

# Two rink operators caution: Use the Internet wisely to sell skates, promote your rink's pro shop

By Jim Morris

Luther Bernstein and Frank Schiazza are friends. They are also friendly rivals ... right down to their favorite football teams.

Bernstein lives in the Dallas area and has been the owner/operator of Interskate Roller Rink in Lewisville, Texas since 1982. Naturally, he's a Cowboys fan.

Schiazza lives near Philadelphia. He has owned and operated CN Skate Palace in Aston, Pa., since 1981. And — you guessed it — he is a big Eagles fan.

Talk about rivalries!

have a return to handle," Schiazza said.

He said people who buy skates for kids often get the wrong size because they think the child's shoe size is what they want.

"You should always buy the skates a size larger," he explained. "Chances are the kid's shoe is not the right size if he or she has had them for any time at all. You have to allow them space to grow into them. And if you talk to me on the phone, I will go over that."

In addition to online sales, Bernstein does a high volume of business selling skates in his rink.

"I am competing against myself by selling skates in my rink and also on the Internet," he said.

There are advantages and disadvantages to selling skates on the Internet vs. rink sales, he pointed out. Following are Bernstein's pros and cons of Internet skate sales vs. sales at a rink.

## Pro

-- Prices on the Internet are lower (very little overhead).

-- It's faster. You don't have to leave your own home.

-- You don't pay sales tax (unless you live in the state where the skates are being sold).

-- You can view a larger number and styles of skates.

## Con

-- You have to pay shipping.

-- You don't have a person to actually fit your skate like an in-rink skate salesperson.

-- Nobody is there to make the adjustments you might need. You can't try them out and then have them adjusted.

-- If you find you have to return the skates, you might have to pay your own shipping and even a restocking fee.

-- There are no incentives, such as free passes and free skating lessons.

At Interskate, the staff offers two incentives when you buy new skates from the pro shop. One is a packet of coupons for five free skating sessions. The other is a certificate good for five free lessons.

"If there are two things I believe in doing at your roller rink it's selling skates and teaching," insisted Bernstein. "They should go hand-in-hand. If someone comes in for a lesson, you try to sell them skates that fit. And if someone comes in to buy

skates, you give them free lessons to keep them coming back to your rink."

Schiazza said he doesn't sell many skates at his rink because there are so many sporting goods and discount stores in their "working class" neighborhood. Instead, he offers a service on his Web site when someone with a Pennsylvania, New Jersey

or Delaware address checks out that automatically offers them the option of picking up their skates at his rink to save the shipping fee. Of course, this also introduces them to his rink.

Schiazza's Web site is newskates.com. He has been selling on the Internet for about 10 years.

"When we first started selling on the Internet, I had 35 pairs of skates to sell. Now I offer more than 400. I had no idea it would take off like this," he said.

Bernstein's sites are: SkateMall.com, lowpricedskates.com (including an e-bay

site), rollergirlsskates.com, goldenhorseskates.com and usedrentalskates.com. Bernstein has also been selling skates on the Internet for about 10 years.

Right now, he said, there are more Web sites out there selling skates than the demand for new skates would dictate. "There is money to be made on Internet



www.newskates.com



www.skatemall.com

They are also competitors in the growing and lucrative Internet skate sales market, an industry Schiazza estimates to be worth multi millions of dollars in sales annually.

If someone is looking for a pair of skates, be they roller, ice or inline, they can be found on the Internet.

The key, according to Bernstein, is to have your service as close to the top of a search engine's list as possible.

"If you are going shopping for skates, won't you check out the first store that sells skates that you come to?" Bernstein asked.

To get to that position is not easy, he added. You might start by using one of the pay sites — you are charged a fee every time someone clicks onto your site. They are always listed first. The key, he said, is to become one of the top free sites, just below the pay-per-click listings. To get to those positions, it is a matter of your number of hits, sales volume, longevity and marketing.

Schiazza thinks placement on the first Internet search page is important, but adds that providing quality skates and good service are just as important.

"There are others who sell skates for less than I do, but I only deal in quality skates and offer good service. People can call me and I will talk to them personally. By doing that we're about 99 percent sure the skates will be the right fit and we won't

**National Roller Skating Month  
has some new faces**

**October is National Roller Skating Month and in addition to Pepsi's 'You Could win in a Flash with Sip 'n Skate, there will be a few new faces lacing up their skates this fall. Stay tuned for more information!**

**Check them out this October.**