



Horse Marketing: Answers and Options

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Introduction to Current Horse Sale Economics

Marketing a horse in today's world can be very difficult. Since fiscal year 2006, Congress has annually prohibited the use of federal funds to inspect horses destined for food, effectively prohibiting domestic slaughter. Due to the forced closure of horse slaughter plants in the U.S., many horse marketing options have been eliminated or severely depressed.

Most notably, with the ceasing of domestic horse slaughter, is the drop in value of mid-to-low range horses. Since 2007, the value of lower-to-medium priced horses has decreased by 8 to 21 percent (US GAO, 2011). In the recent past, horses that would have brought as much as \$500-\$600 for slaughter can now not be given away. Many livestock auctions will not even receive horses for sale.

For decade's weekly or bi-weekly horse auctions flourished around the country. Today, many of those sale venues have been closed down due to the decrease in value of lower priced horses.

Options

So what can someone do if the soaring cost of feed and fuel make it necessary for them to cut back on the number of horses they own or liquidate their animals altogether?

The answer to this question depends mainly on the classification of horse that is being marketed. If the horse is extremely old or in poor health, the options for marketing the animal may be limited or even non-existent.

One option would be to advertise the horse in the local classified section of the newspaper or other periodicals. This also includes the websites that have classified ads

such as KSL.com. You never know when there might be someone out there looking for what you have to sell.

Another option would be to contact one of the many horse rescue groups that are taking in horses that are no longer needed or wanted. These groups can be found online.

Do not take the animal out into the country and just turn it loose like a stray kitten. Many brand inspectors, fairgrounds managers, and ranchers are reporting more and more unwanted horses showing up in strange places. Local government and animal welfare organizations have reported a rise in abandoned horses since 2007 (GAO Findings, 2011). This type of action does not benefit anyone, and especially not the horse.

If someone has a mid to high-range horse to be marketed, the options expand somewhat. The classified ads in this situation are still a very good idea, and may end up in a positive sale of an animal.

Secondly, there are still many consignment horse sales being held around the country. These are annual or semi-annual auctions that provide a forum for horse owners to market their animals. These can range from highly exclusive breed sales to all breed open sales where any type of horse is welcome.



With today's technology a potential buyer can view a horse in action on YouTube or other video sites. A well made video can be a very valuable marketing tool.

Preparing a Horse for Sale

There are some important things to keep in mind when entering a horse in a consignment sale. First, what are the consignment and catalogue fees per animal and how much you will have to pay if you pass your horse out (decide not to sell because the bidding was not high enough). If these dollar amounts are too much, you may want to choose another sale.

Secondly, make sure the horse being sold is well prepared and will show well. For example, a horse can be the best animal in the world, but if it comes into the sale ring covered with mud or burs or just looks horrible in general, chances are it will not bring a good price.

Also, desensitize the horse to lights, crowds, and loud noises before going to the sale event. If the horse comes in scared of everything it sees, the buyers will probably not be interested.

Thirdly, try to add value to your animal. Horses that can be ridden or are started under saddle always bring more money than those that have to be lead in. Consequently, yearlings and un-started 2 years olds do not bring great prices at consignment sales.

It is extremely important to remember that horses changing hands in the State of Utah are required to have a brand inspection. A list of state brand inspectors is available at:
ag.utah.gov/divisions/animal/brands/inspectors.html.

Most consignment sales will require not only a current brand inspection, but also a Coggins test and a health certificate from a veterinarian. A Coggins test is performed by the veterinarian drawing blood and sending it to a lab to be analyzed. The test checks for Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA) antibodies in the

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horse's blood to insure that the virus is not being harbored. It will probably take several days to obtain test results so give your veterinarian plenty of lead time.

Realistic Horse Values

Do not put a value on your horse that is un-realistic. Many horse owners, especially those that are somewhat inexperienced, feel like their horse is worth more than it really is, and will put a floor price on the animal that is not achievable.

Horses at consignment sales with good to great pedigrees are very common. Therefore, a horses' ancestry may not add a lot of value to the animal no matter what the owner thinks. A well broke grade horse will probably bring a lot more money than a yearling that is the grandson of a world champion.

If a horse is floored at a certain price, the owner may have the option to change their mind and lower that price if the bidding is not strong. On the other hand, if an owner's floor price is not reached the horse can be passed out for a fee.

Conclusion

The bottom line is that good, well-broke horses are still holding their value in today's horse market. However, the ending of the slaughter market combined with high fuel and feed costs has depressed the value of brood mares, yearlings, 2 year olds, and aged horses.

References

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