

BREEDERS' FORUM WE ASKED THEM WHAT THEY WANTED

By Barbara Daley

One of the greatest challenges in any business is finding the best way to target your consumer market. Large multinational companies spend millions of dollars on their annual marketing budgets. The net results are crafted to appeal specifically to their unique customer base. Success of these marketing programs is measured. The ultimate measurement is return on investment. In other words, have revenues increased relative to cost? Has my bottom line improved?

Measurement is the end component of a marketing program. The elements which precede this include: Objective, Strategy and Execution. Simply put, a good marketing program has structure.

The majority of the Canadian horse breeding industry has been using a much less structured approach. Fair enough. Many successful businesses are guided by gut feeling, strong desire and hard work. However, some could say it has been a bit hit-and-miss. It's when the same concerns and the same barriers to success keep surfacing from so many different segments of a single industry that we start to question the approach we are taking.

I've been hearing it. I've heard it sitting ringside with fellow breeders watching the young horses make their debut. I've heard it in the barn aisle when chatting with trainers as we attend to our horses. I've also heard it around the dinner table as friends gather for a little down time. We want to do it better. We want to have a world class standard. We want to thrive.

So maybe it's time we stop talking to ourselves. In marketing terms, it's time to do some consumer research. Let's find out what our end consumer really wants. Let's find out what we need to do so that we can market our horses to the world. Let's find out how we can do this so that the whole horse industry – from the breeding shed to the show ring – will benefit.

The opportunity to do just that presented itself, when the Group IV FEI Delegates gathered for meetings during the Royal Winter Fair. This group of individuals represented a good cross section of the world's horse industry. They were very interested to know what Canada offered. They were willing to lend us their perspective as potential partners in commerce.

Canadian horse breeders were invited to gather for a round table discussion with the FEI Delegates. Recognizing that input from partners in sport was integral to the discussion process, members of Equine Canada's Sport Council were also invited as guests. Each participant was asked to provide a question or topic of discussion in advance of the session. These contributions would be consolidated to a single discussion document which would be used to guide the facilitated session.

Initially, it was anticipated that the questions and topics received would be directed to the FEI Delegates. An interesting thing happened however. There were some challenging questions from sport directed to the breeders. The breeders in turn had some ideas they wanted to share with sport. The focus was the same, that is, to connect with the consumer in a way which will ensure good business practices and deep relationships, for now and in the future. Topics ranged from pre-purchase protocols to media coverage. It covered regulated and reportable sales processes and loaning of promising horses to talented riders. Breeders' awards were discussed as were national database programs. Standards from successful countries were cited as examples. A desire for improved communications was highlighted.

Ideas were exchanged and affirmed by both the Canadian stakeholders and the international guests. Action areas were identified.

The process does not stop there however. It is ongoing. There will be other occasions to formally exchange ideas and identify opportunities. These may support and expand on the findings from Equine Canada's Breeders Round Table. The action areas which are identified can then become the basis of a marketing strategy. This strategy will be our guide for execution and ultimately will help us to meet our objectives as an industry.

See related story about the Equine Canada's Breeders' Round Table in the Breeds & Industry section on pages 40-41

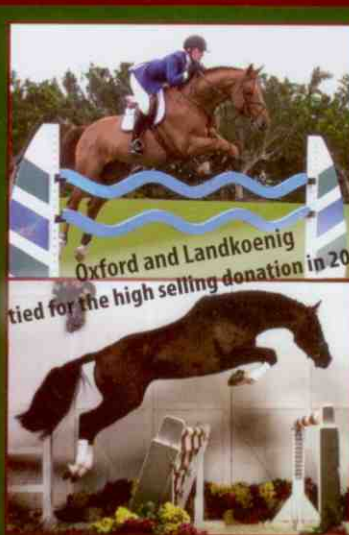
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