

General Session: Successful Ranges and Attendee Feedback

Case Studies of Successful Ranges: Indoor Ranges

By Glenn Duncan, Owner

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I own an indoor range and a gun shop. Everybody wanted to know if it's feasible for someone who's not rich to get started in the gun business and open a range. Yes, it is. I looked around at the market, and then I started looking for a building.

My building was built in the 1880s. It had a "for sale" sign on the outside, so I went in quickly to see if it was usable. Then I got in touch with the city to learn various rules and regulations in my community. While in the process of doing that, I contacted city inspectors and took them with me for a second visit. Whenever you're buying a used building or trying to meet the laws of an area, you immediately want to involve the people in charge of making rules.

My next project was putting a team together. We hired engineers to work with us and the city. We also hired some financial advisors.

Not a lot of folks out there look to finance ranges and gun shops—you really need to talk with your family and friends to attract the right people. I was talking about it in my doctor's office, and he became interested in getting involved financially! You want to get people involved.

You need to find a way to make money at the beginning of your range opening. We sold signage above our range for \$250 per year. Don't be afraid to approach industry for money. We have murals on the outside of our building. The first one was sponsored by Smith and Wesson. Smith and Wesson paid for the mural, plus gave extra money for the use of the range. We also worked on a mural with Remington. The city has rules and regulations concerning signage. We found out that there are no size regulations for decorative paintings, and if you do it properly, you can get a tax break. So, we were able to make our lettering and signs bigger, and we got a tax break for our murals and artwork. We're also involved with many organizations such as Ducks Unlimited and the National Wild Turkey Federation.

You need to get people in your shop. We held a Glock Open House. Glock helped us with money for advertising, and we brought in more than 400 people in two days. Those 400 people shot lots of ammunition, and they bought each round from us.

We also host one of the few indoor Glock League Matches, with 66 shooters—a profitable program. You've just got to get out and find a sponsor.

For Smith and Wesson Weekend, we had more than 600 people in our shop. These people are coming in and looking at your shop for the first time. Get them in there any way you can.

People have concerns about hosting an open house for so many attendees. There is a lot to consider. You need to make sure the events are good and friendly, and also secure. We use our

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cowboy action shooters for door security whenever we do an event. They meet and greet and hand out tags to fill out at the door. We use these tags for drawings at the events and also to compile a mailing list of folks with a known interest in our business.

We start selling tickets for programs a month ahead of time. This is an opportunity for folks to let their friends know what's coming up at our shop. They help us advertise!

We try to involve everybody in our events—kids, mothers, grandmothers. We offer an airgun program. Each child is taught safety, and then they start shooting.

It's important to keep your range busy with special events in addition to general shooting days. Duncan's Outdoor Shop is a ten-position range. We have six positions on one side and four on the other, so we can break it up and have two activities going on at the same time, or we can open it up as a ten-position range. This is an important aspect of range design. If the local police want to come in and shoot, they usually prefer to be private, and you don't want to shut down the entire range. We don't have to do that.

We also use the outside of our property and put tents up for different activities. We have the ranges, two classrooms, and seven outdoor tents. Just because you've got four walls doesn't mean that the property outside can't be used.

We heavily promote our youth program. We started airgun shooting from the very beginning on our range. We have a Thursday-night program now with more than 60 kids. We even bus kids in from schools. The schools are really interested in the educational program that we do, so they're willing to bus the youth to our range. We work with the National Rifle Association in a certificate program.

Our ranges are handicap accessible. I designed a unit for a gentleman with no finger control. We worked with him so that he can actually fire a gun on his own, and he uses it on a crossbow too.

We have an archery range in our building. We don't sell archery equipment because there are seven archery shops in our area, but they need a place to shoot. We have dog obedience classes in our shop, on our archery range and in our classrooms. What does that do? Thirty dog owners come every week. Those people had no idea that they were interested in guns or shooting, but they had to walk past the windows on the range to attend their dog obedience class. A lot of them come back and ask how to get involved.

A lot of families come in our shop. With the airgun program, parents spend time with their children. Afterwards, the kids stand outside the windows and watch their parents shoot on the pistol range.

A lot of our ideas are dreams. How do you put a dream together? One of my dreams was an indoor rifle range. I sat down with a neighbor and we started working together to design two 50-yard, and a 100- and 200-yard indoor rifle ranges. We hired engineers to draw blueprints. Don't be afraid to ask questions. I can't read engineering blueprints! Whenever you're doing a project, understand your project, because unless you have a lot of money, you have to be directly involved with any construction.

I have nine employees, but I have a volunteer group of about 22 people. Volunteers are important. You need to use them and work with them, and you've got to thank them in many ways, and more than once. We take them out to dinner quite often. We have volunteer-only shoots. Make sure that volunteers are part of your program.

Finally, everything begins and ends with a dream. So look at yourselves and look at your dreams. Think about your dreams and make them happen!