

Social Media Can Help You Promote Your Equine Business

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The world of social media can seem confusing; there's a lot of jargon to learn, and using the various sites such as Twitter and Facebook can eat up enormous amounts of time if you're not careful. The good news is that these types of tools can help level the playing field when it comes to promoting an equine business.

Marketing - Then And Now

Print media used to be the only way to go in the equine industry; television was too expensive for most horse businesses, and radio didn't offer the use of eye-catching photography the way that print ads did. But with the rise of the Internet, the options to become a searchable commodity to people from around the world have exploded, including social networking and sharing sites such as Facebook, Flickr, and YouTube.

Termed 'social media' for the social or community aspects of this type of media, they can also be referred to as 'new media.' While this field is still evolving rapidly, social media is likely here to stay.

Business and news site Bloomberg.com recently reported that within the past year Facebook Inc.'s largest advertisers have boosted their advertising spending by at least 1,000%. And Advertising Age magazine reported that the Web was catching up to television for the first time in terms of influencing conversations, according to a joint survey by Yahoo! and The Keller Fay Group.



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Even as big business and corporate brands are planning their own social media strategies, we in the horse industry can incorporate it into our marketing efforts, since many social media sites are free and easily accessible to anyone with a computer and Internet access.

Some Of The Social Media Biggies

The social media landscape is littered with multiple start-ups and sharing sites of all kinds; here are a few that are well-established and of real value to an equestrian business.

Facebook: A social networking site developed by Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg in 2004, Facebook.com allows anyone to create an account and profile for free. Sharing options include photos, videos, and short messages; once you become someone's Facebook 'friend' you can connect with their other friends, growing your own network. Facebook's privacy policies have come under fire, since they've

been trying to monetize the data contained in their site; thus far, users have protested with enough vigor to keep the worst at bay.

LinkedIn: Another social networking site, LinkedIn.com is centered more around business and professional networking, making it particularly useful for business-to-business networking or job-seeking. With over 70 million users, LinkedIn membership grows by a new member every second, according to Wikipedia.com.

When Is It Too Much Information?

Much of social media is centered around sharing. You're sharing photos and information, commenting on the sharing of others, and generally being involved with your online community. But there are times when sharing isn't a good idea.

A Web site called PleaseRobMe.com was formed earlier this year by a handful of folks concerned about 'location sharing' on social media. For example, many people share information about their current whereabouts on Twitter and Facebook updates, indicating what they're doing at that moment whether it's having a drink with a friend, or boating during their vacation in the Bahamas.

Using Twitter's search function, PleaseRobMe.com posted Twitter messages (tweets) that had location-specific information in them, to make their point about the dangers of over-sharing location-based information. Be cautious, they warned, since once you post a Twitter message it's public knowledge, and if you're not at your home you don't know who else might be.

While it's best not to get overly paranoid, the concern is justified. Social media resource site Mashable.com reported last summer that video podcaster Israel Hyman returned from his vacation to find his home had been burglarized. At the time police hadn't linked the theft to Hyman's Twitter updates about his vacation, but Hyman said he's going to be more careful about the information he shares in the public space.

While they're no longer publishing tweets since they've drawn attention to the issue, if you're planning to use social media, it's a good idea to visit PleaseRobMe.com and read the articles on location awareness and privacy they've linked to. A good rule of thumb: If a bit of information isn't something you'd tell a stranger on the street, be cautious about sharing it via social media.

Twitter: Categorized as a 'micro-blog,' Twitter.com allows short, individual posts of up to 140 characters at a time. One of Twitter's strengths is its immediacy; breaking news often gets spread via Twitter before it hits major news channels. It's also an excellent search tool, and allows you to connect with other like-minded horse enthusiasts.

YouTube: Video has long been a tool for the equine business, and YouTube allows anyone to upload short videos, up to 10 minutes in length. As a YouTube member, you get your own 'channel' to broadcast your own video selections.

Flickr: Photographs are as important, if not more so, than video for the horse business. Flickr is a photo-sharing site, and the sharing goes both ways. You can upload your own photos and share with others, or browse the photos of others. Usage is typically outlined under Creative Commons rights (CreativeCommons.org), which provides flexible protections and freedoms for photographers, authors, and other artists.

OK, But How Will I Use Them?

Ways to use some social media sites are clearly evident, such as the ease of uploading and sharing your stallion videos via YouTube instead of creating videotapes or DVDs that get mailed out to breeders. But figuring out the best social media sites for your particular business require sitting down with your marketing goals and taking a good, hard look at what you need to get done and which sites can best help you.

Social media can be of real value to equestrian businesses in their marketing efforts.

Want to share show results with your clients? Twitter and Facebook are both good for this. Upload candids from a show or event? Flickr and Facebook are useful here, but you can also create a photo slideshow and upload it to YouTube, or use a Twitter-related site called TwitPic to upload photos and share links via Twitter. The last day of a sale at your tack shop? Send reminders to customers via Twitter and Facebook.

By learning a little bit about the various social media sites and what each can do, you'll be armed with enough information to begin your own social media marketing program.