

HOW-TO

Market Your Horse for Sale

by Wendye Gardiner

You bred a foal, raised him, had him trained, and it is time to find him a home. Or you bought a horse a few years ago and realize that you have outgrown him and need to sell him and buy a younger, hotter prospect to move up in the show world with. You no longer want to show and your horse is standing there wasting while you ride cute, non-show quality Betsy on the trails. There can be many reasons why you want to sell your horse, but it is a daunting prospect. And I won't tease you — selling a horse can be almost a full-time job. If you don't market him, no one will know he is for sale, even if he is their perfect dream horse. If you market him poorly with poor photos and information, again, the buyer won't make that second step and call you. Where do you advertise? How do you respond to potential buyers? What if they actually want to buy him ... what then? Contracts, vet checks, trial periods, do I have to send him with a halter?

I am going to start by giving you some ideas on how to market your horse to prospective buyers, and will go over how to advertise him, covering everything from description, marketing materials to have on hand, photos and videos, terms, and responding to inquiries. Part 2 will cover presentation, sales contracts, different types of purchases, vet checks, and shipping. Part 3 will be addressed to the prospective buyer — how to look for and safely buy your dream horse.

You'll hear me say this a lot — you probably aren't going to make a profit selling your horse. If you are lucky you might break even, but most of the time, you will lose a bit of your financial investment. Don't think about it — the money you lose in your investment was well spent (hopefully) in your enjoyment of the horse and the good life he had with you. It's a responsibility we all happily take on when we join this crazy world of horse lovers, and we do it contentedly. The most important thing is to be true to the horse, find him a good match and a good home where he will be loved and useful. Be

This is first installment in a new series of "how-to" features. For all of the articles in the previous series go to www.arabianhorseworld.com.

fair to your horse and give him his best chance at a happy future, whatever his discipline may be.

ONLINE ADVERTISING

My favorite (and most successful) way to market a horse to buyers is by online advertising. There are many different websites on which to advertise your horse and in this digital age, it will be your best tool in marketing. If you have a horse website, put him on there and link his ads there as well. Pay for multiple photos, for higher placement in the listings, and refresh your ad and photos often. The more you can do to make your ad stand out above the other hundreds of similar ads, the more likely you are to have a response. If you don't get a response, you aren't going to get a buyer.

Besides websites, there are other digital options such as an *Arabian Horse World* eBlast, online classifieds (such as Craigslist), and digital media (such as Facebook). Use anything and everything available to you. Online classifieds will be more suited to lower-priced horses. Some horse advertising websites will be better suited to sport horses and others to simple trail horses. Remember, you are not only marketing to Arabian people, there are a lot of people out there who admire and like Arabians and feel that a good horse is a good horse regardless of breed, but won't be a part of the "show" world so will miss a lot of the Arabian-only websites — so don't limit yourself. EBlasts are great for show and breeding horses as they are targeting that market, primarily. Digital media can be very powerful but you



Conformation photos look best without tack, but a flattering photo of any type that shows something of the horse is always valuable.

also have to be very careful, as advertising can get negative and out of hand if your ad is not placed carefully and smartly.

PRINT ADS

There are several magazines (like *Arabian Horse World*) and printed newsletters and horse papers that you can use to market your horse. It's easier to get lost in the back and miss your targeted audience but the more you have your horse out there, the better. This can include fliers posted at feed stores and horse shows. Make your ad stand out with professional quality editing and simple, concise information.

HEADLINE

When you use online advertising through eBlasts or websites, the headline can make the difference between prospective buyers opening the ad or skipping over it. Read through ads already posted to get an impression of what people use and what catches *your* attention. Make yours different and yet a short summary of your horse. "Western gelding" may be honest and a fairly good description but "Champion western pleasure gentleman" gives a little more clue as to what sort of horse people will be looking at. If your initial headline doesn't get many responses, try something else.

WORDING

Give an accurate description of your horse. Talk about his disposition, training, what he knows, what he does, and how well he does it. Attract their attention; make them want to know more. You don't have to have 4,000 words describing your horse, they can call or email you to get that detailed

information. Just give them a good assessment of the basics about your horse without being so wordy that you lose their attention. Give them enough to make them want to know more. "Nice horse, broke, tall, good with kids, pretty," is probably not going to bring in the buyers. "This is a very nice horse without any vices, he is well broke with three year's professional training and has been shown to the Regional level in the walk/trot division with multiple championships. He is 15.3 hands and strikingly beautiful with his loud pinto coloring and exotic face." Same horse, much different depiction. Which would you call on?

TERMS TO BE WARY OF

- Bombproof — don't say he is bombproof unless you absolutely know for sure that he will not react to sounds, stimuli, new situations, barking dogs, crying children, honking semi-trucks, fire extinguishers, earthquakes, and hailstorms. Think about it — how many horses are truly bombproof? Very rare, highly valued for children, and seldom for sale. Someone will get hurt if you advertise falsely.
- National caliber — This term is flung around loosely. "Well, if there are only nine in the class, I am *sure* he will top ten ..." yes, with the new Nationals' rules this is true, and most horses could, in fact, be National caliber. But most people who want a National-caliber horse would like to have a shot at the top two positions in a tough class. Could your horse be a National champion in the toughest class in his division? (National-caliber open western horse, National-caliber amateur hunter, etc). If not — at what level of competition could he actually win? Not everyone can afford to show to the National level.

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Buyers will often want to see a basic conformation photo with all four legs visible and the horse standing on a flat surface.

Most people will be happy with a horse they can have fun with at class A shows and have a shot at a top five at their Regional competition. Don't stretch the truth, be honest! Another way to look at it is, if you say the horse is National caliber and the buyer only wants to show class A — they will be embarrassed and afraid that you will think they will be wasting your top-quality horse.

- Kid safe — have you had kids on the horse? Did they do silly kid things or did they ride around as if they were in an equitation class? How old was the kid? Sixteen doesn't really count. Assume that people looking for a kid-safe horse will want a horse they can turn their ten-year-old loose on for an hour and the kid can do strange and unusual things only a ten-year-old can think of, and the horse won't kill them. "Kid safe" is different from "youth prospect."
- Beginner friendly — if someone were to grab the horse around the barrel with their legs, let go of the reins, grab the horn and shriek — what would your horse do? Try it. Beginners will often dig their heels in to stay on when unbalanced — will your horse assume they want to canter, gallop, run? Or will the horse stop and think ... "this person really doesn't know what they are doing. I'd better stop or go to the middle and get my owner to save me." "Novice friendly" might be more appropriate because a novice rider should at least hopefully know to keep hold of the reins.

- Trail safe — have you had him out on actual trails away from home? Crossing logs, mud puddles, experiencing jumping bunnies, barking dogs, other horses running past, and weaving in and out of trees, up and down hills, and through gates? Be honest about his actual experience.
- Potential — Most horses probably have some sort of potential in most disciplines. That's what Arabians excel in — versatility! But to advertise him as having western potential because you can ride him in a western saddle — that's not quite what people are looking for. Be honest and think forward.
- Green, well-started, trained — How much time under the saddle has the horse really had? Does he know how to bend his neck, give to the leg, turn on a dime, canter from the walk, and remain consistent with his head? Can he go to strange facilities and maintain his training and composure? Does he neck-rein? Does he know how to walk, trot, canter, turn, and stop ... mostly? "Green" is a horse that someone has been on a few times. "Well-started" is a horse who knows how to go around the arena pretty safely but isn't quite finished. "Well-trained" you'd better bet they expect a well-mannered and fairly finished horse. "Finished" — pretty much anyone should be able to make the horse do his job well, once they know the buttons. Be honest with yourself and your buyers.
- Temperament — many websites use a scale of one to ten — ten being hot and one being bombproof. Like people, horses have their moods. Try to find a good median number that describes your horse, most of the time. Don't give him a one or a two, though, unless he is always dead quiet. Don't give him a nine or a ten unless he is always on the verge of out of control.

PHOTOS

First impression is everything! You need a photo that will catch a buyer's eye and make that person want to keep reading the ad. It may mean the difference between their opening the ad and calling you, or passing over it. If you place an ad online and you don't get any calls in the first week or two, try changing the photo. What you like may not appeal to someone else. If a head shot didn't get attention, try a trot photo. If that didn't work, try a riding photo, and so on.

- Professional photos are always best, but clear, close, sharp



Kneel down for leg photos to prevent any distortion. Square him up so front feet are even and make sure you are directly in front of him. For hind leg photos tie the tail in a knot or move it aside for a complete view.

images with flattering angles are fine. Don't use any unflattering photos. Be *very* critical. Is the horse standing downhill? Is his leg too far back so as to make his shoulder look straight? Is the fence behind him positioned in such a way as to make him appear swaybacked? Are his eyes rolling back in his head making him appear to have white around his eye? Try to think of everything ... just because you think he looks pretty doesn't mean it's a flattering photo or one that will catch a buyer's eye. Be critical, be harsh, and be honest with yourself. Plan ahead, be prepared, and have everything together before you advertise, or be prepared to take more pictures and have them ready to email within 24-48 hours.

- Before taking photos, bathe (if possible) and groom your horse, brush out his mane and tail and fly spray him. A basic clip of whiskers, fetlock feathers, and bridlepath always helps; a show clip is even better. If he has a winter coat, you might want to just clip off the "goat" hairs and clean up his face without doing a full show clip that might distort the color. For liberty photos, don't overdo the makeup and grease as it will cause a lot of reflection making it hard to get good photos.
- Buyers will want to see photos of the horse under saddle (if applicable) as well as at liberty. Movement photos are attention grabbing, flattering, and can give a good impression of the quality and athleticism of the horse in question.
- Long-distance buyers will often want to see a basic conformation photo with all four legs visible and the horse standing on a flat surface.
- Many will want to see a photo of the horse's legs. Stand your

horse on a flat surface: cement or gravel is best, but a dirt arena is fine as long as the footing isn't so deep you can't see the horse's feet clearly. Square him up so his front feet are even and make sure you get directly in front of him, and kneel down so it is a straight-on photo, not off to one side or another, which can distort the photo. For a shot of the rear legs, move the tail aside or knot it. Some horses will act as if they are drunk, standing too close or too wide, or on top of themselves or on top of you ... be patient and keep in mind that you are acting oddly and they are likely completely confused as to why you have gone crazy, wanting them to stand in an exact position in an exact spot so you can kneel down and flash a light at them 15 times before grunting and repositioning and doing it again.

VIDEO

Long-distance buyers will almost always want to see a video of the horse before they either make a sight-unseen purchase or take a long, expensive trip to see him. Regardless of your horse's discipline, most people will enjoy an at-liberty video. Have one or two helpers encourage the horse and get his attention while you shoot the video. Don't have him be a tiny speck off in the wild blue yonder — use a smaller pasture and your zoom lens to keep him close and in frame. Videos should be one to three minutes long — enough to see what they need to see but not so long as to lose their attention.

PRICE

The seller's nemesis! Too much and they won't sell. Too little and you cry yourself to sleep. Too much and people think you are crazy, too little and they wonder what is wrong with the

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horse. And on, and on. Many people think the online auctions are a good place to evaluate the current market and prices — yes and no. While the auctions can be a good indication of the general economy and buyers' market, there are many people who will never buy from an auction and will pay more to a private seller because they appreciate the time to try the horse out, have a leisurely vet check, and perhaps a trial period; luxuries you can't get from an auction. So don't panic because you saw three National top ten horses similar to yours sell at auction for \$800 and you want \$8,000 for your horse. But that said, remember the old adage: "The only way to make a million in the horse business is to start with two million." Just because you paid a \$3,500 stud fee to breed your foal, spent three years raising him, and a year of professional training, doesn't mean you can get \$25,000 for your horse. You may put all that time and training into him, and find out he is a \$5,000 pleasure and trail horse prospect. You are essentially paying to find him a home, but it is the responsible and ethical thing to do and someone will love and enjoy your horse.

So how do I price my horse? Check out equine sale websites. There are several. You might ask friends, trainers, do Internet searches, and peek at major farm websites. Look up horses similar to yours and find the median price. Always keep in mind that people can price their horse as high as they want, but doing so doesn't mean that is what the horse is worth or that he will actually sell for that. Trainers can ask for higher prices than backyard owners can. Sad but true — they have the facility, flexibility in schedule/time, and resources to be able to market to a broader and perhaps higher echelon of clientele. But that doesn't mean you should expect to take a big hit marketing your own horse — remember how much you are saving at the same time. Drop your price and your expectations a bit, being grateful not to be spending much more.

High-end show horses will always have a market, but they will need to have enough training to show that they can continue in their training pretty easily and consistently, and have some sort of a show record. If you have a high-end horse, you probably should enlist the aid of a trainer to help market, present, and show him. At the higher price ranges, trainers will be doing a lot of the purchasing as agents for their clients, and

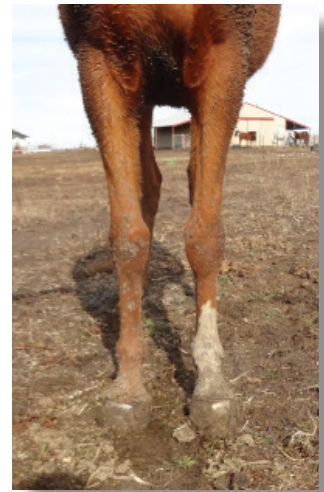
in general, trainers will prefer to deal with other trainers for a smoother transaction.

Trail and pleasure horses — the lower you go the more inquiries you will get — if you need to sell your horse within the month, you had better go to \$3,500 or less. Show horses will of course bring more, but remember, we are in a buyer's market. The age of "prospects" has passed, overall. People want to *see* what the horse can do, so don't tell them what you *think* he will be able to do. You will have to put some time and possibly money into your horse's training. If you want to sell him as a true prospect, you are going to have to take a significant price cut because the buyer will be the one taking the risk on the horse's not making it in that discipline.

Endurance horse prospects can bring a decent price but don't think that just because your horse is fast and hyper, he will be good at endurance. Such horses have to be sane, like to eat and drink even when stressed, and have good recoveries, sound conformation, etc. If you think your horse may be an endurance prospect, you may want to enlist the aid of an experienced endurance person to evaluate him and help to describe him. If you are an endurance rider and your horse has actual miles, the price will go up, sometimes significantly, depending on how many miles your horse has gone and his completion record.

Sport horses have a pretty strong amateur market, though they still won't bring huge prices unless they are extremely proven. But you can expect to consistently find buyers for nice sport horses who are fairly safe to ride, with good movement and temperament, in a low-to-moderate median price range.

Height sells — the majority of Americans are bigger nowadays and want a bigger horse. You can generally add a little to the horse's value for that. Fancy colors or exceptionally pretty faces will also bring more money. Who doesn't want to have the



Make sure your horse is clean for photos. First impressions mean a lot.

prettiest horse on the trails? The more broke they are, the easier they will sell but that doesn't necessarily mean you will be able to get a lot more money.

Bloodlines can help — some buyers specifically want a pure Polish or straight Egyptian. Many don't care. If your horse's sire is extremely famous, that can help, but again, many buyers don't follow the mainstream market and won't have heard of the sire, so it doesn't necessarily raise his value. As they say, your horse is only worth what someone will pay you for him.

COMMISSIONS

If you work with an agent to help market your horse, find out in advance what the commission will be (it's usually 15-20 percent). Tell them your absolute bottom dollar *after* commission and have them price your horse accordingly. If you are selling the horse yourself but the buyer brings a trainer, many times that trainer will anticipate receiving a commission, usually five to ten percent, depending on the individual trainer, price of the horse, and the market he is in. If your trainer or agent is selling your horse and another trainer or agent is working with the buyer, the two agents will split the maximum (15-20 percent) commission between them.

If you want to give someone incentive to help you sell your horse, many trainers will do deals in which they will take and train the horse for free (you may or may not pay hard costs in the horse's care), and sell the horse for you, giving you an agreed upon minimum price while the trainer keeps all profit above that amount. This can be a good deal and incentive for all involved in some cases, and it never hurts to ask if this is something you think may be valuable and have a trainer you trust.

RESPONDING TO INQUIRIES

Be prompt! If you take three days to respond, and the buyer sent off inquiries on five different horses, the first responses will have the buyer's attention. If the buyer writes back with more questions, answer them as soon as possible. If you are slow to respond, human nature will take over and they will assume you are either hiding something, or have sold the horse and they will move on to another prospect.

Honesty is key, and vital both for the future happiness of the horse and your reputation in the very small world we call the horse industry. If the person wants a safe, sweet, best friend and your horse would intimidate Godzilla on the best of days — tell them that he is not the horse they are looking for. If you know your horse has a veterinary problem, a vice, or even a blemish that may turn someone off, tell them up front. The buyer will appreciate your honesty and will know immediately that they are dealing with an upstanding seller. Your horse will appreciate it as well when he doesn't get passed from home to home because the buyer did not get the horse they expected and turns around and dumps him.

Don't put pressure on! If you have multiple buyers interested in your horse, do tell them that there are other interested people so that they do not dawdle and lose their dream horse, calling you five days later to buy him only to find he sold out from under them. But don't put unnecessary pressure on to buy him "yesterday or he will be gone tomorrow and you will be sorry!" You will cause them to put up their guard and they will begin to wonder what you are hiding. Be honest and keep your horse's best interests at heart, and the buyers will notice, respect, and appreciate it.

Next month, we'll go over the presentation of your horse to the buyers and how to close the deal with contracts, payment agreements, vet checks, shipping, and all the other little things that can be confusing and daunting. So start putting together your marketing material, photos, and videos. Work on wording your ad, and research prices. Spring is coming and it will be time to start looking for a new horse!

About the horses: page 59: AM Michael Love (*Seffer x AM Dream Dove), left, and Assante NS (Alixir x Ambianse); page 60: SDA Silver Legend (*Silvern Magic x PR Silver Dream).

About the author: Wendy Gardiner runs Solstice Training Center, LLC in Aubrey, Texas, where she trains, markets, sells, and shows to the National level in several disciplines. Twenty years of experience and wonderful opportunities to work with some of the best names in the business have given her the ability to individualize her training perspective to each particular horse and she loves to teach interested people how to do it themselves. In selling, she wants to match up horse and buyer for a lifelong companionship and is glad to help others learn to do the same for the benefit of the horse.