.”

In uniforms, one of the newest items is the USMC Running Suit, which Fox said is available for sale at all of the Marine Corps commands.

“Tactical clothing is up and coming with us from a couple of vendors including 511 Tactical, Propper and Vertx,” she said. “Their clothing items provide comfort as well as functionality for our contractors who go into theater. We have started slowly adding commands with clothing and a few gear items, testing the water with good results.”

PROMOTIONS

Like other MCX categories, the tactical area is a hotspot for promotions. “We have two 12-page tactical ads during the course of the year; one that ran June 8 to 21 and another in October that will run Oct. 12 to 25,” Pruet said.

These ads primarily feature tactical merchandise, but also include modest exposures of sports nutrition and video games.

“Emphasis is placed on the various tactical categories such as knives; eyewear; bags; hydration;

lighting; gloves; firearms accessories, including cleaning items, slings and holsters; field equipment and general tactical accessories like Rite in the Rain and McNett towels,” Pruet explained. “The ads feature a combination of best sellers and new items, as we sometimes use these ads as a vehicle to test out some new products to see what potential they may have in our assortments.”

The tactical ads have been very successful. Pruet noted that during 2010, the two ads generated total sales of \$477,873.

“We also have a one-page exposure of tactical merchandise in our September Anniversary Sale, which will run Sept. 7 to 20,” she said. “Featured vendors this year include Rite in the Rain, Ka-Bar, Snug Pak/Pro Force, CamelBak and SureFire. Vendors provide co-op funds for these ads as well as in-store support, to ensure featured goods are represented properly on the selling floors.”

MCSS also plans to participate in the September Anniversary Sale. Fox said these stores would be offering uniform shoes and boots at a discount. The Modern Day Marine Expo at Quantico, Va, on Sept. 27 to 29 will also feature some special offerings, she added.

FOCUSING ON THE MISSION

Keeping focused on the mission of providing Marines with the tactical items that they are looking for in the right quantities, at the right prices, and at the right time is the MCX’s goal, and teamwork between the headquarters’ buying staff and store personnel is essential to reaching this objective.

“We would just like to let our store managers know that we appreciate their input and feedback,” Pruet said. “We rely heavily on our commands to communicate as much information as they can regarding troop movement, deployments and training activities. The more notice we have on these events, the more flexibility we have to secure additional goods from our vendors so we can be sure we have the right merchandise on hand for our troops when most needed.”

To MCSS store personnel, Fox said, “Keep up the good work. Stay focused on your mission of providing great customer service and support to our Marines and their families. Communicate your needs to my office as soon as you are made aware and I will do all that I can to meet your expectations.”

—E and C NEWS