

TOP 10

No Cost or Low Cost Marketing Tools for Your Horse Business

by *Marnie Somers.*

Instalment 5

In this instalment of Top Ten marketing tools, Linda and I suggest how social networking (SN) can help you promote your horse business to your target market.

However, we cannot stress enough that SN is not a replacement for your other avenues of advertising. It is just one part of the whole mix. Whether it is location, age demographic or technology-resistance, you still need to reach out to prospects in traditional ways.

All the links quoted in this article and previous instalments of this series are at www.horsecountry.ca/archives.htm

In this instalment of Top Ten marketing tools, Linda and I recommend why and how to take advantage of three social networking (SN) services: Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. We will also touch on YouTube, the very popular video sharing Web site, that lets anyone upload short videos for private or public viewing. There are many others, of course, but arguably these are the “top four” web based services, which can help promote your horse business to your target market. And they’re free – in terms of dollars, that is. They do require a dedicated investment of your time.

What exactly is an SN service?

- Wikipedia (an on-line dictionary) defines SN as, “...an online service, platform, or site that focuses on building and reflecting of social networks or social relations among people, who, for example, share interests and/or activities. A social network service essentially consists of a representation of each user (often a profile), his/her social links, and a variety of additional services. Most social network services are web based and provide means for users to interact over the Internet, including e-mail and instant messaging.”
- One popular use for this technology is interaction between businesses. Companies have found that SN sites are great ways to build their brand image. According to Jody Nimetz, author of Marketing Jive, “There are five major uses for businesses and social media: to create brand awareness, as an online reputation management tool, for recruiting,

to learn about new technologies and competitors, and as a lead generation tool to intercept potential prospects. These companies are able to drive traffic to their own online sites while encouraging their consumers and clients to have discussions on how to improve or change products or services.”

But, isn’t SN just a fad?

The website www.graphicsms.com/blog/877-social-networking-statistics-2010 lists the following data:

- 47% of online adults use SN sites and 73% of teens and young adults are a member of at least one SN.
- The global average time spent on SN sites is now nearly 5½ hours per month.
- The active US-based SN audience grew roughly 29% from 115 million in February, 2009 to 149 million in February, 2011.

Facebook has more than 400+ million active users, with over 1.5 million business pages, with the average user spending more than 55 minutes per day on their site.

Twitter has 24+ million unique visitors per month, with 50 million tweets per day, and 11 % or 33.8 million US online adults use this service.

LinkedIn has 60+ million professional members worldwide, including all Fortune 500 companies.

And then there’s **YouTube**:. The website www.website-monitoring.com/blog/2010/05/17/youtube-facts-and-figures-history-statistics lists the following data:

- YouTube exceeds 2 billion views per day. (Nearly double the prime time audience of all 3 major US broadcast networks combined.)
- There are more videos uploaded to YouTube in 60 days than all 3 major US broadcast networks created in 60 years.
- 24 hours of video are uploaded every minute.
- The average user spends 15 minutes per day on YouTube.
- 70% of the traffic comes from outside the US .

But, isn’t SN a huge “time-suck”?

Yes, it can be if you get mired into the games, the horoscopes and teenagers’ relationship angst. Be selective in what you “like” or “comment” on. Invest time and effort to use these marketing tools effectively. You cannot afford to exclude on-line marketing in your marketing mix when you look at the user statistics. Move forward with the trends rather than standing by and wondering what all the “buzz” is about. Today’s business environment is highly competitive and to survive and thrive you need all the help you can get.

Instalment #4 of this series provided links to several on-line marketing tools including SN. This time we’ll dig a little deeper to help you overcome the “technology intimidation factor”.

Let's start with perhaps the most well known of the social networks, Facebook. What could a Facebook page do for your business? A good online article is www.netrostar.com/Article-216-A-%20road%20map%20for%20setting%20up%20Facebook%20page%20for%20business. This article says, "Facebook is a supremely useful instrument for companies to use in their marketing and promotional efforts. When done properly, it can go a long way towards helping you stay in touch with existing customers and acquiring new ones." The article provides a "roadmap for setting up Facebook for business... including several "do's" and "don'ts" to help you set it up right from the start and to avoid pitfalls." It suggests setting up your business Facebook page separately from your personal Facebook page, which is good advice for medium to large business enterprises with many employees. However, if you are the owner(s) of a small business there may be advantages to linking your personal and business Facebook pages and/or linking them to your business website. You should be able to make your own assessment of which is most relevant to your business. (Warning - don't put your personal information on any of your Facebook pages. Information sharing is rife, and really, your business prospects do not need to know about that wild weekend in Vegas!)

Twitter is a social network where you can post comments (140 text characters per post) on any subject you care to promote, including your business. The premise of Twitter is that it provides quick and easy two-way communication between you and your target market. Some people post frequent comments (called Tweets) on an hourly or daily basis. Our personal view? This is overkill unless you are in the financial market commenting on share prices. You are not required to post regularly or to respond to all the tweets you receive, just enjoy the conversation. Quality is always better than quantity. The Twitter link from Instalment #4 is www.chrisbrogan.com/50-ideas-on-using-twitter-for-business. The article suggests, "Step 1. Build an account and immediately start using "Twitter Search" to watch for your name, your competitor's names, or words that relate to your products. (Listening always comes first.)" The trick to getting a solid following audience is to always comment on your business or industry interests, not the status of your Tim Horton's drive-thru position or the fact that you have a headache.

Twitter can provide almost instant feedback about your industry that you might miss otherwise.

LinkedIn is a network which is more business than social, for industry people to establish a professional profile online, stay in touch with former classmates, colleagues and friends,

and find experts, ideas and opportunities. Many members use this network to collaborate with other like-minded business contacts, and/or find businesses who offer the products or services they need. There are many "interest groups" set up for discussion and idea-sharing. It provides potential to reach new clients and source new ideas. To start up a new account, go to www.linkedin.com/static?key=business_info.

YouTube, the free video sharing website, is an especially useful tool for equine businesses to share videos of horses for sale, or showcase a breeding stallion. You could even upload a video of yourself (or a professional) giving a sales pitch for your business. Videos are streamed to users from

the YouTube website or, more importantly, can be viewed from blogs and other web sites, such as your own business website. YouTube provides the necessary computer code that can be embedded in any website page to view a specific video. Launched in 2005, YouTube supports AVI, MOV and MPEG video formats from most digital cameras, camcorders and cellphones. For more information visit the website at: www.youtube.com to open your (free) account. For a sample horse videos, type the words, "One Hot Krymsum" in the YouTube search box and check out the videos you find there.

Your SN strategy can complement your continuing print advertising too. Enquire if your chosen magazine has a digital version; for instance, in Horse Country's digital version we can add video, page-turning catalogues, posters and soundbites to adverts which initially appear as regular print pages.

As previously mentioned, there is no one magic trick to build your business. It's built through the cumulative efforts of your whole stable of marketing tools and strategies. And, they work so much harder for you when they support and complement each other. 🐾



In the spirit of mutual learning and sharing, we invite your questions, comments and feedback (positive and negative), which you can post on our websites or submit direct to editor@horsecountry.ca.

Marnie Somers is a freelance writer and web designer whose articles have been published in numerous horse magazines across North America. She is the designer/webmaster for numerous horse associations and other agribusiness clients. Somers has been a media/marketing consultant to the horse industry since 1997, and has presented Marketing Tips seminars. In addition, she is the current President of the Canadian Quarter Horse Association and a Director-At-Large on the Boards of Directors of the American Quarter Horse Association and Equine Canada. Her email is marnie@horsescoops.com. The Marketing Tips blog is at www.horsescoops.com/blog.