

Ahead of Roula's site tour during New York Retail Innovation Week, CEO Mark Voysey explains how he built a premium bicycle brand around consumer demand for on-the-go fitness, helping provide ultimate efficiency for the traveling cyclist

Today's consumers increasingly prioritize their exercise needs and leisure activities when traveling. Doing so doesn't come without inconveniences, however, especially for sports that require special equipment, like outdoor cycling.



[Roula](#) is a bicycle rental brand that aims to change this, enabling cyclists to rent premium bikes when they travel, thereby eliminating the need for them to transport their own or spend time searching for a quality ride. Ahead of [New York Retail Innovation Week](#) this coming January, when Roula will be hosting a [site visit](#), PSFK CEO and founder Piers Fawkes spoke to Mark Voysey, founder of Roula, to learn about how his mobility business is letting travelers click, rent and ride in a consumer climate of on-demand retail as a service.

Piers Fawkes: Could you explain Roula's concept of a high-end bike rental program?

Mark Voysey: It is exactly that, with all the necessary biking bells and whistles, such as concierge delivery that we've amped up starting in New York and a custom-designed Vespa delivery service that is already turning heads. We're also pursuing unique partnerships, such as putting Roula's Brompton bikes in the hotel rooms of NYC travelers.

We host regular free weekly rides for all levels of ability as well as custom-tailored rides, corporate partnership events, a drive-through bike wash and at our NYC headquarters have one of the best views in Manhattan over the Hudson River right on the Bike Path.

What's Roula's brand ethos?

Roula's mission is to make life easier for the traveling cyclist. It's a rapidly growing sport and lifestyle brand that aims to address the challenges of traveling with your own bike or dealing with the logistics and hassle of finding a high-end bike to rent while on the go.

Could you describe your target market and consumer trends that are driving a need for your service?

Our main demographic is currently aged 35-60, mainly working professionals and male-skewed, with the female sector offering an enormous growth opportunity, and we offer weekly women's rides.

Many of our customers are weekend warriors, individuals who see the bike as their outlet. Roula appeals to them because we're serving a need amongst a community (or passionate traveling cyclists who like to perform at their peak, in a market where service and efficiency to fulfill their need means everything.

There are a number of aspects at play in their lives that generate demand for the Roula service: One is bicycling becoming the new golf. Old, stuffy, white-male dominated golf clubs are being questioned by society and culture, as well as seen as too time-consuming—spending 5-6 hours on the course.

Second, there's the largest and growing over-50 population on record that is looking to stay fitter and healthier later on in life. Low-impact cardiovascular social sports are top of their list, with cycling being prominent.

What do you think is driving this change in high-end consumption, shifting the focus onto fitness and spending time in the outdoors?

Cultural and lifestyle choices have shifted to emphasize health and well-being, leading to a decline in foot traffic in pubs and bars as well as new silos in the travel sector such as Equinox Gyms launching its own hotel brand and Marriott Hotels' holistic well-being platform within its Westin brand.

People are increasingly integrating health and well-being into their leisure and business travel to maintain their routine. Corporations have also adopted a more proactive approach to the well-being space, knowing that a healthier workforce is more motivated and productive, and over time even saves cost on their health insurance premiums.

Could you explain the importance of community within this space?

The community is highly viral through the lens of the equipment, gadgets, apparel and brand factors within the category that's been harmonized at a digital level by platforms like Strava, the 'Facebook for athletes.' Other platforms such as MapmyRun are extensions of this, and Apple is also pushing its health and wellness integration via its watch range.



Our brand generates community by encouraging our members to come hang out at our Roula NYC HQ, enjoy the views with a coffee and their peers and use Roula as their meet and return set. We also encourage them to join weekly rides, where they can enjoy [VIP Demo days](#), [recovery services](#) from Roula partner products as well as participating in [brand partner](#) events and [activations](#).

What's driving your partnership strategy, both in terms of the value for your customers and for the business itself?

The drivers behind the partnership strategy have been largely led by retail channel changes and the category playing catch-up with others that already adopted the D2C channel. Brands such as Canyon, Serotta and Allied are avoiding traditional retail and thus require other means to get their products in front of the consumer within a tactile and authentic environment. The larger brands— Giant, Canondale, Trek and Specialized—are also striving for more experiential marketing relationships given the physical nature of the product in question and traditional IBDs closing—think Trek concept stores.

There's arguably no better category that this medium serves. The purchase decision process for buying a road bike is similar to that of a bespoke suit or a high-end car—you can't just get on a \$5k+ bike and ride around the block to get the feel for it. Cyclists need to be in the saddle for 2-3hrs or more to really experience the product.

Could you explain why partners are interested in collaborating with you?

We have a captive, obsessive, high-spending and highly viral community that thrives to participate alongside others and loves to share news, gear, performance, riding camaraderie, and ultimately experience and discover great new rides in new locations.

Roula facilitates this in a remote manner by aggregating traveling riders and connecting them to like-minded individuals in new locations via our retail partners. Then Roula flagship locations provide a unique cycling cafe experience—including nutrition, air and basic biking essentials to maximize the ride—establish a meet point to depart from and a home to return to, and then provide recovery aid with brands such as Normatec and Theragun, available to aid athletes post-ride.

Finally, Roula is made up of a great crew of riders, passionate about cycling and helping others fulfill their goal, whether they're just starting out or aiming to win the Crit.

What's next for Roula?

We're expanding the Roula network every month to new markets with retail and travel related partners, plus building out our membership and events program.

How can those interested find out more and sign up?

Folks can sign up at roula.cc, and if we aren't in a market where they'd like to rent or demo a bike today, they can let us know, and we'll be there soon!



[Roula](#)

Roula is responding to consumer need for on-demand access to premium equipment that allows them to maintain their fitness and lifestyle routines wherever they travel. For more from Mark, come see him and take a tour of Roula's site at [New York Retail Innovation Week](#) on Mon, Jan 14, [RSVP now](#).