

# Three Pronged Promotion Strategy

By Lisa Derby Oden

Let's take a look at some common horse business marketing perceptions:

- 1) I tried advertising once, but it didn't work.
  - 2) I don't need to advertise - I rely on word of mouth.
  - 3) Marketing and advertising are the same thing.
  - 4) I can't afford a marketing plan and don't have a marketing budget.
- Marketing...advertising..budgeting..planning...

It's true that marketing is a broad topic. It can make any horse business owner dizzy to try to figure out how to get started. By building a fundamental understanding of marketing, you will take the first step to winding your way through this multi-faceted maze of options and opportunities. Formulating a three pronged promotion strategy is a good first step, and will form the backbone for any marketing you do.

## 1) Image

Image deals with how you will portray your business to your market and the general public. You'll want to come up with a tag line or slogan that gets the essence of your business across to the public. Examples can be found by flipping through any trade magazine publication: Equine Affaire - The Great American Horse Exposition Stetson - The Pride of a Lifetime Absorbine - The Horse World's Most Trusted Name Agway - The Winning Tradition in Equine Nutrition

Coming up with a tag line takes a little time and thought. Start by writing your business vision. Your vision is how you see your business in the future, usually 10 to 15 years from now. After you've written a few sentences about your vision, determine what your mission is. Your mission is how you will achieve your vision. We'll use my consulting practice as an example. Blue Ribbon Consulting - Vision: To be a leading equine industry consultant that promotes industry growth and quality through education, excellence and professionalism. Mission: To offer services that provide business and economic development, marketing and professional workshops. Tag line: Good horsemanship is built on solid basics. So is good business. It is well worth your time to figure this out. Whenever you are in conversation with someone about your business you will answer their questions about your horse business succinctly, efficiently, confidently and in a manner that demonstrates you've given much consideration to what you're doing. This in itself presents a professional image. One caution here – be sure that your image and marketing are consistent with each other. If you build an image that you are the Wizard of Oz, be sure that the public finds a Wizard, and not someone throwing smoke screens and pulling levers and switches just to convince them that they are a wizard. You can put yourself out of business by marketing an image that doesn't match reality.

## 2) Services/Products

The next step is to make a list of all the services and/or products that you offer. Set up a chart that shows the features of each service/product. Features are descriptive. Then take it one step further and chart the benefits. Benefits are what or how the buyer/client is affected by using this service or benefit. Most people buy a service or product because of what it does for them. The benefits are the primary reason for making the purchase. The features are secondary. A basic example for a lesson/boarding facility follows.

Service/Product: Riding lessons

Feature: Balance seat

Benefit: Build strength, confidence

Feature: Beginner through Advanced

Benefit: Solid foundation now for future success; continuing education; recreation; exercise

Service/Product: Boarding

Feature: Box stalls, pasture

Benefit: Safe, individual care

### **3) Special Events/Products**

Finally, list any special events you offer. List any seasonal, limited edition or custom products. As a horse farm, perhaps you offer a show, clinic, ride, workshop, or open house each year. As an instructor or trainer, perhaps you're available for demonstrations and talks. As a tack shop, perhaps you feature equine art and jewelry and offer an annual sale that brings in the artists and crafts people.

It is these three basic components that will form the backbone of your marketing efforts. Let's go back to the beginning to see how these elements address the perceptions we started out with.

- "I tried advertising once, but it didn't work."

There are many reasons that the advertising you tried may not have worked for you. You may not have had a clear image to get across to your market, so they may not have known what you offered. You may have advertised your features only, and not the benefits. Again, it's the benefits that really get your prospect to seek you out. Your advertising may not have let your prospect know how you are different than your competition. Any advertising you do must be consistent. A one shot attempt doesn't really give your market a chance to respond. Advertising statistics show that it takes an advertising message 8-12 times to impact a customer.

- "I don't need to advertise - I rely on word of mouth."

Word of mouth is a powerful marketing tool. If you have a clear business vision, mission, and slogan, you will be assured that a more consistent message is being passed along. A study conducted by GE found that word-of-mouth influences consumer decisions TWO TIMES more than advertising. You can see the impact this has if the information is inaccurate, or negative.

### 3) "Marketing and advertising are the same thing."

Advertising is one tool that you have in your marketing tool kit. Marketing is defined by Webster's as "all business activity involved in the moving of goods from the producer to the consumer, including selling, advertising, packaging, etc." Examples of additional marketing tools include business cards and letter head, press releases, direct mail, websites, and trade shows. There are many more than this. Make a list of all the ways you can think of that other businesses, horse and non-horse, promote themselves. Then consider how you can apply it to your business. Of course, you will make decisions about which ones will reach your market and be the most effective.

### 4) "I can't afford a marketing plan and don't have a marketing budget."

You have taken the first step of putting together a marketing plan by going through the exercises outlined in this article. Additional steps include: research about your

competitors; knowledge about the tools available, their cost , and demographics of their audience; and research about your customer base. As far as a budget is concerned - you are spending money on marketing whether you realize it or not. It's good to know how much you spend, where it goes, and what effect your marketing money is having. If it's not bringing in more business, you'll want to determine why and resolve the issue, or spend your money in other places. For example, do you spend money on a yellow pages ad? This is marketing, not phone cost. Do you sponsor a class at a horse show? Do you have t-shirts, jackets, pens, mugs or any other take-along with your business name on them? Again, consider the cost, and consider the response.

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