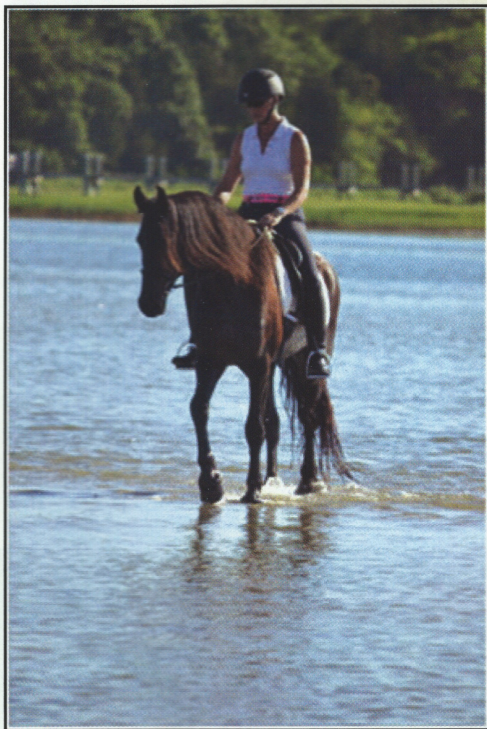


MARKETING YOUR FRIESIAN

Selling strategies that will help promote your sales.

By Meghan Hamilton



Meghan Hamilton is a USDF Bronze Medalist, writer, demo rider, professional rider and coach who operates her Riding Inspired dressage program out of Sleepy Hollow Farm in Dartmouth, MA. She is a current member of FHANA (Friesian Horse Association of North American), USDF (United States Dressage Federation), NEDA (New England Dressage Association). As a clinician Meghan also offers many clinics and workshops that often highlight working with the riders biomechanics with a holistic approach. Meghan also breeds and has a special affinity for training the Friesian. With over 25 years in the saddle she is constantly re-investing in her education. She is a current student of international rider, Olympic Team reserve and Pan Am Gold Medalist Heather Blitz, FL and has ridden in clinics and recently completed a RWYM Teacher Training course with RWYM (Ride With Your Mind) international coach Mary Wanless, UK.

Selling or buying Friesians can be an art. They are a special breed, with a unique market all their own. I have worked both as a buyer's agent and a seller's agent, and have bought and sold many horses over the years. Somewhere in the last 10 years I became more focused on the Friesian and fostering great relationships between this great breed and my clients. I was inspired to finally write about some of these experiences after a sales search earlier this spring where I was left disappointed at the communication between the potential seller and horse owner. I realized there are a lot of sellers and buyers that could benefit from some of the tips you will read in the next few paragraphs.

Communication

Communication is a top priority for me. I have a 24-hour rule. Return all calls, emails, texts, and messages from sales inquiries within 24 hours, period. If you are on the selling side, getting back in touch with potential buyers shows them that you are serious, and also can save a lot of time. There is nothing worse than never getting a follow up phone call, waiting and wondering. From a buyer's point of view, when there is a lack of follow up in communication the buyer is left

wondering about the possible sale and they shouldn't have to wait for that answer. Buyers don't want to chase down the sellers just to get information, especially when the seller has listed in their ad "Highly Motivated Seller" but never calls you back. How motivated are you really? Returning all calls, messages, et cetera, builds confidence and shows buyers you are serious and willing to make a sale as easy as possible. I have my own tolerances and will walk away if I have to keep chasing a seller, and then it is their loss. If you don't have time to actively field calls and questions from potential buyers, then you might consider hiring a broker to help get the sale done.

Prep For Sale

Selling your Friesian can be very time consuming and emotional, because after all they are like potato chips, and we cant have just one! There are a few tips that will make your life easier. If you have arrived at the point where you are selling one of these black beauties you need to pull out all the stops. I love making a horse ready for its new owner. This means a glossy coat, tidy mane, tail and feathers, up-to-date on everything, including veterinary care and farrier. Clean them up and keep them in work, so that buyers get to see the horses at their best.

Take Great Photos

I can't tell you how many times I see horrendous pictures of horses for sale that make me cringe and walk away. If I cannot get a great idea on conformation through pictures or video, I have to move on and keep looking. Which is awful because the potential sale horse is probably a great horse, but was not shown in a great way. If you cannot get high quality high-resolution photographs at home with your own camera or iPhone®, you should consider hiring a professional to come do a mini sales shoot for you. Often the cost is less than you think and worth every penny if it will catch someone's eye and make them call on the sale horse. Great pictures facilitate great sales. A picture is worth a thousand words.

"Keep the shutter speeds high for motion shots and use 1/800 shutter speed when possible," says equine photographer Amy Riley of Studio Equus.



Gail Aumiller driving 11 year-old Crown Mare, Sjaantje Sport in Carriage Pleasure Driving Turnout Champions at the 2016 JD Massey Show in Clemson, SC. ©Sandra Hall

Get Equally Great Video

If sales ads do not contain a video, 75% of potential buyers will walk away. A photo can initially pull in a potential buyer's attention, but a video can show off the horse's gaits, training and ability, and frequently seal the deal for requesting an in-person visit. One major pet peeve is Slo-Mo videos. They are unnecessary, annoying and do not allow prospective buyers to see true movement. Keep them short and sweet, too long and you risk losing the buyer's attention. Video should last 2-3 minutes MAX- long enough to show the horses walk, trot, and canter, a tiny bit longer, 4 minutes if the horse is multi-discipline trained or upper level. Personally, I love seeing "a day in the life of" types of videos because it give buyers a great idea on how the horse handles in its daily routine rather than just a performance video. I have bought and sold horses sight unseen because the horse had super video and pictures that gave the buyer/seller a great insight on what they were looking at.

I recently interviewed the Iron Spring Farm (ISF) team and asked, "What are your best tips for Friesian sales video?" Their advice: "In general, use professional videos and photos to promote your sales horses. Most keuring locations have professional videographers and photographers available at reasonable prices. This is money well spent because your mare and foal look great. They've had beauty parlor service and are showing off because they are excited."

If you do photos and videos at home, the ISF team suggested these tips:

- *Choose a nicely manicured area, making sure the area is free of distracting clutter, and has clean footing or short grass. Mow it if necessary.
- *Choose a time of day that provides the best light for the location. Ideally, keep the sun at your back.
- *Be sure the horse and handler/rider look their best. If possible, take off the halters for free movement. If you must leave the halters on, make sure they fit well and are buckled properly.

All these little details make a difference. They keep potential buyer focused on your fancy horse instead of being distracted by the rusty tractor parked next to field. Keep the video to a few minutes in length, and be selective about which segments you include. Show off your horse's best moments at the walk, trot and canter.



Wendee DCTF out of Dreams Come True Farm's Crown Mare Sjaantje Sport, taken at the Iron Spring Farm Keuring in Coatesville, PA..

Be Honest

Write a concise and accurate description of the horse - another area that needs deep improvement in the descriptions of horses for sale. This means the good, the bad and the ugly. Hopefully, by now you have caught the eye of a potential seller with a super 'awesome sauce' picture or video, and can take the interest a step further. Make sure you have all the details correct, including the year of birth, height, breed status (Premium, Sport, Model, etc), registration, and competition results. On the flip side you also need to be 100% transparent with all health issues, concerns etc. The more the potential buyer is loaded with truthful information, the easier it will be to weed out tire kickers, folks who are looking for very specific health requirements, etc. If your horse requires light maintenance or had surgery or has a cosmetic blemish they need to be listed. You will also stave off disappointment of a potential buyer who flies in to look at a horse for sale in your barn and, 'oopsie,' you forgot to mention that the horse had OCD surgery as a foal. Keep it honest.

Set A Fair Price And Target Your Market

Pricing your Friesian appropriately can make or break a sale. There are so many factors that go into a Friesian's worth, primarily because of their inherent breed specialty. That aside, you still have many factors that make a horse what they are worth - age, training (and by training I mean consistent training), sex, accomplishments (Premiums, IBOP, Crown, Model, Sport, proven broodmares, etc). If you are not sure what price range to market your horse, hire a trainer or professional in your area that works in your discipline or with the Friesian breed. Pay them for their time to evaluate your horse and suggest a price. This can save you a lot of time and help you get your horse marketed in the right areas. Speaking of areas, you need to know your market and where you will sell your Friesian. Social media has had a massive influence on where I buy and sell horses as well. Facebook© is the #1 horse sales network, and there are a handful of great websites that link well to Facebook© and are user friendly. Outside your own personal websites FHANA.com is a super resource and offers great deals on classifieds, as well as cross promotion on social media sites, but also in publications.

In my interview with Iron Spring Farm, I also asked, "Which social media drives the most sales inquiries"? Malone stated, "Facebook© and Instagram© both help us get our horses out in front of the Friesian market. Social media is a way to connect interested clients to our sales team via photo commenting, direct messaging, and linking to our website, www.IronSpringFarm.com. The increased online presence of the farm supports the serious buyer's ability to literally see the reputation and international quality of Iron Spring Farm's KFPS dressage breeding program."

Capitalize On The Initial Listing

The first three months of marketing a horse is full of excitement and interest. After that the attention of prospective buyers weans as new prospects come along. Folks might start wondering why the horse has not sold yet. Is he/she overpriced? Did he/she not pass vet check, etc. Take advantage of your initial listing by promoting the horse via social media, posting flyers at appropriate venues. (Quote Iron Spring Farm)

Transparency

Although I mentioned it above, it is worth repeating. Sellers must disclose any and all health or training issues. Legally, as a seller you must share anything essential you know about the horses behavior and physical condition. This could include any lameness history, maintenance required to maintain and keep the horse sound. Disclose any behaviors, such as kicking, cribbing, weaving, bucking rearing, biting and any other dangerous behavior.

I highly recommend all potential buyers get a pre-purchase veterinary exam on the horse from an independent veterinarian (i.e., not the seller's vet). Ask sellers to disclose all vet/health records and authorize release from their own veterinarian. Nondisclosure could lead the buyer to distrust the seller. Buyers often use the pre-purchase exam or PPE results as leverage to lower the price during negotiations. By disclosing up front, buyers are less surprised by the results of the PPE and are more likely to offer closer to the asking price.

Get The Sales Agreement In Writing

You've done it! You now have a sale you have negotiated and need to finalize your paperwork. Get your sales agreement in writing and have a clear plan for funds transfer and horse transport. Keep all correspondences via email, text, Facebook©, etc., and use a sales contract drafted by an attorney. Additionally you need to organize registration papers, Coggins, vaccinations and any other pertinent forms, registries, memberships, etc., and have them handy in one location.

Cross Promote For Referrals

I asked Iron Spring Farm one last question: "What other sales tips can you offer for those selling a Friesian?" She replied, "Breed to stallions who are well promoted and whose owners will refer potential buyers to their breeders' sales horses."

"Iron Spring Farm offers breeders an extensive, easy-to-use sales page on the Iron Spring Farm website for all horses sired by, or who are in-foal to, ISF stallions. These sales pages are some of the most viewed pages on the website and are a very effective addition to other sales sites."

