



UNITED STATES *Dressage* FEDERATION
SECTION EIGHT – MARKETING AND PUBLICITY

Your GMO needs to implement a marketing plan. Starting small is fine, but starting is paramount.

Marketing and Your GMO

Marketing is an area where many GMOs can fall short, but it is a necessary function to make your club thrive and grow. The “build it and they will come” approach is better left to Hollywood movie fantasy. Your GMO needs to develop and implement a marketing program. Starting small is fine, but starting is paramount. And just where does one begin?

Your GMO Marketing Committee

The first step to marketing is assigning someone the task. You need a champion, not a Prix St. George champion, but a leader for your GMO’s marketing efforts. Ideally, appoint a volunteer to run your GMO’s Marketing Committee. Committee? Yikes! But truly, a small group of dedicated members is needed to run your GMO’s Marketing Committee. The committee should be headed by the Marketing Committee Coordinator. The coordinator would optimally work with three other committee members: the advertising planner, the public relations coordinator and the newsletter editor.

The newsletter editor often serves a dual role as webmaster as more and more GMO’s are hosting websites. Often these four demanding functions fall to one person, but having individual members dedicated to each area will afford your GMO the best opportunity for marketing success.

You may be surprised how many members have some experience in advertising, sales, promotion, graphic design, and printing. Ask these members to volunteer their expertise.

Marketing is simply promoting.

What is Marketing?

Marketing is simply the task of promoting your club. Promoting your GMO will help you grow membership, promote the sport of dressage through awareness and participation, increase the club’s revenue and enable your club to offer more varied programs, including many turnkey USDF programs.

Getting Started with your GMO’s Marketing Plan

“Plan your work and work your plan” is the cliché that best suits marketing. Your GMO marketing committee will need to develop a marketing plan – a blueprint for the year’s marketing efforts. Outlined here are five simple steps to developing a marketing plan.

Step One: Identify Your GMO’s Benefits

Determine the benefits your GMO offers to the community and write them in a list. For example:

- We offer dressage enthusiasts a place to network, find trainers, sell wares, etc.

- We offer the community a place to learn about dressage and socialize with people who share similar interests.
- We offer a year end awards program to recognize dressage accomplishments.
- We host rated and schooling dressage shows.
- We offer many opportunities to learn more about dressage via GMO sponsored clinics, symposiums, and seminars.
- We promote dressage at equine events for other disciplines.
- We provide dressage enthusiasts a link to USDF in our area.
- We are the largest or only dressage club in the area.
- We have X number of celebrity or nationally ranked riders in our club.
- We offer programs for children, seniors, or handicapped riders.
- We provide information on dressage via our newsletter and/or website.
- We provide a communication channel for dressage and equine businesses.
- We provide an outlet for the Olympic sport of dressage in our community.
- We host charity events to benefit our community.

As you review your GMO's benefits, identify any benefits that are unique to your GMO. Your club's unique benefit is called its USP – unique selling proposition. It is the one benefit your club alone offers. For many GMOs the USP may be the fact that the GMO is the only one in the area. Your GMO's USP will become a key message when you develop your advertising creative message, provided of course that it is a marketable benefit and suitable for advertising. For example, if one of your GMO's USP's is a number of celebrity members, you may not be able to exploit this fact in advertising (unless you gain written permission from the celebrities involved).

Step Two: Identify Your Target Audience

You can't reach everyone and everyone is not interested in joining and participating in your club. Make a list of key target groups you would like to attract to your GMO. For example:

- Riders from other disciplines, specifically hunt-seat, saddle-seat, and reining.
- Non-riders who are animal lovers.
- Horse owners in your area.
- Celebrity horse owners and nationally known riders who reside in your area annually or seasonally.
- Members of neighboring dressage clubs.
- Members of area breed associations.

By determining whom you are attempting to attract, you will be better able to develop targeted advertising and PR plans.

Step Three: Outline Your Advertising and PR Plans

There are actually a few steps within the step of outlining your advertising and PR plans. It is beneficial to perform each of the steps for your advertising plan and PR plan separately. First, you will want to identify opportunities and their cost. With that information, you can develop a budget. And finally, you will want to outline your plan on a calendar for the upcoming year.

To begin, make a “free for all” list of both advertising and PR opportunities. Include the cost or estimated cost of these possibilities. When creating your list, keep focused on your target audiences outlined in Step Two. Brainstorm your list. Include any ideas your committee can come up with. Of course, not all these ideas will end up in your final monthly plan. For example:

Advertising Opportunities

- Put stall door hangers of flyers (secured in envelopes) on every non-member’s stall at shows. Provide an incentive: Join today and receive a free GMO saddle patch.
- Produce posters promoting the club and club activities. Hang these at the show secretary’s boot, tack stores, etc.
- Place small ads in show programs for other rider disciplines or breed shows.
- Sponsor a dressage suitability class at shows for other disciplines.
- Offer year-end awards for specific breeds.
- Sponsor a dressage lunch demonstration at shows for other disciplines.
- Invite horses from other disciplines to perform at dressage show lunch breaks.
- Place ads in other dressage clubs programs, omnibuses, and newsletters.
- Investigate co-op advertising in newspapers or on TV with a corporate show sponsor.
- Produce and run a schedule of cable TV spots.
- Run classified ads in local newspapers under horses and equipment or pet sections.
- Consider buying billboards during fire sales when no advertisers are using them.
- Put flyers and/or small bulletin board cards in tack stores. Announce shows, breed awards, clinics, etc.
- Host a referral contest. Give members \$5.00 in club bucks for each new paid member they sign-up during the contest period. Offer a grand prize to the member who signs up the most new members.
- Put your GMO’s logo on specialty items, such as hats, shirts, umbrellas, water bottles, saddle pads, auto decals, etc. Sell these at shows and events and let the buyers advertise your GMO wherever they go.
- Run newspaper ads with a “free admission” coupon to your shows. (Even if you didn’t charge admission!)
- Develop a brochure with a perforated membership application inside. Invest in brochure holders and put these take-one brochures at shows, tack stores, pet stores, vet offices, etc. Or use USDF produced brochures in these racks with your local GMO membership application folded inside.
- Hold a membership sale halfway through the year. Buy one membership, get a second membership free.
- Advertise your GMO in National USDF publications, such as *Connection* and the Calendar of Competitions.
- If your GMO has a website, make it easy to join online and offer a calendar of events online. (If your GMO does not have a website, it is time to develop one.)
- Link your GMO website to USDF’s site.
- Use your GMO logo on all advertising materials. Be consistent with your logo image. It is an important identity factor for your club.
- Laminate your membership cards. Give members a card they will be proud to display. This promotes a sense of exclusivity. Follow American Express’ lead and include a “member since date.”

If no member of your GMO is willing or able to develop a marketing plan, consider hiring a consultant to develop a plan the GMO volunteers can execute. Try to negotiate a flat-fee for this service. Keep in mind that if the consultant is not an equestrian, the learning curve will be great and you will need to spend time assisting the consultant. In return, the consultant will see your GMO with fresh eyes and should offer many marketing ideas you might have overlooked. For example:

PR Opportunities

- Develop a PR mailing and phone list. Include local equine publications, equine newsletters, radio, TV and local newspapers. Include the name of the editor, assignment editor, or sports editor.
- Provide dressage show, clinic, and event information to newspaper “community calendars” and breed newsletters. (Keep in mind the lead-time for these listings is often 2 – 4 weeks in advance.)
- Take quality photos at your shows to use with press releases. Negotiate with professional show photographers to provide five free photos for press use. (Naturally, the photographer’s credit will be included in the press release.)
- Promote your breed awards with a press release to each breed’s local publications, newsletters, and national magazines. (A club member who owns a specific breed can often provide address information on these publications.)
- Participate in local “Parade of Breeds” or equine awareness events. Be sure to have plenty of press kits and brochures available on event day.
- Produce an informative 6 – 8 minute video continuous loop to play at shows and events, including non-dressage events.
- Get to know equine reporters. Ask them how you can help them. Take care of them when they attend your events. Make sure they are well fed, well treated, and getting the inside scoop. Make them want to come to your events.
- Produce and sell a calendar with photos of your GMO year-end champions featured in each of the twelve months. Include a little human-interest story on each horse and rider pair. Provide these free in your press kit.
- Send a press kit to local TV and newspaper sports editors. Include information about the Olympic sport of dressage, your GMO, and USDF. Also include human-interest write-ups on area horses and riders.
- Host a charity event and send photos and press releases to everyone on your press list.
- Host a press party at your show. Provide photo opportunities with top riders and horses. Treat the press like royalty. Provide them with an elaborate official-looking press pass, which will grant them admission and VIP treatment at all of your GMO events.
- Overnight or email show results to the press after every show.
- Invite the press to your year-end banquet. Pick up the tab.
- Appoint a club spokesperson to be the official press guide at each event.
- With permission, produce and distribute a press release on celebrity members of your GMO.
- Send out profiles on members of your GMO who will be, or have recently been, participating in national events such as the Pan Am games.
- Have club members write their local newspaper and TV stations requesting sports coverage of equine events.

A Little More about PR

When preparing a press release, try to find a volunteer with journalism skills to draft the release. If there is a journalism school in your area, attempt to find a student intern who can write your releases.

How to Prepare a Press Release

Keep your press releases short and simple. Make what you write read like news. Type your copy double-spaced on regular letter-size (8 ½" x 11") paper. Use wide margins with plenty of white space. Do not type on the back of any page. If possible, laser-print each release. (You don't want to give the recipient the impression that they are getting a photocopy of the exact same thing every other editor is receiving.)

You can submit your release on plain white paper or on your GMO letterhead with your logo. Don't make the recipients guess what they are receiving. Print the words PRESS RELEASE or NEWS RELEASE in bold type, all capital letters across the top of the page. Provide a contact name and phone number. Do not include a cover letter. Your press release should be self-explanatory. Use the following tips to improve your press release.

PR Tips

- Keep the release short. Use lots of action verbs and avoid equine jargon.
- If necessary, add a fact sheet for details or lists, such as a rider's show career highlights.
- Keep the story news focused. Avoid puffery, opinion, and cute headlines.
- Stick to the old "who, what, where, when and why" rule.
- Verify spelling on all names, including people, places, and horses.
- When possible include a 5 x 7 glossy photo with all the people and horses in the photo clearly identified on the back. However, do not write on the back of the photo. Include photo credits on the sticker. If the photo is copyrighted, include a release from the photographer granting permission for the publication to use the photo.
- End your release with a two to three sentence statement about your GMO.
- Follow-up all mailings with a phone call. Be very persistent without irritating the editor.
- Send a thank you note to the editors and publishers who run stories from your releases.

To start developing your plan, pick the top five to ten opportunities you would like to execute.

Back to the Plan

Once you have brainstormed opportunities and gathered media and production costs, you are ready to outline your GMO's plan. Start by eliminating opportunities that are financially infeasible. Identify the top five to ten opportunities you would like to execute.

Next, set up a month by month calendar of when each activity will take place. Include the cost of each activity for your budget. For advertising opportunities, be sure to include the "reservation" and "material" dates on your calendar. Each publication has a date (the reservation date) by which you must commit to placing an ad. The publication will have a second date (the materials deadline) by which the publication must receive your ad. In addition, the publications have "specs," which are specifications, on the form the ad materials must be submitted in. (For example: film-right read, emulsion side down, or camera ready velox or Mac disk or CD.) Your printer or graphic artist will help you prepare your ads to the proper "specs."

All of this information is available by requesting the publication's media kit. This kit will list the insertion rates (the cost of placing or inserting an ad in the publication), along with the ad specs, space, and material deadlines. The media kit may also contain an editorial calendar which outlines what features the publication will cover and in what issues. For example, if a national dressage publication is covering "Dressage in the Southeast," in their January issue, and your GMO is located in North Florida, you may want to consider advertising in that issue. The editorial calendar is a helpful planning tool.

A Note about Media Planning and Buying

There are many sophisticated methods used to evaluate media purchases, including reach and frequency, measuring audiences in cost per thousand (CPM), evaluating points (GPRs), and utilizing SQUAD and rating to evaluate medial value. However, without the assistance of an ad agency or media planner, your GMO will make evaluations on experience with the publications. This "mom and pop" shop approach to media placement will serve your GMO's initial marketing efforts. As mass media and larger media expenditures come into play, outside media buying assistance may become necessary to maximize your GMO's spending.

Keep in mind that many breed club newsletters and small publications will not have media kits available.

Follow these steps and you should be equipped to outline both an advertising and PR calendar for your GMO.

By writing headlines specifically to your target audience, you increase the chances the your ad will be read.

Step Four: Developing Advertising

Your GMO will need ads, flyers, etc. for the publications and plans you have outlined in your calendar. There are basically two components to your advertising: the "creative message" and "the design."

The Creative Message

When determining your creative message, ask two questions:

- Who are we talking to?
- What do we want to tell them?

Go back over your target audiences. Make sure that your ads speak to your audience(s) in their language. For example, if you are placing an ad in an Appaloosa Newsletter to attract participants to your breed awards program, your headline might read: "Look, There are Spots in the Dressage Ring," or "Chief Joseph Knew How to Spot a Dressage Horse." Incidentally, Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce Indian tribe was monumental in the breeding and preservation of Appaloosa horses.

By writing headlines specifically to your target audience, you increase the chance that your ad will be read. If you were putting your dressage show schedule in the same Appaloosa publication, it might read, "We've Got a Spot for you at our Shows." Or, if you were trying to attract riders in a hunter newsletter, your headline might read, "Take a Leap into Our Arena," "Hunting for a New Challenge?" or "Is Jumping Leaving you Flat?" Talk to your audience in their language. It's fun and effective.

Make sure your ad tells readers exactly how to respond.

Keep your ad copy short and to the point. Use bulleted lists when possible. Most importantly, make sure your ad tells readers exactly how to respond (Call Now, Visit our Website, etc.). Never run an ad without a specific call to action. If the ad doesn't instruct the reader to do anything, the reader won't do anything!

You may have a writer amidst your membership who would relish the opportunity to write your ads. Student interns or freelance writers are also good alternatives. However, if these writers do not have an equestrian background, the learning curve may be extensive and time consuming.

If your ad is cluttered with too much information the reader's eye will not know how to quickly scan the ad.

The Design of Your Ad

The second consideration for your ads is the design. This is an element that is all too often overlooked. Your ads need to be designed in a simple, pleasing manner. If your ad is cluttered with too much information, the reader's eye will not know how to quickly scan the ad, so they will subconsciously skip it.

Choose clean easy-to-read typefaces. Avoid swirly serif types that are challenging to read. Here again, you may find a member who has graphic design training. If not, your ad design should be turned over to a freelance designer or a design firm.

Many publications will design your ads for free or for a very small fee. This is a reasonable alternative, although some of your GMO's brand identity may be lost, as each of the publications will design your ad differently.

There are many books available on graphic design basics. It is worthwhile to review these, even if you are hiring a graphic designer to produce your ads.

Learn as much as you can about design and copy before producing your GMO's ads. As it is with horses, it costs the same money to run a good effective ad as it does to run a bad one!

Step Five: Set Specific Goals for your Marketing Efforts

How will you know if your marketing efforts were successful? You will need to measure the results against the specific goals your GMO marketing committee set. Ideally, your marketing committee should review goals quarterly and make adjustments to the marketing plans as needed. An annual review of your GMO's marketing plan will dictate the next year's plan. Obviously, successful efforts will be repeated and less successful programs should be replaced with new marketing initiatives.

Examples:

Goal: Increase Membership

Current membership – 120

Year end goal – 200

Goal: Increase Participation

Number of horse/riders who competed for awards last year – 28

Goal for this year – 75

Goal: Increase Participation

Number of entries at GMO rated shows – 300

Goal for this year – 425

Goal: Increase Participation

Number of members who participated in two or more GMO events – 35

Goal for this year – 100

Goal: Increase Retention

Membership renewal rate last year – 72%

Goal for this year – 89%

Goal: Host 4 USDF Events this year

Summary

These are the five steps to a simple marketing plan for your GMO. Your marketing committee coordinator, along with your advertising planner and public relations coordinator will be instrumental in performing these five steps, as well as communicating these plans to the entire GMO membership.

Your GMO newsletter is your number one communication link with members.

The GMO Newsletter

Your GMO newsletter is the number one communication link between members. Ideally, the newsletter should come out monthly and be mailed to every member. It is also worthwhile to run extra copies of your newsletter to include in non-members show packets and to distribute at horse shows and local tack and feed stores.

Along with the monthly meeting minutes, your newsletter can contain a wealth of information that is valuable to members. In addition, your newsletter can be a source of revenue via display ads (1/8 of a page to a full-page ad) and classified ads.

In designing a newsletter, it is easiest to design a template and then fill in the pages and stories each month. Many computer software packages are available to assist newsletter editors. Also, consider inviting graphic design students to assist in the design of your newsletter template. A student contest with a \$100 prize will generate a lot of participation among art students and your club may have trouble choosing only one design!

Once you have a template and masthead for your newsletter, you are ready to fill it with news and information. Below is a list of ideas for the editorial content of your newsletter.

Newsletter Feature Ideas:

- Show and event calendars
- USDF programs/awards information
- Trainer directory
- Farm directory
- Show and clinic entry forms
- Show prize lists
- Helpful dressage tips
- Local dressage news
- How-to articles

- People profiles – trainers, members, judges
- Equine profiles
- Equine centerfold
- Book reviews
- Members' stories
- Financial club status
- President's letters
- Question and answer section
- Ask the trainer – write in section
- Excerpts or reprints of articles (with permission)
- Horse show results
- Contests (member participation required)
- Cartoons
- Recipes
- Rule changes
- Sales catalog page to order hats, saddle pads, t-shirts, cups, etc. with GMO logo on them
- Advertising
- Classified

The possibilities are endless. But, keep your newsletter timely and packed with interesting information. Your GMO newsletter should be the piece of mail that members are most eager to open each month.

The GMO Website

Most of the information from your newsletter should also be available on your website. If your club does not have a website, now is the time to set one up. There are a variety of local servers that can host your GMO's site and an abundant number of freelance designers who can set up your site. Inquire within your membership to determine if you may already have a "web tech" in your club. Otherwise, ask at the local computer store or go online for reference.

In Closing

The ideas outlined in this section are just the beginning. But, beginning is an important step in marketing. A simple 10-step GMO marketing plan is better than no plan at all. Take a few of the ideas outlined and institute them into your GMO's marketing efforts. You will be amazed at the results!