

A New Era: Marketing Horses for Sale



Figure 1. Shot of horse standing with front and hind legs square.

In today's market, selling horses is quicker and easier than ever. With the advent of social media platforms that can dramatically decrease time to sale and drastically increase the buying marketplace, achieving a competitive price for a horse is less challenging than in the past. Before the internet, local markets for buying and selling horses were much more limited. Horses were bought and sold through physical auctions and third parties, which restricted many of these horses to being sold within a limited area. While quality auctions are still a great place to buy and sell horses, the use of the internet has eliminated geographical barriers while greatly increasing visibility to a larger market. Nevertheless, there are some simple techniques that will assist sellers in getting greater prices. This publication discusses how to maximize the potentially positive outcome of selling horses on social media by outlining photography strategies, creating sales descriptions, providing quality videos, and identifying online marketplaces.

Strategies for Obtaining Conformation Photos

A high-quality conformation photo draws a person's eye to your sales ad. Seeing a horse with a pleasant expression and standing squarely is more likely to lead to a sale, compared to



Figure 2. Shot of horse standing with front legs square and hind legs offset.

a photo of a horse with his ears pinned or back and standing with a rested leg. Quality sale photos for horses should include the following:

- proper lighting;
- clean background—nothing to distract the viewer from the horse (e.g., dogs, cars, people, etc.);
- horse's ears forward and alert, exhibiting a pleasant expression; and
- horse standing squarely or slightly open.

When asked what to look for when photographing a horse for conformation photos, equine photographer Elizabeth White says, "I like to have the horse in a level and open area with minimal background objects and minimal distractions. The optimum time and weather preferences are early morning and late afternoon when the lighting is less harsh, which helps to preserve the natural color of the horse." Shooting in direct sunlight will cause undesired shadows and glare that will affect the quality of the photo. Always give yourself ample time to allow for adjustments due to undesirable weather or lighting conditions.

"The horse needs to be exceptionally groomed, as bad grooming distracts buyers from the conformation and quality of the horse," White says. Make sure the horse is clean, with a

well-groomed mane and tail, and any stray or undesirable hairs trimmed if needed.

White also prefers to take two types of shots. The first (Figure 1) is a square shot with the horse square in all angles with the neck level or slightly above the top line. The horse's ears should be up and its eyes looking forward away from the camera. The second type of photo (Figure 2) is with the horse standing square in the front but the back legs are slightly offset from each other. Its neck should still be level or slightly above the topline. "I make sure the horse fills the frame of the photo, and I try not to leave too much background," White says.

Descriptive Sales Ads

Sales ads should provide an honest portrayal of the horse being sold. If sellers choose not to tell the whole truth, they run the risk of being rightfully classified as dishonest horsemen. An excerpt from an article in *Heels Down Magazine* says, "Building a credible reputation as a seller can take you far in the horse world—and this will help find the best home for the horse." It is important to be aware that some states are "buyer beware" states. This means that the buyer should ask meaningful questions to which the seller is responsible for providing honest answers. For example, if the intent is to purchase and use the animal as a performance horse, a buyer should ask if the prospective horse has had past lameness issues. In preparing to purchase any horse, asking pertinent questions is always recommended.

The contents of the sales ad will vary based on the horse's purpose (breeding, racing, roping, or just enjoying at leisure). It is always a good idea to include the pedigree and registration papers (if applicable), training level, past or current injuries, and vices (if any). It may be prudent to list previous competitions the horse has performed in and to include placings, earnings, and breed association performance record. This information will help prospective buyers get a better feel for the horse and hopefully assist the seller in weeding out the less serious potential buyers. Also, some horses are better suited to a certain experience level of rider (beginner vs. advanced). Specifying this information will also help the potential buyer better identify the suitability of the horse and rider. For instance, if the horse is a bit strong or has a naughty side to it, a seller may choose to list it as "best suited for an advanced rider." When it comes to a horse's health or injuries, career-limiting injuries should always be mentioned, whereas an abscess that the horse had 6 months ago does not need to be mentioned. All vices should be listed, too. Cribbing and weaving are major vices that would be of concern to any buyer.

Quality Sale Videos

Today, it is very easy to market any horse through video advertisements. A sales video should showcase the horse's best attributes that the seller deems most desirable for prospective buyers. Sellers will not be able to put all they believe to be special or desirable about the horse in a sales video but should rather focus on what the potential buyer may find useful and desirable. It is important to put only the most desirable traits so that the video does not become too lengthy. From 2012 to 2013, viewers' attention spans when viewing social media videos declined from 7 to 5 minutes. A study analyzing the attention span of students while watching videos showed 5 minutes was the optimum length for a video, as longer videos caused students to become bored and quit watching. A dwindling attention span when buyers are viewing social media means that sellers must be brief, focused, and to the point when creating sales videos.

When putting a sales video together, sellers should consider showcasing two main factors to the potential buyer: conformation/performance potential (quality of movement) and attitude/demeanor/disposition. If the horse is being sold as a prospective or competitive performance horse, the video should clearly show the horse at a walk, trot, canter, and stop. This goal can be accomplished either on a lunge line or by free lunging in a round pen. It is important that the horse is warmed up before making the video just long enough that it is moving forward and attentive but not sweaty. The video should clearly show the horse performing the discipline or up to the level of training as advertised (if the horse is being sold as a cutting horse, then cattle should be a part of the video). Videos should be edited to leave out some aspects, such as missed gaits and leads or stumbles in a performance, highlighting the horse without making the video too lengthy. It is also important to limit distracting or offensive styles of music.

Places to Market

Social media is one of the biggest and best ways to market horses. While traditional markets and sales are still used, 77.8 percent of buyers and sellers use social media to market and find horses. Although social media is a popular way to market horses, what the horse is being sold for can influence where sellers market horses. Sellers marketing horses primarily based on pedigree are 64 percent more likely to still use traditional methods such as books and magazines. Although many sellers may fear that using social media to market horses will be a hassle and not worth their time, many equine professionals reported that social media was easy to use and positively

affected their business. Facebook was the primary platform used by sellers until it placed restrictions on horse sale ads. Now, Facebook will not allow posts that include verbiage such as “for sale,” so sellers have to refrain from titling their sales ads as “for sale,” and they have to leave out prices. Nonetheless, posting descriptions of horses along with videos and pictures is enough to let people know that the horse is being marketed. Below is a list of websites and a brief description of what they offer as platforms for marketing horses (based on rates on December 1, 2020):

- Horseclicks – Requires an account and allows photo and video for free. It offers basic, premium, and elite advertisement for a one-time fee per ad posted. Basic is free, and ads can be seen once per page. Premium is \$10 and gives an ad more exposure. Elite is \$20 for maximum ad exposure. Potential buyers can contact sellers through the ad via email or phone number.
- Dreamhorse – Requires sellers and buyers to create an account. It is free to create an ad, but users cannot post photos unless they upgrade to Photo Ad, which costs \$20 and runs for 90 days.
- Equinenow – Requires an account. It offers a free photo ad but has premium and premium plus as options. Premium is \$14.95 and allows sellers to add up to eight photos and a video; your ad is placed above standard ads. Premium plus is \$24.95 and allows 15 photos and a video; your ad is placed above premium ads. All ads run for 3 months.
- Facebook – Requires Facebook account. You can post in breed-specific groups (Quarter Horse, Thoroughbred, Tennessee Walker, ranch horses, etc.). It’s free to use but has many rules. You must avoid statements such as “for sale” and “for your consideration,” and you cannot include pricing to avoid posts from being flagged and removed. Sellers can invite prospective buyers to direct message them for additional details.

Conclusion

As with many other industries adapting to advances in technology, the equine industry is changing and improving the way it markets and sells horses. Social media has allowed people to buy and sell horses from farther distances than before, essentially expanding and opening the sales market. This expansion has created a broader avenue for both buyers and sellers, but taking full advantage of this market requires attention to detail to attract the right buyer for the horse being sold. By providing a good conformation photo, a descriptive sales ad, and an informative sales video, sellers can create a situation where the horse being sold is found by the prospective buyer, often much quicker than in the past.

Marketing horses is all about finding the “right fit” for the buyer. The smart seller markets the horse professionally, using all the tools now available to the maximum extent possible. If done well, buying and selling horses can be a positive experience for all involved.

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