

**SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING PLAN FOR SMALL-SCALE HOBBY
HORSE FARM**

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

Social Media Marketing Plan for Small-Scale Hobby Horse Farm

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In this project, the researcher will work with a small-scale horse farm to develop a social media campaign to sell twenty horses of various riding disciplines, skills, and breeds to establish whether social media marketing is a viable option for hobby farm owners to market their goods and services. There is a significant need for the development of small scale agri-ventures' social media packages. While many operations have some sort of website, there are little to no resources available by extension services that helps hobby farm owners market and advertise their animals or services. In this project, I will work with a small-scale horse farm to develop a social media campaign to sell twenty horses of various riding disciplines, skills, and breeds to establish whether social media marketing is a viable option for hobby farm owners to market their goods and services.

At the time of the writing of this work, given the pending nature of the IRB approval for the project, a social media marketing plan for a hypothetical small scale horse farm (hobby horse farm) is developed, centering attention on different types of social media marketing tools as well as appropriate contingency plans.

DEDICATION

Thank you to the family, friends, and mentors who have helped me see this project through. It has been such a learning experience for me, and I hope it inspires others to help educate and preserve America's hobby horse farms.

CHAPTER I

AN INSIGHT INTO THE EQUINE INDUSTRY

The American Horse Industry is multi-faceted, serious, and economically significant industry across the nation. A pre-recession study conducted by Deloitte Consulting LLP, sponsored by the American Horse Council, found that the equine industry accounted for a direct economic effect of \$39 billion on the US Economy. There are two million horse owners in the United States, and the horse industry pays \$1.9 billion in taxes to the Federal Government (American Horse Council , 2005). The same study also concluded that there were 9.2 million horses in the U.S. that are involved in various activities, with racing, showing and recreational purposes being dominant endeavors in the horse industry. Other activities involve farm or ranch work, rodeo, carriage horses, polo sports, police work etc. (American Horse Council , 2005). There are 4.6 million people involved in the horse industry, with 46% of horse owners lying in a household income bracket of \$25,000 to \$75,000. The study dispels the notion that the equine industry is a place only for individuals who have a high income, because in the study, only 28% of horse owners have an annual income of over \$100,000 (American Horse Council , 2005).

The objective of this research project is to establish whether social media is a viable marketing tool for the small-scale horse farms in the United States. Social media is easily accessed by the majority of the population and proves time and time again to be a substantial way for people to connect with others and receive information. According to a 2011 Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) study, 37.7% of all residential or lifestyle livestock operations were predominantly equine and other equid based (Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 2012).

With that being said, the majority of them also have substantive off-farm income and other responsibilities they must attend to. The managers of these organizations often have many responsibilities, ranging from office manager to sales person to emergency veterinary tech. However, if there is not a demand or established market territory and marketing plan for these enterprises, they will not succeed. According to our best of knowledge, little to no research has been published about industry specifics of marketing in the equine industry, more specifically with regards to the use of social media as a marketing tool for the small-scale equine industry.

History of Arabian Horses

The Pyramid Society is sub-section of the Arabian Horse Association, the breed association for this complex breed. Arabians are known for their athletic ability and companionship. They have very distinguishable body type and mannerisms. Egyptian Arabians are decedents of the stallions of Egyptians Viceroy Mohammed Ali and Abbas Pasha I. At one point in time these horses were scattered across the globe, and great lengths have been taken to purify and resurrect the ancient bloodline. (The Pyramid Society, 2015).

Royal Legend Arabians and Horse Center

Royal Legend Arabian Horse Farm is owned by Lisabeth Robertson and is located in Bryan, Texas. Royal Legend Horse Farm is known for its Egyptian Arabian horses, as well as being a small scale equestrian facility. It is a well-rounded facility that truly offers something for every part-time equestrian. I believe that Royal Legend is a phenomenal sample of a hobby horse farm in the U.S. It offers a diverse set of profit drivers and is run by a sole proprietor. Royal Legend Horse Farm operates on a small profit margin due to the high sunk costs of multiple horse

ownership. One of the most important functions of the operation is horse sales. While Royal Legend is currently offering many types of horses for sale, the barn's main focus is still kept on Egyptian Arabian horses (Robertson, 2013).

Proposed Marketing Plan

By creating a larger presence of Royal Legend on various social media and equine related websites which generally are free, this marketing plan will increase the farm's visibility as well as sell the current horses on the sale bill. By using the free services found at equinenow.com, uniform advertisements can be made for each horse on the sale list and easily distributed to Facebook, Instagram, and email. In addition to selling the horses on the sale bill, we also hope to use supplemental marketing messages to promote other services at the horse center, as well as strengthen the brand image.

CHAPTER II

METHODS

There are 25 horses of various ages, skill levels, disciplines, breeds, and pedigrees that Royal Legend Horse Farm seeks to sell within the next two quarters (Quarter 4 of 2015, quarter 1 of 2016). Each horse will be treated as an individual sample. The horses will have pictures taken in a style suiting to the horse's breed and intended discipline. Each horse will have an inventory of skills that it currently possesses. Any significant pedigree data for each horse will be collected. The owner of Royal Legend Horse Farm will establish an asking price for each horse, as well as a bottom-line price. A social media campaign will be developed using Instagram, Facebook, and Royal Legend's own website. Google Analytics will be added to the website and will be set to collect how people are getting to the site, and how much time they are spending on each specific page. Any consumer data obtained by these methods will be evaluated using a count of how many times people interacted with the page without obtaining any identifying information about the consumer. If necessary, additional online advertisements may be placed in appropriate web forums such as Craigslist.

The data recorded will be the amount of time it took for the horse to sell, how much the horse sold for, and what kind of buyer demographics the horse's new owner fits into. Any trends in the data will then be processed and rationalized by use of statistical procedures such as differences of mean and variance analysis¹.

¹ At the time of the writing of this thesis, due to the delay in the IRB approval process to access data, actual data was not collected and analyzed. We only present a hypothetical marketing plan that can be applied to small scale hobby horse farm, which could be put into use, should the data become available.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING PLAN

At the time of the writing of this thesis, the data has not been procured because this project still under review with Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Texas A&M University. As a result, we focused on developing a social media marketing plan template which can be used by small scale horse farms in the United States, by taking Royal Legend Horse Farm in Bryan, TX as a prototype. Therefore, in a hypothetical situation, where Royal Legend Arabians would sell a customary and usual horse, the following marketing plan could be implemented:

1. The horse is assessed by the horse owner based off of demographic data, such as age, pedigree, health conditions, and show record.
2. A media marketing kit would be prepared for the horse, with video and pictures that would transfer easily from different accounts and advertising services.
3. Specific advertising wording and phrasing should be written for all social media posts to ensure cohesiveness. For each post on social media, an appropriate picture description with all seller information should be included.
4. Posts should be scheduled by using a social media management platform, or by another listing system.
5. A contingency plan should be put in place to lower pricing or run a special on the horse if there is not enough market interest at it's current listing price. In situations where a high value horse is needed for quick liquidation, it may be prudent to enlist

the help of a horse broker, or use a common buyer market, such as a horse sale barn.

Figure 1. Flow of the Market of a Usual and Customary Horse



CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The most important aspect that must be implemented in any horse farm is a comprehensive record-keeping system. Whether it is high-or low technologically oriented, any horse farm with any number of horses needs a system that is easily managed and accessed for anyone who has a reason to have access to the system. It should include birth dates, health records, show performance, and pedigree. Without a successful record keeping system, the idea of a marketing plan to sell certain number of horses a year is highly inefficient and unfeasible.

At the time of the writing of this work, given the pending nature of the IRB approval for the project, a social media marketing plan for a hypothetical small scale horse farm (hobby horse farm) is developed, centering attention on different types of social media marketing tools as well as appropriate contingency plans.

A marketing plan is possible for a sole proprietor to comprise for the individual needs of their farm, but some initial help by a marketing specialist would be a huge jumpstart. Many marketing tools and materials are just not easily understood in the small amount of time allotted to a sole proprietor with many other daily tasks to accomplish. This research project has shown me the disconnection between academia, research, and its practical application in the industry. I hope that this thesis paper may help to open up a better dialogue between the two worlds.

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