

# Blue Ribbon Business

Business Management and Leadership Topics for the Horse Industry

## MARKETING

### ***The “Best Clean Underwear” Approach to Social Media for Your Horse Business***

**I** talk to lots of people that are still very skeptical about social media. Some are not computer oriented, some claim philosophical opposition, and some are afraid of it. Fear revolves around privacy issues and the concern that it will swallow up all their time. But social media is proving to be an important marketing tool. We’re starting to see that social media lead conversion (when a prospect’s interest turns into sales, converting them from a prospect into a customer) is equal to email conversion. Email/newsletter has been one of the top tools, so this says a lot.

Even though social media is proving its value, I can hear skeptics saying, “Do I HAVE to use social media?” The answer is – of course not! I’d follow that by asking “Do you have all the business you want and need?” If the answer is no, then social media is worth considering. Remember, too, that even though you aren’t using social media, much of your customer base most likely is. And so are many of your competitors.

#### **Best Clean Underwear Approach**

I’d like to suggest a “Best Clean Underwear” approach to your involvement with social media. Remember the stories our parents told us about their mothers always insisting they wore their best clean underwear whenever they went out anywhere? That way if a catastrophe occurred or they were in an accident of some kind and they had to go to the hospital, they’d be prepared because they’d have their best clean underwear on. No embarrassment, or at least embarrassment would be minimized. It’s wise to take a similar approach to social media. Whether you’re using social media already, or are getting ready to take the first steps, these suggestions will help you wear your best clean underwear.

#### **Your Personal Information**

1) Privacy is always a big concern for people. Rightfully so, it shouldn’t be taken lightly. But it shouldn’t stop you from using social media either. Do you know what is out there so far about you or your horse business? Do an online search using your name and your business name to find out what other people see when they do the same search. Are you surprised, pleased or horrified by what comes up? Some people have found that nothing comes up. Though you might think that’s a good thing because it means your privacy has been preserved, it also means that someone that might be trying to locate you can’t. Only 1 in 12 people uses the yellow pages to find what products, services and businesses that they’re looking for now. They get online and do their looking their.

Many of the social media channels allow you set privacy settings related to who has access to what you are posting. But here’s the truth of the matter – your personal information, dirty laundry and other deep secrets can’t get out there if you don’t put it out there. If there is something that you wouldn’t want your partner, mother, employer, or minister to know then don’t announce it online. The internet is “sticky” – that means after you’ve put it out there you can’t erase it.

#### **Rome Wasn’t Built in a Day**

2) You also don’t need to build your social media presence in a day. In fact, it makes more sense to take your time so that you become familiar and comfortable with what you’re doing. The best thing you can do is to start by “listening.” That means checking out blogs, forums and groups related to your market and interests to see how others post comments and what they’re talking about. Start to get your feet wet by commenting when a topic comes up that moves you to do so. Or choose one channel to begin with such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or YouTube and when you’re very comfortable with that one, try another one.

**Schedule It**

3) Schedule it into your day in a way that fits. If you're already into a little social media you've probably noticed that it seems like some people spend all day (and night!) everyday sitting on their computer giving you a moment by moment description of their life. Don't worry, you don't need to do that to succeed with social media. First of all, you probably find the minutiae irritating, and second, you don't have all day everyday. Make a habit of getting on once a day. Some prefer first thing, some prefer during lunch, and some like just before they shut their computer down for the evening. Whatever works for you, schedule 15 minutes each day to look at what's been posted and if there is something you'd like to comment on. When you become comfortable, make one comment a day, and the next day see how others have responded. Social media is one element of your marketing mix, not all of it, so allocate your time accordingly.

**Oh, What to Say?**

4) There's plenty to "talk" about. Some people worry that they won't know what to say. Knowing what to say will come partly from what your objective is. Are you educating and informing, providing customer service, making others aware of activities and events, providing additional resources, networking... The key here is to spend a little time thinking about what you want to achieve with social media. It's frequently said that people do business with people, not the business entity. That means that people like to know who you are. Knowing who you are helps to build trust, and trust is part of the purchase decision. So in addition to providing comments that provide value, solutions or education, let yourself show through as well. For some that's a very natural thing. For others, it's a little harder. Remember, you're not building this in a day – you'll get more comfortable over time.

Examples of things you can post:

- Things your horses are doing
- Shows you're going to
- Other horse events that you attend
- Books you're reading
- Articles and videos that you find valuable
- Congratulate students
- Congratulate colleagues
- Favorite quotes
- New insights gained
- Horses for sale
- Trivia just for fun
- Ask questions to get others to share

Contests and giveaways

Industry news or other news of interest

Pictures and videos

**The High Road**

5) Have an idea what you'll say about a complaint or if someone makes negative comments. After all, people are people no matter where they are. If it does happen, take the high road. If it's a complaint, this offers you a chance to demonstrate top notch customer service. If its negative comments, indicate that you see it a different way and thank them for their views. There is always a way to the high road, so don't jump instantly in and match them blow for blow. Take a few moments to organize a thoughtful response. You may turn a naysayer into your best advocate!

So as you get involved with this new social media realm, remember to wear your best clean underwear. Don't talk about it if you don't want others to know about it. Go at a pace you're comfortable with. Plan a set amount of time each day. Provide value. Take the high road. It's an old-fashioned common sense approach to new media that will stand you in good stead.

**FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION**

Quit counting fans, followers and blog subscribers like bottle caps. Think, instead, about what you're hoping to achieve with and through the community that actually cares about what you're doing.  
~ Amber Naslund, [brasstackthinking.com](http://brasstackthinking.com)

Social Media puts the "public" into PR and the "market" into marketing.  
~ Chris Brogan, [chrisbrogan.com](http://chrisbrogan.com)

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