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How to be Innovative in the Equine sector?



A Guidebook on Practices and Inspiration
from Central-Baltic

Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
Faculty of Landscape Planning, Horticulture
and Agricultural Science

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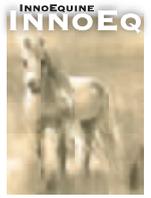
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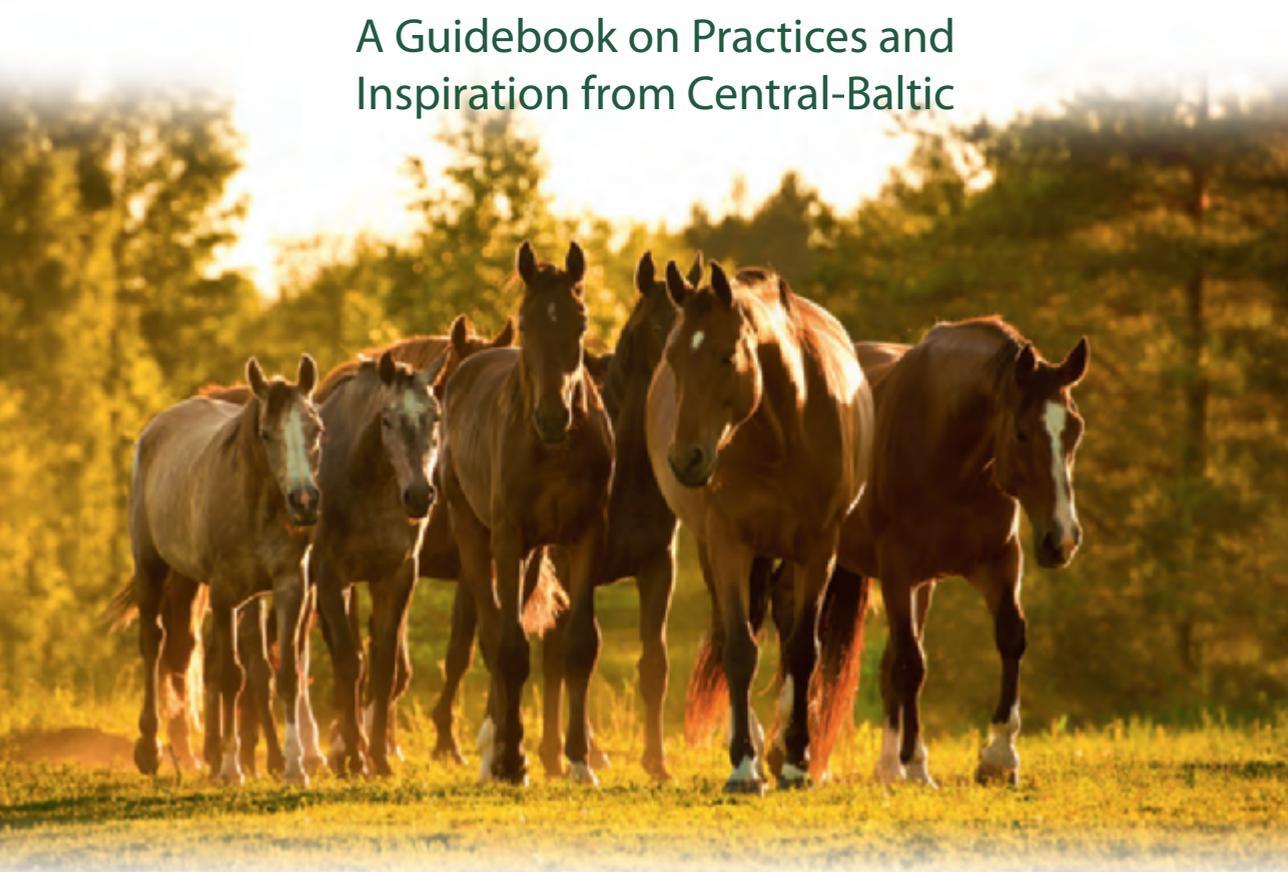


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How to be Innovative in the Equine sector?

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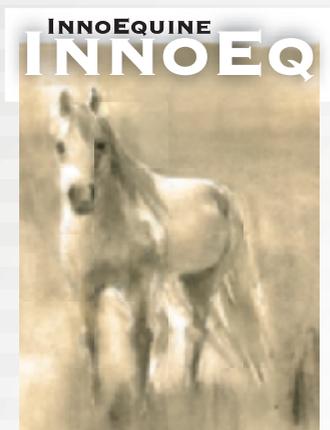
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PROLOGUE



© Tihuse Stable

How to be Innovative in the Equine sector when a horse is no longer considered necessary for some of the work of the past?

There is no simple answer or prescription that would suit all. This guidebook introduces a reader to practices and ideas that work in particular place and time in relation to horse welfare, diversity of services, different customer groups and customer oriented communication, as well as cooperation and networking as important driving forces for innovation. These ideas show enthusiasm, creativity, being in love with horses and hard work – probably combination of these features are the entry point to the core of innovative future of the equine sector.

The guidebook is about the ways how equine entrepreneurs deal with challenges the sector faces. The identified practices reveal that being innovative doesn't mean you have to come up with big radical new ideas all the time. Sometimes the very best innovations are quite simple and subtle; they could be as easy as slight improvements or diversions from existing ideas. Being innovative is being different in a profitable way. Just *"Do what you can, with what you have, where you are"* (Theodore Roosevelt)

This guidebook presents practices and inspiration from Central-Baltic identified during the InnoEquine project. InnoEquine (*sustainable Equine industries promoting economically competitive and Innovative regions*) is an EU-funded project (Central Baltic Interreg IV A programme 2007-2013) being carried out in collaboration by MTT Agrifood Research Finland (project manager), Helsinki University, the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) and Latvia University of Agriculture (LUA). In addition, the main national equine organisations, stakeholders and equine entrepreneurs are involved in the project. The overall aim of the project is to create basis for cross-border networking between those involved in the equine sector and to promote the competitiveness of the equine sector in Central Baltic area. Each partner was responsible for identification of innovations and good practices in their country. Albeit many good practices are presented in the guidebook, we have not been able to cover all good examples in the area. We believe that there are and there will be many innovative practices in the Equine sector in Central Baltic, and this guidebook will serve as a source of inspiration and encouragement.

InnoEquine team



© Maija Järvinen



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1. THE EQUINE SECTOR TODAY

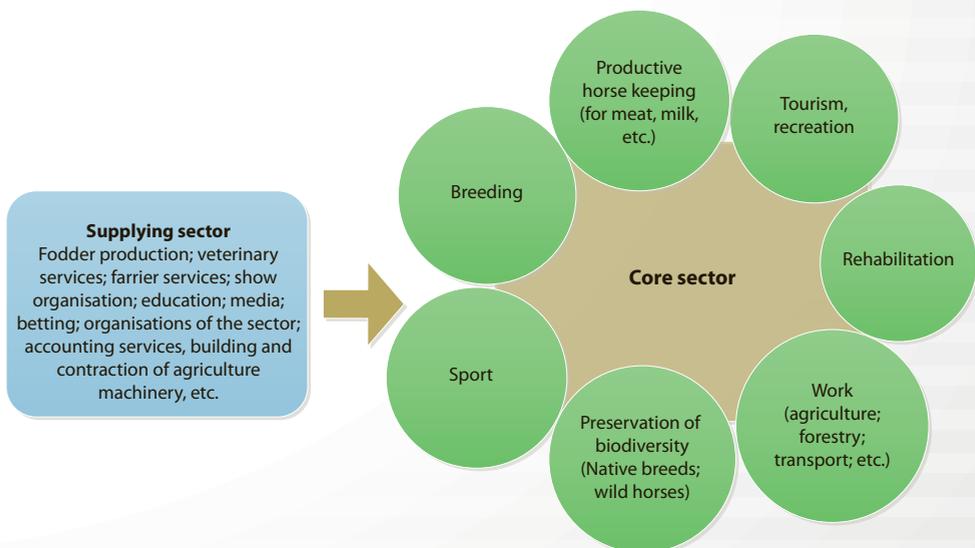
The changing role of the horse

The relationship between horse and man is one of the longest love stories that like all great romances has been full of passion over more than 30,000 years it has lasted. And in this connection the man has seen the horse as the power source first, to complement their physical limitations after, as a symbol of power in many historical periods, a supporting and working tool in the past centuries. But although the relationship has changed over time, what has remained constant is the attraction that men have felt for the horses. So when the horse is no longer considered necessary for some of the work of the past, their relationship with men has changed in this new millennium to be present in our lives as an important element for leisure and sport. *(Rafael Castejon).*

The Equine Sector and its Constituent Sub-sectors

The equine sector encompasses a number of different activities and consequently enterprises that provide these activities. The spectrum of these diverse activities ranges from the agriculture sector as breeding, working with horses in agriculture and forestry and productive horse-keeping to the activities related to leisure, entertainment and health as horse-riding, tourism, rehabilitation and equine sports.

Equine sector can be divided into the core sector and the supplying sector that supplies the core sector with the necessary goods and services as horse fodder and bedding, farrier services, veterinary and dental services, horse tack and stable equipment, transport, show organisation, and media. These services can be specialised and directly linked with horses as veterinary services or a kind of general services that are required for most of the enterprises as accounting services, setting up and administration of the homepages, insurance services.



The recent trends in the Equine sector show transition from the traditional use of horses in agriculture, breeding and sports to broadening the offered range of equine-related services and searching for new business ideas. With the range of equine sports disciplines and levels and various services for occasional riders and non-riders equine sector has become more approachable to a wider scope of people that value the companionship of horses.

2. INNOVATIVE TRENDS IN HORSE WELFARE



© Iveta Kļaviņa

What is horse welfare?

It is the meeting of the needs of a horse in terms of stabling, pasturing, feeding, socialisation and veterinary care.

But to meet ones needs first we would need to understand what horses actually need. Firstly, horses are herd animals that naturally live in plains and are almost constantly on the move; therefore the best environment for horses ensures that they are kept as close as possible to the natural way they have lived in the wild.

The daily use of time of the stabled horse and the horse living in the wild



Source: Carissa Wickens, *Incorporating Behaviour into Horse Management*, 2011. Available at: <http://extension.udel.edu/equine/files/2011/05/Horse-Behavior-Incorporating-Behavior-into-Horse-Management.pdf>

It can be seen from the graphs that in the wild, horses use almost half of their time in feeding – horses by nature are designed to eat by grazing, so they intake food in small portions but very often. This type of feed intake is also suggested if the horses are kept in stables – therefore in some stables horses are fed more than three times a day or the hay nets are used to prolong the eating of the feed.

The second biggest difference between stabled horses and free ranging horses is the time spent in moving and standing; the horses are animals that are born to move, therefore it is essential that even stabled horses are provided with as much daily movement as possible.

Yet nowadays, when large stables are often located in the urban areas it can be challenging to provide horses not only with daily exercising but also leisure time spent outside the stable.

The horse welfare principles can be concluded in assuring the horse with five freedoms:

One	Freedom from hunger, thirst and malnutrition: this requires a supply of fresh, clean water and an appropriate diet to maintain health and vigour.
Two	Freedom from physical and thermal discomfort: this requires that horses have sufficient bedding and shelter to insulate them against adverse climatic conditions.
Three	Freedom from pain, injuries and disease: these should be prevented, where preventable, and otherwise, there should be rapid diagnosis and treatment of injury, infections, infestations, and disease.
Four	Freedom from fear and distress: horses should not be subjected to prolonged periods where they experience significant psychological stress.
Five	Freedom to express most normal patterns of behaviour: horses are sociable animals; they should have the company of other animals, preferably horses, and be kept in situations that foster normal behaviour patterns, not vice versa.

*Source: A guide to Horse Welfare and Responsible Horse Ownership, 2009.
Available at: www.horsesportireland.ie/_.../Horse_Welfare_booklet-w2%20SC.pdf*

The consideration of these principles assures that the horses will be in a good physical and mental condition and therefore also perform better – whether the horse is used in a sport or in giving riding lessons or any other purpose – it will be easier and more efficient to work with a horse that is overall healthy and mentally balanced.



© Sandija Zēverte-Rivža

Shortening the time between feedings by using automatics



© Christina Lunner Kolstrup

Picture: Using straw as a bedding material in the stable in Sweden

When horses are kept inside, and they can't be fed with free choice amount of hay, there are still ways to increase the time horses spend eating. One way is to use straw as bedding material. Usually horses don't eat straw so much that it would effect on their body condition. The straw is giving the horses something to do and satisfy their need to eat. However, some horses do eat everything they can, and with this type of horses straw bedding is not the best solution.

As mentioned earlier, horses are social animals and the need to contact with other horses can be met not only by keeping horses in herds but also inside the stable.

To increase the social interaction between the horses it is important to allow them to see and touch each other. Often horses which get used to each other get along well. Few boxes with high walls for those unsocial ones, who really like to be alone, can be built to secure their needs as well and to ensure the peace in the stable.

The first worker in the morning can start straight with feeding the horses with concentrated feed (at the same time the worker can check the horses condition, which is the reason they have not automatized the whole feeding process) and after that start to take horses outside for their daily time in paddocks.



© Maija Järvinen

Picture: The hay automatic can be filled with two portions from the hallway, without entering in the box. Finland



Horse-friendly stable design

The modern way to shorten the time between the feedings is to use feeding automatic. The automatic can be timed to give hay or other feed to the horses at the time when stable workers are not available, for example at night, late evening or early morning. In Primus-stable, Finland, both straw bedding and automatic feeding system are used. The hay automatic can be filled with two hay portions at a time, and the automatic will feed the horses late in the evening when the last worker has already left, and early in the morning, an hour before the stable employee will start to work. This way horses can eat more often and they also stay calm during the feeding session: all horses get their food at the exact same time, and no one needs to get nervous.



© Christina Lunner Kolstrup

In the pictures: Stable interiors in Sweden, Finland and Latvia - steel bars are used for the upper walls and doors of the horse boxes to achieve transparency in the stable - the horses are able to see their surroundings so they feel less isolated and more relaxed as they have a greater control of their environment



© Christina Lunner Kolstrup



© Sandija Zēverte-Rivža

All summer outdoors



© Irina Herzon

In the picture: A horse that does well is a joy to the eyes (Ben Simonsen with his colleagues in business)

Savijärvi organic farm in Southern Finland specializes in providing riding facilities and breeding horses mainly for horse driving trials.

The experience in running an equine business based on lake-side pastures stems for 20 years. Presently there are 50 own and 10 in-keep horses.

Ben Simonsen is one of the three current owners. He stresses that the main reason of managing pastures for horses is their welfare. "Grazing is a natural way for a horse to live and move. Animals also get plenty of D-vitamin and exercise. It is easier to work with horses that get out on a pasture", - explains Mr. Simonsen.

There are only 24 ha of pastures but these are kept under intensive rotational grazing that stimulates even, continuous re-growth. Only in dry summers, there is a need for occasional additional forage. Mineral supplements and water are provided always.

Young 1-2 year-old horses live on the grazed forage day and night. Horses that are used for riding are cared for and fed extra after the lessons, after which they are let out into a pasture till the next day's lesson. "Some more experienced customers specifically enjoy going out and collecting their own horse to ride from the pasture" – stresses Mr Simonsen. Yet weekends are for all to pasture in peace.

Unlike in many stables, also competitive horses pasture daily. "After a tough competition a horse may go for specific plants to nibble at. It is important to allow the horse to look after itself this way", - describes Ben. While the horses graze mainly on grasses and clovers, it is important for them to be able to pick up also herbs depending on their personal taste and needs, and even time of the day. Especially, horses under stress, such as competition, seem to go for specific plants.

According to the owner, the problems on pastures are few – occasional quarrelling among the animals and wasp bites. The benefits by far outweigh these. "One cannot keep horses in a total risk-free way". If anything, he would wish a more difficult terrain on his pastures, so that the horses can further strengthen their legs.

Due to the intensive rotational grazing, the pasture vegetation is quite poor in species. However, the pastures have plenty of water edges, lake and ditches, and grazed forest patch. A few stones and trees heaps are scattered around. Finally, there is a clear natural gradient from drier to wet areas. All these contribute to a considerable botanic diversity over the whole area. Migrating birds like to stop over before grazing starts. Small passerine birds and insects find safety in the fenced out patches. Organic methods of managing the area also benefit the wildlife.

And finally the pastures do make the setting of the whole farm so much more picturesque and attractive. This is why urban people want to see outside their straight lined and concrete-covered environment.



© Irina Herzon



© Irina Herzon

Customers' expectations regarding physical environment of a stable



© Sandija Zēverte-Rivža

Stable, design, pasture availability, feeding, manure management and several other aspects are the ones that assure the horses feel comfortable in the stable. InnoEquine survey 2012/2013 showed that the physical environment of a stable and horse welfare issues are also important to the stable customers – horse owners, riders and other clients.

Combined results of the respondents from Latvia, Finland and Sweden revealed that regular access to paddocks and pastures as well as quality and safety of pastures were among the most important attributes customers have found important.

Overall customers highly value the well-being of the horse and only after that come the things that increase the comfort of the rider, like changing rooms and showers.

Another group of things that customers have found important were the ones connected to the riding facilities - surface of the riding arenas, availability of indoor arena, trail riding tracks and equipment of the riding arenas – fences, dressage arena boards and markers, etc.

Importance of physical environment attributes for customers in Latvia





3. KEEPING HORSES NATURAL AND SAFE

Many horse owners feel that they need to choose between keeping horses in the natural way – in herds and out in the paddocks for 24/7 - or almost completely in the stable that especially applies to the keeping of competition horses. Commonly it is justified by the safety concerns – horses that go out tend to get more injuries. Yet is it really true and is it avoidable?

Satisfying the horse's need for exercise and recreation in different circumstances



© Christina Lunner Kolstrup

It may be challenging to satisfy the horse's need for exercise, especially when living in central areas where land is expensive and large paddock areas are often impossibility. Competing horses have also their own challenges – their owners don't want them to exercise independently in large paddock areas due to the risk of injuries.

One way to satisfy horse's needs for free exercise and recreation in big riding schools is to rent places for horse's vacations outside the city. In big stables often certain numbers of horses are on holidays because of sickness or lack of motivation. Exceeding the capacity of the stable by keeping larger number of horses than fitting

and renting places for pasturing horses in countryside stables is one way to both take care of horse welfare and use the whole potential of the expensive facilities in central location.

Nevertheless, horses that are able to have a countryside vacation should have free exercise daily in paddock or at least with walking machines or walked by a groom or owner. This is often the case when talking about competing private horses. They seldom have possibility for longer vacations, because they have to be trained regularly and the competing season matches the pasturing season. Expensive horses are also often kept in smaller paddocks alone to prevent injuries. Still, with the support team that is taking care of the horse, relaxed exercise as short paddock times or hand-walks and light trail riding can be arranged. When exercises throughout the day are scheduled in a way that the time standing in the stable is always short in-between, the horse is less likely to get bored and subsequently develop stable vice as weaving, box-walking, cribbing, wood chewing etc. It should also be remembered that horses used in more intensive work may also need to rest more than horses working lighter. .



© Christina Lunner Kolstrup

In the pictures: Outdoor loose housing system and a horse on a walking machine Sweden.

Assuring the need of free movement for horses apart from daily training is recently becoming topical also within the top riders of equestrian sports due to the fact that the horses kept in a natural way are more motivated to work and handle the stressful show atmosphere easier.

Horses herding and moving freely in loose house system



© Christina Lunner Kolstrup
Loose house systems in Sweden

One way to offer horses a possibility to free exercise and social interaction is to keep them in large loose house system as a herd. If the terrain is varied (for example, partly forest), horses have good chance to train their balance and muscles. In a herd, horses also move more than when staying alone.

If horses of the same herd have enough room and get along well, they rarely harm each other. The more they move in varied surfaces, the more they get practice for their muscles and tendons, and injuries are rare after horses are used to their freedom.



© Sandija Zēverte-Rivža
In the picture: Paddock with varied terrain and partly forest

Free moving in varied terrain may also help, if the horse is often ridden or trained on an inconsistent surface like event horses. Of course, horses that have spent a lot of time indoors and on flat terrain may need some time to adapt for such circumstances.

To avoid injuries it is essential to check the fencing of the paddocks. The traditionally used wood planks are rather safe, but the horses like to chew on them thus damaging the fencing. An alternative is to use plastic poles and wires or ropes with electricity that serves much longer or wood planks in a combination with electric fencing. The least favourable alternatives are metal wires or barber wire as horses can tangle in those and get severe injuries.



© Sandija Zēverte-Rivža



© Christina Lunner Kolstrup
In the pictures: A damaged wood plank paddock and a paddock form plastic poles

This choice is sometimes also applied to training of horses. There is a classical way of training based on classical equine disciplines and there is an unconventional or, as it is called, a natural training technique. Is there room for both, should one be chosen or they can be combined? The Monty Roberts method instructor Raivo Saļms shows that sometimes things are not that distinct when it comes to training of horses:

Understanding is the key



© Erceni

Raivo Saļms is the only certified instructor of Monty Roberts method in Latvia and an owner of the stable „Erceni“. He has a huge experience in working with young and problematic horses and likes to share his insights by organising clinics for riders and horse owners.

In working with horses he combines so called natural training methods with the traditional or classical way of teaching horses: “I do not want to separate conventional and natural training methods. I don’t see it that way - the only difference is in the understanding or misunderstanding from the horse. Horse is an animal that understands a lot and it will

understand whether you use strengths or you try to teach it different – with an understanding of the equine psychology.

Untraditional way is to train beginner riders on a bit-less bridle to reduce stress on horse's mouth while riders learn to control their hands. When I train young horses, I teach them the traditional aids and I do it also with a traditional bridle, because mostly further these horses are used as sport horses. So more or less we perform a standard horse schooling yet with a greater understanding and higher level of knowledge about equine behaviour.”



© Zahlo

In the picture: Swedish rider Rebecca from RC Horse Vision training the horse Eamonn according to the natural training methods



4. DIVERSITY OF SERVICES IN THE EQUINE SECTOR



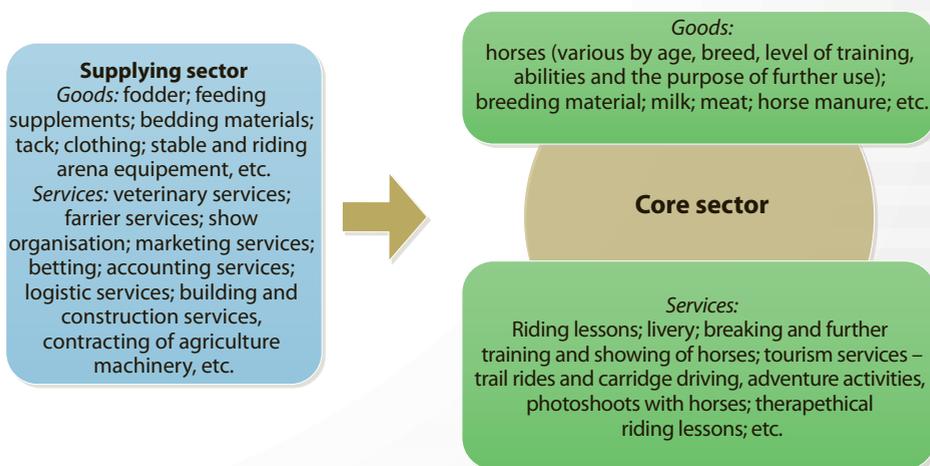
© Zīrgaudzētava Kocēni

There are a broad variety of activities (competitive & non-competitive) undertaken with horses and other equines; many of them require specific venues, equipment, organisation and promotion, and so support a range of businesses and suppliers involved in providing these services.

The produced goods and services of the equine sector can be divided similarly as the sector itself – goods produced and services provided by the core sector or the supplying sector.

The main goods produced by the core sector are horses that can be sold at various age, breed and level of training; also the abilities of the horses, conditions and the expectations of their further use vary. The services provided by the core sector are very wide ranking from those closer to the horses - as breeding services, breaking in and further training and showing of horses, livery, etc. to those targeted for people engaged in the sector – like riding lessons, tourism services – trail rides, carriage driving, adventure activities, and also rehabilitation with horses, natural tourism and many others.

If we look at the supplying sector, the most commonly used goods produced by this sector are fodder and feeding supplements, bedding materials for horse boxes, tack and clothing for riding and the equipment for the stable, riding arenas and paddocks. But commonly used services of the supplying sector are veterinary and farrier services, and various services that help to enhance the work of equine enterprises, like accounting and marketing services.



In the horse sector, professional activities (stud farms, trade and training stables, sports stables, riding schools and boarding stables) are intertwined with recreational activities to the extent that it is practically not possible to deal with them separately.

Still, in this chapter some basic product concepts are introduced, with a twist of some fresh ideas from the horse sector.

The most popular activities in the sector



© Jura stallji

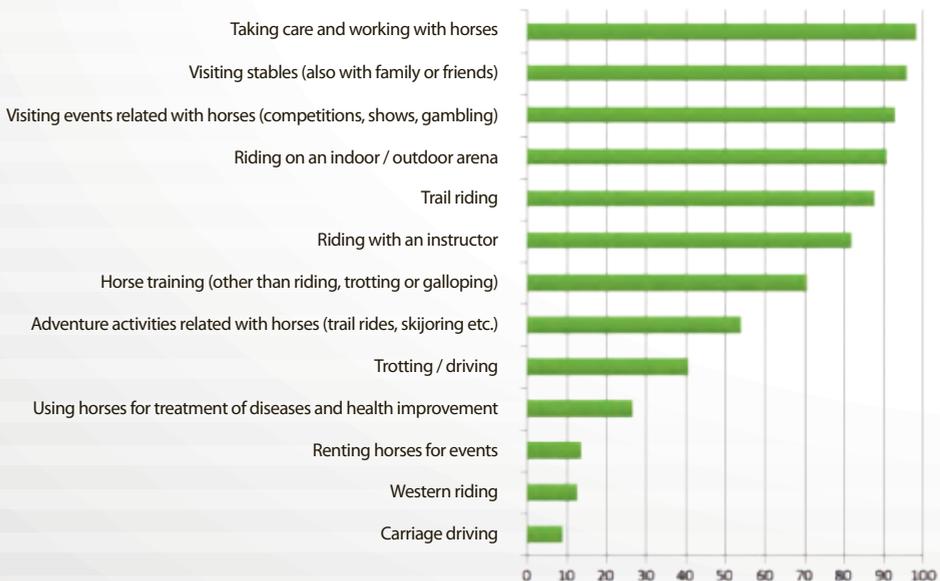
Riding for leisure and equestrian sport attracts people of all ages. Recreation implies the equine sport activities without the competitive element. Recreation takes place in riding schools and other organised events. Recreation and equine sports is also a very important reason for private persons to keep horses. For the horse owners the most important reasons for keeping horse are positive emotions, such as relaxation and escape from the pressure of everyday life.

The most popular horse-related activities in Finland, Sweden and Latvia: are: taking care of and working with horses; visiting stables; riding on an indoor/outdoor arena; horse training (other than riding, trotting or galloping); riding with an instructor. Taking care of horses is

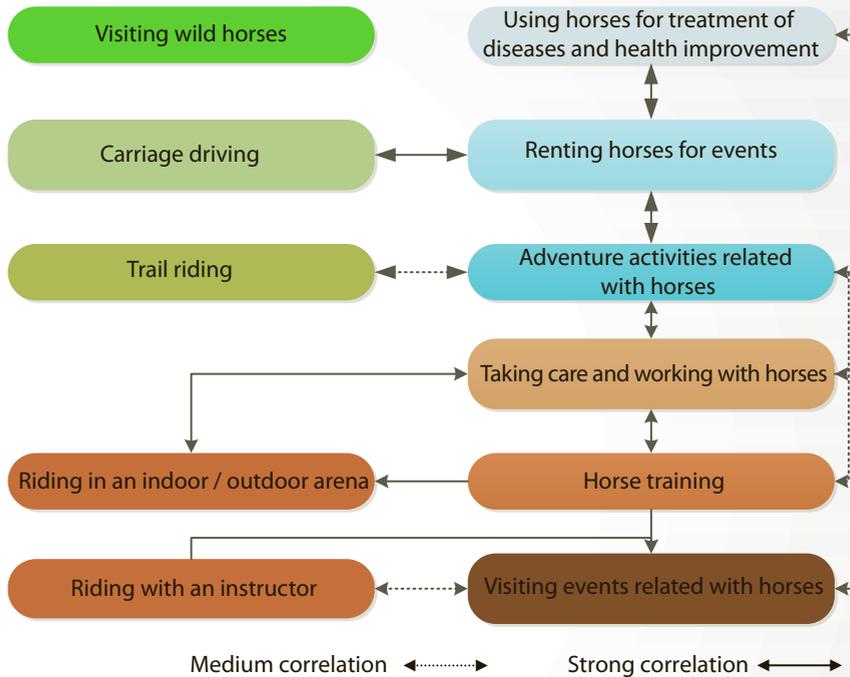
a natural core activity for horse enthusiasts. Taking care of a horse is essential part of owning a horse and in the riding stables many customers like the opportunity to groom, bridle and saddle the horse by themselves. Also, beginners are first taught the basics of horse care. These are common in all Central-Baltic territory and will be increasing in the future.

But there are some other, more country/region specific activities. For example, in Finland trotting and adventure activities related to horses are more popular than in other surveyed countries. In Sweden galloping, trotting and carriage driving are most immanent horse-related activities in the country. Pony trotting schools for children are becoming more and more popular in Finland and Sweden. But such activities as visiting wild horses, renting horses for events and carriage driving are more widespread in Latvia than other Central-Baltic countries.

Participation in horse related activities, % of current and potential customers



The customer survey (InnoEquine survey 2012/2013) revealed that there is a tendency for some particular customer groups to use several interrelated services contemporaneously. Of course, some of the horse-related services are being used more, some less. For example in Latvia, there is a group of customers who prefer such set of activities as riding on an indoor/outdoor arena, taking care and working with horses, horse training and visiting events related to horses. They are engaged in these activities on a regular basis, even more than three times per week. Also there is interconnectedness between trail riding and adventure activities related to horses – these activities constitute one more set that is attractive for customers. Although many horse devotees are interested in trail riding and adventure activities, they use them rarely – once or twice per month, some even more infrequently. On the other hand, such activities as using horses for treatment of diseases or visiting wild horses are particular and separate. Customers who use these activities for some reason usually do not use other horse-related activities. The figure indicates interrelatedness of services in the Equine sector in Latvia.



According to the InnoEquine survey (2012/2013) results, almost all of the current equine consumers plane to increase their horse-related activities or keep them at the same level.



The importance of various motives for horse related activities

An entrepreneur should always think about what is the actual product the customer is buying. Instead of „riding“ the customer is often seeking for more personal benefits, such as contact with horses, exercise, learning and sharpening skills, entertainment, confidence or escape from everyday life.



© Jura stallji



© Zirgaudzētava Kocēni

The customer survey from Finland, Sweden and Latvia (InnoEquine survey 2012/2013) showed that positive emotions and chance to get close to animals are the most important motives for riding and other horse-related activities.



Compared to other countries Swedish clients emphasize the importance of nature experiences and sceneries. Customers in Latvia particularly value the opportunity to improve their health and physical condition. In turn, Finnish clients highlight that horse activities help to escape the pressures and cares of everyday life.

Motives of riding in the foreground of an offer: Example of „Jura stalli” in Latvia of how a gift card for a romantic ride could be presented



@ Jura stalli

„Jura stalli” focuses on recreational riders as a customer group. Gift cards are a very popular type of a present in Latvia (also among horse devotees); so the stable have prepared several offers. Gift card for a romantic ride is presented as follows: “Forget the daily routine – only you, your loved one, majestic horses and winding trails of the centenarian pine forest. Enjoy this magic with us! A ride in the forest is relaxing, romantic and pleasant. It is even

more pleasant if you spend it with your loved ones and friends. Horseback riding is a very healthy recreation. During the ride you can: train the muscles, improve your posture and correct its defects, develop the ability of trust and cooperation, gain positive emotions and energy. In the silence of the pine forest you can enjoy the mysteriousness of the forest trails and you can relax from the daily haste by listening to sounds of the forest and the horse hooves clapping”. Also some practical information is given for the possible consumer of the service: “You and your company will be escorted during the ride by the instructor so you can relax without any worries. The clients must have riding skills”.

Specialization makes the difference

Satisfying the need of different customer groups may be extremely tricky. Some riders need small ponies, some need big horses. Some customers like easy, calm horses, and some like them highly educated and lively. To have all kinds of horses (and enough for all suitable customers) can be difficult and challenging. Many of these problems can be solved when stable focuses on one or two customer groups: adults or children, beginners or advanced riders, dressage riders or jumpers, recreational riders or goal oriented riders... you name it.

Viikin Ponikoulu in Finland has specialized in children and ponies



© Viikin Ponikoulu

Everything is pony-sized, and also the costs (feeding, bedding materials) are lower than for the same number of regular horses. All customers are children and all ponies are nice tempered and suitable for beginners as well.

Also the side activities in stable have been planned to satisfy young customers: a customer can ask for specific pony to take care of two times per week and thus learn more about horses and responsibilities in

a safe way. To encourage the riders not to spend too much time in the stable, the maximum number of “own days” is two. Trusted older teenage grooms are assigned as “tutors” to help and teach younger riders and grooms. They have special uniforms to be recognized by; that way they can be easily approached. With this system bullying and other side effects are minimized: older tutors maintain the peace, and if some of them act badly, her “title” would be taken away. So far all tutors have been so proud of their honourable task that there have not been any bigger problems. The stable arranges some events for all the tutors to thank them for their reliability.

Pony trotting schools

Pony trotting schools have become increasingly popular in Sweden and Finland. Children and young people from 10 to 12 years old can compete on Shetland ponies (A-ponies) and from 12 can compete on slightly bigger B-ponies (mainly Gotland Russ). Pony trotting school is equivalent of riding school. In the school children can safely learn how to take care and feed the ponies, learn how to drive safely and other important topics related to harness driving. There are different courses from beginners' level for competing to trainer levels. Many young professional harness-racing drivers started their career with pony trotting.



© Leena Rantamäki-Lahtinen

RC Horse Vision specialised in the Art of Academic Riding, Liberty Dressage, and tricks and tolerans with horses



© Zahlo Foto. Academic Riding – Christofer and Fardelejo

RC Horse Vision offers a scope of different activities, a variety of private and group riding lessons, training of horses, riding and training courses lasting for some hours or an entire week and more specialised intensive courses in Academic Riding and Liberty Dressage.

RC Horse Vision is located at Hellekis Manor, a beautiful estate where Rebecca and Christofer lease the riding facilities. The facilities consist of an indoor and outdoor riding arena, an indoor round corral with stands, a stable for 24 horses and 20 hectares of fields. RC Horse Vision offers training of both horses and riders in Academic Riding (which is based on the idea that the rider trains him/herself and his/her horse to a level that is comfortable and suitable for both the horse and the rider) and Liberty Dressage (which is based on the idea of understanding the language of the horse, training it to understand the riders signals and ride it without bridle or a halter saddle and harness). Usually, riders come to RC Horse Vision to get help solving e.g. trailer loading problems, other everyday problems or learning how to catch their horse in the field.

RC Horse Vision offers a



© Zahlo Foto. Liberty Dressage – Rebecca and Eamonn

Rohan stable in Finland came up with new business idea: Medieval riding shows and lessons



© Rohan stable

The shows are the main operation of their business, and they've performed in Finland and also in different countries of Europe. The time left from show life is used for training and providing medieval riding lessons, which are especially popular as one day experience for groups. Besides, they also have some regular riders. During the riding lessons customers are able to wear medieval clothes and practice using of medieval weapons while riding a horse; in these shows people are able to travel to the medieval tournament with the Rohan riders.

Although this type of ideas has always quite narrow customer group, this stable has demonstrated that there is room for innovative business among horse enterprises. It also shows that for a rider looking for adventure or something totally new there are still new riding styles to experience.

Horse as therapy

Supporters of horseback riding interventions state that the warmth, shape, and rhythmical, three-dimensional movements of a horse improve flexibility, posture, balance, and mobility of the rider.

Therapeutic riding is typically provided by a trained riding instructor who teaches the disabled rider to control the horse using basic riding skills. In contrast, hippotherapy is commonly provided by a physical therapist or an occupational therapist, with the goal of using equine movements to improve balance, posture, gross, and fine motor skills.



© Ponijs.lv

Rehabilitation of disabled with horses, the project Health and Horsepower in Sweden



Health with Horsepower is a Swedish project run by Örkelljunga municipality which is intended for persons with physical or mental impairment. The aim of the project is together with individuals with disabilities build a business as well as offer riding in nature, and green farming with horses. The goal is to enhance one's mental health with the help of animals and nature and over time build a social entrepreneurship that leads to meaningful work.

Specialization in using native breeds for tourist services: Example from Tihuse stable in Estonia



© Tihuse Stable

Tihuse farm in Saaremaa provides horse trekking by using Estonian native horses. Tihuse has been owned by the family for a long time. It was built by current owner's great uncles. The farm buildings remained as family property during the Soviet period. After the Soviet Union collapsed, the land was returned back to the family. Buildings were renovated for tourism purposes in 1991-92 and horse tourism activities started in 1993. Nowadays there are approximately 300 horses on the farm of which 100 are used for trekking. Nearly all the horses on the farm are Estonian native horses. Majority of those customers who stay overnight are from Finland, Sweden and Germany. There are also a lot Estonian

visitors who go on treks or carriage tours. Local specialities are utilised in the routes. For example, there are ancient worshipping places of old Estonian nature religion on the farm. Tihuse provides special guided treks to these places. In addition to horse tourism services, farm provides hospitality services (accommodation, restaurant and café), breeds and sells Estonian native horses and raises beef cows. Of course, using native breeds for tourism services requires also marketing them and marketing the cultural and emotional aspects of the breed.



© Tihuse Stable

Specialization in offering unique services in the country: The case of "Erceni" in Latvia



© Erceni

"Erceni" also offers equine massage service and they are the only ones in Latvia who are specialized in Masterson Method therapy for equines. At the moment Zane Apiņa is the only certified Masterson Method practitioner in the Baltic states. The Masterson Method is a unique method of bodywork that recognizes and then follows the visual responses of the horse to the touch in order to find and release accumulated muscle and structural stress in key junctions of the horse's body that affect performance. The purpose of The Masterson Method is to improve performance, well-being, relationship and communication with the horse.



© Erceni

One more sphere of specialization of "Erceni" is specialization in training of young horses and 'difficult' horses. "At the moment we observe that people are more interested in correcting the behavioural problems of the horses", tells the owner Raivo Saļms who is the only certified instructor of Monty Roberts method in Latvia.



© Erceni

Keeping of Wild horses as innovative segment in the Equine sector

Alongside the traditional horse breeding several horse breeds have been actively accustomed to the life in feral or semi-feral conditions in Europe. In Latvia this initiative was introduced in 1999 within the project of the World Wildlife Fund for the reintroduction of several large herbivore breeds to the wild with the purpose of encouraging natural grazing as one of the main tools to maintain meadow habitats. Since Latvian breed horses are not suitable for such purposes, horses of Konik polski breed were chosen as suitable to Latvian climate and natural environment.



© Einārs Nordmanis

In Latvia the territories, where the wild horses are grazing, most often are the Natura 2000 territories or organic farms. The motives of the wild horse keepers to keep these horses are following: environmentally friendly farming and being fans of natural grazing, an interesting occupation and income source, as well as a way of tourist attraction and diversification of the farm.



© Einārs Nordmanis

the reserve if crowds of people started wandering there. Guided tours to the wild horses are available for a reasonable charge, which depends on the size of the group. The owner of the Pilssala horses has completed environmental guide courses and hopes that through his tales he will succeed in opening to the people some less known pages of nature. When telling about the horses, he gradually touches upon everything else that lives there and the interaction that takes place.

The importance of diversification

To satisfy the needs of various customer groups and/or to survive in the competitive conditions some entrepreneurs seek out the possibilities of offering wide range of services. For some of them diversification means making better use of available resources or meeting the needs of customers, for some it is a search for novelty, for some - an economic necessity.

Diversification as a way to attract various customer groups within the Equine sector

One of the largest farms in Latvia - stud farm "Zirgudzētava Kocēni" offers almost a full range of equine-related services: breeding of sports horses, livery stable with indoor arena, trail rides, riding lessons for all age groups and riding skill levels, possibilities to train and participate in show-jumping, dressage and carriage-driving competitions. This is mainly for three reasons: (a) there is a demand for various services, (b) there is all necessary equipment and appropriate qualification of staff and (c) it is also an issue of economic necessity.



© Zirgudzētava Kocēni

The Local Initiative Group has created a camping ground with place for camp-fires in the area for all those who are interested. During the winter season, as well as under bad weather conditions training is continued in the indoor arena. The indoor arena is equipped with heated changing rooms with showers, tack room, toilet, as well as lounge room on the second floor, where visitors can take a cup of coffee and observe what is happening in the indoor arena.

The stud farm "Zirgudzētava Kocēni" is popular by their riding school and possibility for anybody interested to handle and ride the horse up to the level when a client can buy his/her own horse for hobby or engage in equestrian sports on a professional level.



© Andijs Kaltigins

The farm is also an important player in the provision of rides and trail rides in the region. They can provide more than ten horses at a time for the rides. Not every place in Latvia can provide that. This and other services available at the stable make them attractive for corporate groups.



© Zirgudzētava Kocēni

One of the owners Dace Stūre is passionate with carriage driving. The stud farm offer not only carriage rides and lessons in carriage driving but also organize Baltic Cup carriage driving.

Case of the rural tourism enterprise “Zāgkalni” in Latvia about the strength of diversity of various services



© Zāgkalni

This is a family business. They are mainly involved in providing guest houses and different recreational activities, especially fishing. Their main occupation has been rural tourism and fishery. Horses came later and now they present a nice addition to the whole offer package. One of the customer groups are families with children.

here, because their child wants to ride a horse, a father wants to go fishing and a wife wants to pick berries or mushrooms or simply spend time at the lake. Other group of clients are more appreciative of the relaxation near the lake and being close to the nature. They are agreeably surprised to take a riding opportunity.



© Zāgkalni



© Zāgkalni

Owner of the farm Ernests Bušers tells: “People of different age groups want to take a ride on horseback –one wants to try it for the first time, another wants to remember how he/she did it ‘once upon a time’. Interestingly enough, an interest arises when people see somebody else is riding... or someone else being led on horseback in the circle, on the lunge, - in those cases all of a sudden there is a line standing.”

Moreover, a horse is an important component of the whole offer package during winter time. Along with such activities as ice fishing and taking sauna, horse related activities like driving a sledge and skjoring behind a horse become more and more popular.



© Zāgkalni



© Zāgkalni

In the case of ‘Zāgkalni’ the services supplement each other and in this way various interests are satisfied. And although horses are not the main business activity, various horse-related activities are a crucial part of the rural tourism enterprise.



© Zāgkalni

Case of rural tourism and adventure at Ösjönäs in Sweden

Ösjönäs, Tiveden´s activity- and adventure centre, is surrounded by protected forests and borders to one of Sweden´s most popular National Parks. Tiveden is northern Europe´s most southern wilderness. The centre with their 15 horses is run by Jessica and Klasse.

The centre offers a variety of different activities such as riding on Icelandic and Peruvian horses, tour riding for a half or whole day, weekend tours or 3-day tours, horse carriage driving and riding tours with horse-bathing in the lake. Besides riding, the centre offers other activities such as conference facilities, paddling, climbing, sauna, hot tub, and, of course, good food and cosy accommodation.



© Jessica Sannö, Ösjönäs

Case of diversification: horses for sport and social activities in the local community



© Unda Egendorfa



© Unda Egendorfa



© Unda Egendorfa



© Demora

Equestrian club “Demora” in Ventspils (Latvia) owns more than 10 horses which are used for several purposes. The main activities are related to horse riding – equestrian sport (training, organization of competitions), therapeutic riding, and tourism and recreation.

Horses are used also for different social activities: wedding ceremonies, birthday parties, photo or video sessions on the beach, and local as well as regional events.

The owner of the club organizes events for local children and people directing their attention and interest towards horses. For example, on Christmas there was a party with typical Christmas activities, baking ginger cookies, playing with dwarfs (they were made by the owner’s family) and sledge riding.

Diversification of activities and being flexible is stressed by the owner as important factors affecting ability to sustain resilient business: “When you can offer different services and products, you can survive more easily in times of crisis or ensure diverse sources of income as they complement each other”.

5. DIFFERENT CUSTOMERS - VARIOUS NEEDS

No business can exist without customers or, if you rephrase, “your customers are the reason your business exists”. But who are the customers and how to attract them?



© Arturs Medveckis

Which of these people could be Your customers?

The attraction of clients starts with defining who your customers are and what they are interested in. When planning new services, it is important to be familiar with the demand of current horse-related services. It can help to define the customer groups of the equine sector. They are usually connected to the services they use and can be divided as follows (this is a general division and there can be some exceptions to this):

Services / goods	Type of customer
Horse sales	Domestic buyers, foreign buyers
Horse boarding	Domestic horse owners
Riding lessons	Domestic horse owners, domestic riders, foreign riders
Tourism and leisure riding (including several day hacking)	Domestic riders, foreign riders, domestic tourists, foreign tourists
Driving	Domestic riders, foreign riders, domestic tourists, foreign tourists (inc. non-riding)
Adventure activities with horses	Domestic riders, foreign riders, domestic tourists, foreign tourists (inc. non-riding)
Horse shows, competition, racing	Participants of the shows, domestic and foreign riders, horse owners, spectators, not connected with horses

If you define the services you are offering now or would like to offer and the customer groups that use these services, it may help you to better understand customer expectations and consequently help you to increase the value of the provided services.



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Characteristics of clientele in Finland, Sweden and Latvia

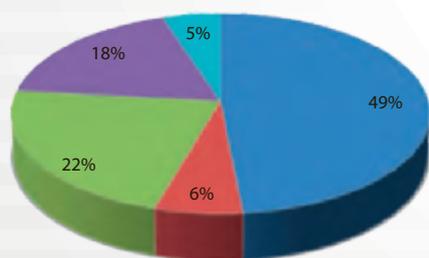
InnoEquine survey 2012/2013 reveals following characteristics of clientele in Finland, Sweden and Latvia. The total number of respondents participated in the survey were 438 from Finland, 430 from Sweden and 458 from Latvia.

Clientele characteristics in the equine sector

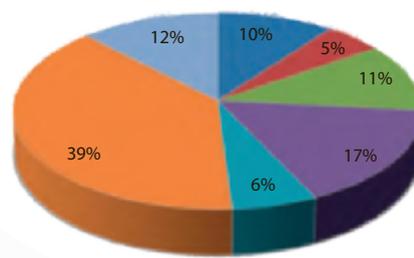
	Finland	Sweden	Latvia
Riding frequency, average per year	265	98	231
Total expenses for horse activities, EUR per year	8200	5200	2200
Share of horse owners, %	69	57	32
Female, %	98	91	89
Age, average	36	34	30
Living in town or city, %	53	50	64
Household income per year (average)	EUR 50 000 - 59 999	SEK 300 000 - 399 999 (~ EUR 36000-48000)	LVL 3000-4999 (~ EUR 4500-7500)

In planning the new services it is beneficial to be aware of the current spending of clients. Customer survey reveals that active riders that do not own a horse spend EUR 2300 in Finland, EUR 900 in Sweden and EUR 600 in Latvia a year on their riding activities. The largest expense for riders is riding lessons. The distribution of expenses between various services is shown in the diagram below. Horse owners spend approximately EUR 11 000 in Finland, EUR 9000 in Sweden, EUR 4000 in Latvia on the expenses related to horses. For horse owners the boarding and farrier and veterinary services are the main categories of expenses that take up about a half of the total cost.

Active rider's (non-owner) expenses for activity



Horse owners' expenses for activity



- Riding lessons, coaching, other activities
- Visiting or participating events related with horses
- Travel costs
- Equipment and clothes (own and horse's)
- Insurances (own and horse's)

- Riding lessons, coaching, horse training and other activities
- Visiting or participating events related with horses
- Travel costs
- Equipment and clothes (own and horse's)
- Insurances (own and horse's)
- Horse boarding (stall, feed, bedding etc.)
- Veterinarian and farrier services

Customer survey (InnoEquine survey 2012/2013) in Latvia indicate three customer groups that have different preferences for riding lessons.

What is important in riding lesson for different customer groups in Latvia?

	Low in activity 36%	Recreational riders 35 %	Goal oriented riders 29 %
Important attributes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lower interest in riding lessons • interest to develop horsemanship • close proximity of the stable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • amateur teacher is good enough • stable can be further away • customer convenience is appreciated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • qualified teacher • importance of horse welfare
Rider characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • less young • lower education • lower percentage of horse owners • live in cities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a few horse owners • high education • high percentage of upper white-collar workers and students • live on farms • less children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ride often • own horses • higher income • also men • less young • have children • live on farms

In Latvia, as well as in Finland and Sweden three consumer groups are found. In all countries there is a segment that emphasises the importance of highly qualified teachers in developing their riding skills. In Finland and Sweden, participants of this group express an interest in developing horsemanship. In Latvia this group of consumers emphasizes horse welfare. In Latvia, the second group demonstrates their willingness to travel longer distances and particularly values consumer convenience. In Sweden and Finland, the second group appreciates the versatile riding environment, and to those in Finland diverse natural environment is also of great importance. The third group shows less interest in buying riding lessons, but in Finland and Sweden they appreciate high quality teaching.



© Sandija Zēverte-Rivža



© Andrijs Kaltigins

Niches do not 'exist' but are 'created'



© Zirgaudzētava Kocēni

Niche markets consist of groups of consumers (market segments) within the larger marketplace who have similar demographics, buying behaviour, and/or lifestyle characteristics. You can think of a niche market as a narrowly defined group of potential customers.

Niches do not 'exist' but are 'created' by identifying needs, wants, and requirements that are being addressed poorly or not at all by other businesses, and developing and delivering goods or services to satisfy them. What does the market suggest? Is the market signaling growth in an existing niche, or are there possibilities to develop an entirely new market niche?

To understand what clients need and what they are willing to pay for, you must have sufficient information about your target market. Understanding who your current or potential clients are, where they come from, and what characteristics they share will help you both to develop services that will meet their needs and communicate with them effectively.

Dividing the market into distinct groups of current or potential clients with common characteristics allows you to focus your efforts on the segments that are most likely to respond to your communications, seek your services and benefit most from them. Market segmentation can be done, for example, by geographic criteria – by location – clients from your neighbourhood (local clients), clients from your region, national clients or clients from your country and international clients:

- ❑ local clients – for example, horse owners who live nearby and use boarding services in your stable;
- ❑ regional clients – for example, riders who live in your region and come to you every weekend for riding lessons;
- ❑ national clients – they can be, for example, national tourists who come to visit a touristic sight near your stable and want to go for a ride. National clients are also often horse buyers;
- ❑ international clients – similarly to national clients they most often are either tourists or potential horse buyers.

Market segmentation can also be done according to the customer behaviour – are they active and outgoing, do they like adventure activities or maybe laid back activities they can join with the whole family. Every client has several important motives for their activities.



© Zirgaudzētava Kocēni

Focus on local clients at „Zirgaudzētava Kocēni” in Latvia

There are several types of clients, that come to the stable: “Our clients basically are people that want to learn to ride and come here for lessons. Mostly they come from the local area and from Valmiera (a town nearby). Of course, there are clients that work in Riga but come here to ride during the weekends. It is a very good client group, unfortunately too small. There is another, but a small category – those that use horse livery”, tells the owner of the stable „Zirgaudzētava Kocēni” Maija Kleinberga.

The riding school is attended by the children and young people. Parents bring their children, they learn to ride and then you can see how much they will want it, if they will want to own a horse in the future and if they will want and be able to participate in shows as well. Children under the age of seven can learn the basics – develop the balance, learn how to approach the horse, how to handle it, how to work together with the horse.

Local vs. international clients: a case from AdventureRide



© AdventureRide

The owner of the adventure horseback tourism provider AdventureRide Ričards Fomrats states that after a market research the enterprise has come to a conclusion – not to focus on local clients. Because Latvians often cannot appreciate what the nature here offers – sea, sand – all this seems ordinary. But a client from Germany is thrilled of how it is possible to have so many uninhabited places, peaceful beaches, few people. „I have explained to such tourists that we can be in a place where the nearest shop is 50 km away and the villages consists only of separate houses – during the Soviet times huge seaside territories were closed or had limited access for residents, because it was the

Western border of the Soviet Union with a military importance. And if foreigners come to our seaside to enjoy the peace and rest, then the Gauja National park seems like a wild natural territory, and they often cannot understand how there can still be such a green and untouched place in Europe. If we compare local clients, that go through the same trail course and foreigners that have ridden in many places in world, the later appreciate nature much more, also the quality of housing for tourists is higher in Latvia. Local clients often focus only on the service itself. They haven't ridden anywhere else and they don't know that often in such trail rides tourists are housed in small dorm-type rooms. And they don't look at the nature, because they are used to it and it does not seem special to them, therefore the value of the whole offer doesn't seem so high to them comparing to foreign clients.



© AdventureRide

Overall we focus on international tourists, which is a new niche in Latvia. We want to create our own distinct product with which we can compete on the market, we don't try to stick to the traditional approach just because it is habitual. The owner highlights his position – *we should not invest in the things we are not strong in, but develop the ones we are (strong in).*



© AdventureRide



© AdventureRide

From equestrian sport to recreational activities with horses: the Case of „Jura Stallji” in Latvia



© „Jura stallji”

“We have reached the point where we have totally changed the status. Back then, during the so called “good years”, we emphasized the sports activities. We had 12 to 14 active riders here. They were of different levels but they all competed on national and/or international level. Everybody had certain success at his own level. All our horses were more or less trained for sports only. We did not take anybody from the side, because what kind of recreational business could you undertake, if on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays it was quiet here, the stables were closed because everybody had gone to the competitions. Those were mostly young people who trained and competed. And then there were gradually less and less of them... At the moment we do not have a single active athlete in the stables... none...” tells the owner.

He continues: “And so we have changed our status completely now – we work more for that part of the public that has become accustomed and attracted to horses. The goal is not to make some top professional athletes of them or something... the goal is to create positive feelings related to a horse – to learn riding, to enjoy it. I cannot say that we are lacking in clients at the moment”.



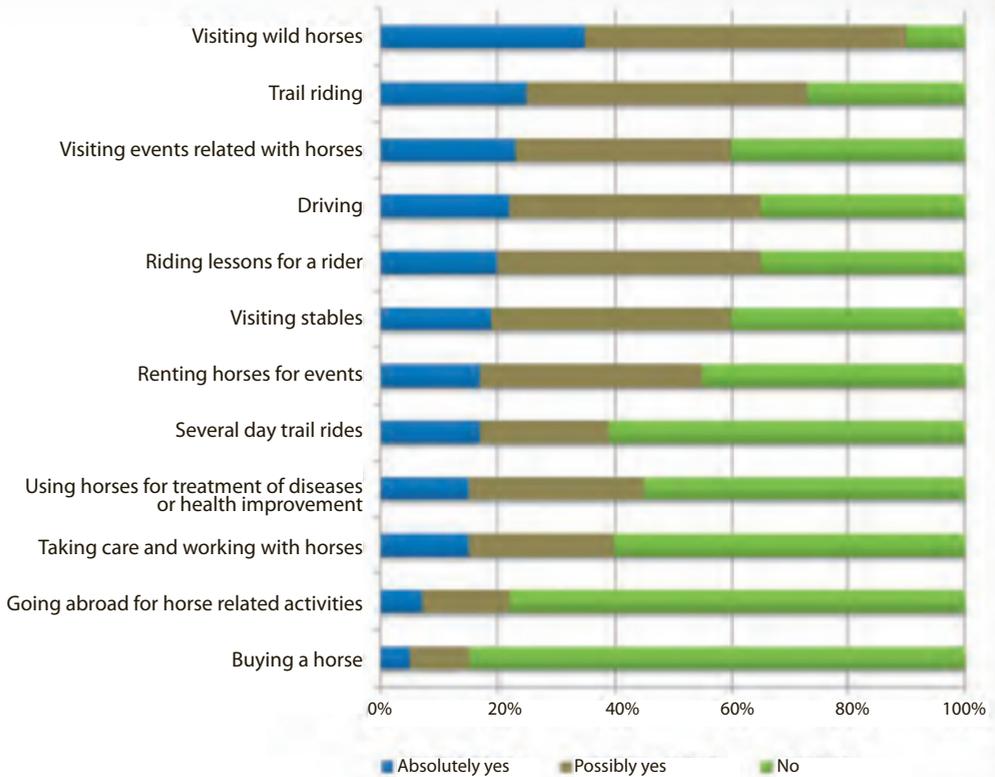
© Edgars Pohevičs



© „Jura stallji”

Potential clients – Who are they?

Within InnoEquine project the possible activities of potential customers were identified. It always should be taken into account current riders are also potential clients for equine enterprise.



It is not easy to find clients but keeping them happy and wanting them to come back time after time is another thing. It takes time to build a steady clientele for a business. The client relationship is so very important because of the time and effort spent to create it. Success takes strong desire and drive coupled with best practices in building and maintaining the customer base upon which your company thrives. Once a solid clientele is built, one must protect and nurture it.



Customer service can make or break your business



© Andijs Kaltigins

The essence of good customer service is forming a relationship with customers – a relationship that an individual customer feels he or she would like to pursue.

Having good customer service orientation is the ability to keep customers happy by doing some of the following things effectively:

- Being responsive to the customers
- Treating them with respect
- Keeping customers informed, and responding to their requests promptly and efficiently
- Being able to deal with requests in an appropriate manner
- Asking lots of questions so you can understand customer needs in order to deliver the best service possible..

The friendly attitude and the qualification of the stable staff are very important to the customers. Good customer service takes into account clients' needs, what they perceive important and how satisfied they are.

Innoequine survey provided information on how to develop the services in a riding stable. The clients visiting riding stables in Finland/Sweden/Latvia identified the issues that are most important to develop. Issues that need development are considered important by customers, but currently customers are unsatisfied with them considering the state of the service in the stable they typically visit.



Complex offer package makes customers satisfied



© "Jura stallji"

We allow to use this place for birthday parties, christening events or simply for picnics – it has a definite price, but if clients take horse-related services as well, they have to pay only half-price for the site rent, for example... and then people take the horses... and in the end they are even more satisfied..." tells the owner Juris Kalita. The challenge for an entrepreneur is to think a step ahead of clients' needs and desires. The most important thing is to find the ways how to agreeably surprise a customer again and again.



© "Jura stallji"

Playroom for children as a part of good customer service



© Leena Rantamäki-Lahtinen

Children's playroom in Lahti Jokimaa Harness racing (trotting) track. They have taken families into an account very well. During the competitions there are several nannies taking care of the children, thus their parents can spend time in race court. This service is free. The track also has outstanding playing ground outside.

Safety comes first

Horses by nature are prey animals, meaning that in the wild there are always predators attacking them, therefore flight has been the best survival strategy for horses. Even though horses have been domesticated for already about 6,000 years, the flight behaviour is still very characteristic to them. This explains why horses can be quite spooky and shy from the things that are unfamiliar to them; inexperienced and especially young horses can spook from loud noises, sharp moves or the surroundings. Therefore it should be always taken into an account when dealing with horses – in the stable, the paddock or when leading, riding or driving a horse.

Safety and fun – a strategy at the AdventureRide

AdventureRide is the first and biggest adventure horseback riding provider in the Baltic States. It is a family business where caring about horses is a mandatory part of everyday life. Employees and owners of the company are tourism professionals and offer more than 30 years of riding experience. AdventureRide is the first adventure travel company in the Baltics that offers several day trail rides allowing to explore the beauty of the Baltic States wilderness - away from the tourist rush and stressful everyday routines.

The owner of the company Ričards Fomrats states that the company is not only interested in providing a high quality service for the clients, but pays special attention to the security issues: "We test our clients. Long before coming to Latvia we communicate with them and find out what their experience is and what riding skill level they have. Overall, the skill level of our clients is usually high; these are people that go for trail rides on a regular basis and have also done it in other countries.



©AdventureRide

During the trail rides helmets are obligatory for all riders. The other measure of precaution is an inquiry (elaborated by a lawyer) that is given both to local and foreign clients. It includes a description of the possible risks – a horse is a living being that can be easily spooked by untraditional circumstances, therefore horseback riding is an activity with increased risks. We warn clients familiarizing them with possible risks.

The clients that come for several days are usually already insured. Especially the ones that are experienced in this kind of adventure tourism activity have their insurance from the company they choose annually. Also, the clients that come through the tourism agencies are typically insured. With all these measures of precaution we provide service that our clients can enjoy; feel safe and relax."

Safety vests and reflexes for children, adults and horses



© Christina Lunner Kolstrup



© Christina Lunner Kolstrup



© Christina Lunner Kolstrup



© Christina Lunner Kolstrup

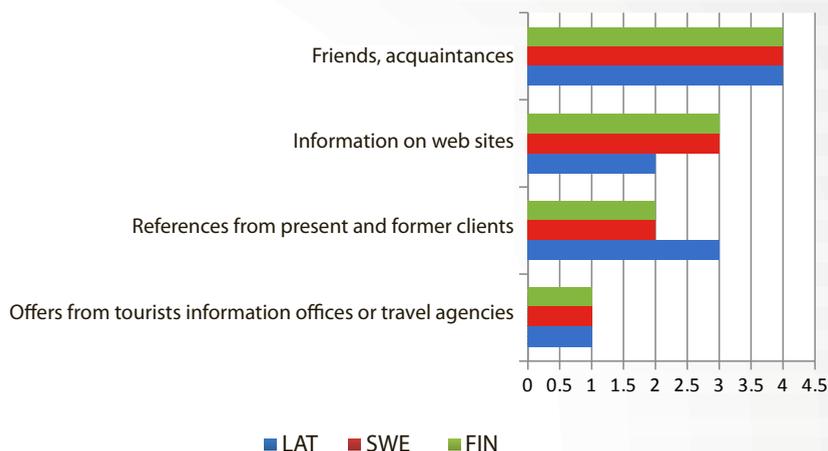


6. CUSTOMER ORIENTED COMMUNICATION

How to make customers notice you?

When you have defined what goods and services you want to sell and what clients you want to attract, you should start thinking of the best ways of doing it.

The first thing in attraction of customers is to make the information about your existence and offered services as visible and as reachable as possible.



It means that you should understand how the people find information about your goods and/or services. Customer surveys can offer knowledge of the most efficient ways to reach clients, according to the InnoEquine survey (2012/2013) results in Finland, Sweden and Latvia the most important source of information for clients



© Sandija Zēverte-Rivža

searching information on equine services are their friends and acquaintances. That is why good reputation is particularly important for equine sector service providers. The recent trends of customer behaviour show that people increasingly tend to use the Internet in finding services or information about them. If you think of spending a weekend in the countryside, you „google” where you can stay or what places you can visit, or, perhaps, what activities you can be engaged in.

Nowadays not only tourists look up the information on the Internet. Also, for example, potential horse buyers try to find information about stables they can go and look for the horses they are interested in. Therefore it is good if they can find the information you want them to find – fancy photos of horses for sale, nice videos, showing best qualities of your horses, background information about the current horse and the breeder/owner in general.



© Andijs Kaltigins

All visual material that is published by you reflects your enterprise and affects the opinion of the existing and potential customers, therefore you should always make sure that if you publish a photo or a video of a horse you intend to sell, the horse looks at its best in it – clean, in a good condition, with nice surroundings and a skilled rider. Note, that also the rider, his appearance and a riding style shows the level of professionalism of your enterprise.

If you are publishing photos or videos, where you advertise your services, it would be best to show customers using those services, and the positive effects it gives them – like positive emotions for tourists riding on the trails, etc.

You should also bear in mind that you cannot always control the information that is available about you – reviews from previous customers, show results, show photos in other websites (as Riders Federation etc.) or other information about the services you offer and even your enterprise itself. The best strategy is to be honest to your current and future clients and employees and take the responsibility for your real life and virtual activities – remember that every opinion you or your employees share will be linked to your enterprise.

Keeping people informed – or PR in the equine sector

One of the cheapest ways of spreading the word about goods or services is Public Relations (PR). PR is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics. (Definition of the Public Relations Society of America) PR activities can be most often seen as press releases after or before events like horse shows, auctions, touristic events; also the communication in social networks and expressing of the opinion in the media is considered PR.

In the equine sector the main PR activities are done by the organisations of the sector – sometimes it can be seen, e.g., the press releases of Breeders Associations; Riders organisations regarding, for example, show results by naming the breeders of the winning horses or the trainers and riding clubs of the winning riders. It could be also done by show organisers, riding clubs or stables – the people working in the sector or the ones that have horses as a hobby are interested in equine news, and it is good if these news can be used to highlight the achievements of the enthusiasts of this sector. It will be more exciting for the readers if the news is supplemented with photos or opinions (quotes) of the involved.



© Sandija Zēverte-Rivža

Websites tempting customers



Nowadays good websites are crucial for any business. Many riding schools and private stables have functional websites, providing information about products and services, prices, horses, teachers, facilities and so on. There are still many stables whose websites lack crucial information or compelling layout. As we know, both are important in the world of the Internet.

For private stables and trainers websites are also a good tool of getting the right customers to communicate with them. Some private stables explain their practices and rules in the website very carefully. This way it is clear to everyone who calls, what the services offered are and what kind of limitations horse owners have in the particular stable. Also, riding schools can in their website tell to who their target audience of their services is and what kind of learning opportunities, facilities and horses they can offer. Still, one group for whom good web pages are indispensable are horse sellers.

Nowadays customers want to see videos and photos and read realistic and extensive descriptions (in English, if selling horses abroad) of the horses before they travel to see them.

Some riding clubs and stables are creating their homepages on Facebook or local social networks. Facebook makes conversation among the customers and members easier and it's also a fast way to inform customers about changes or new services. Such pages are easier and cheaper to manage comparing to separate websites. If a separate webpage exists, connecting it to social networks is a good way to keep people informed and it takes them less effort to follow the news.

Creating and managing of a homepage – what can we learn from others?



If we try to generalise – there are two basic types of home pages – homepages that are mainly used as informative resource and homepages that are mainly used for selling of goods and services.

Informative home pages

To make the creation of a homepage easier, it is useful to look at other homepages that have already been made in the equine sector.

As mentioned earlier, one type of homepages are homepages that are setup to serve as informative resource for the people of the equine sector. Usually they are homepages of different organizations, including NGO's like National Equestrian Federations.

In some cases these pages can also sell some goods and services, but mainly draws attention because of the information published in them, for example, in the Latvian equine news portal www.zirgam.lv the main sections include information about shows, results, articles about riding and horse welfare, yet there is also a „shop” section where items for sale are advertised.

Functionality and attractive photos - Latvian Horse Breeding association homepage

A good example of home pages in this group is a homepage of Latvian Horse Breeding association - www.lszaa.lv. This homepage combines high functionality and effective, yet not overbearing design. One of the common mistakes in equine sector homepages is a much too variegated design – the creators of the homepages should be more selective in including different animation or many small photos in the pages. The photos indeed attract attention, but they should be rather big and of a good quality. Yet this homepage represents most advantageous balance of nice photos and useful information.

Another common mistake is creating too many small sections in the homepage and repeating the same information in several sections which make the viewers disoriented, but in the Latvian Breed Horse Breeders Association we can see just a few sections, the information is easy to be found; the homepage thus is not confusing and it is convenient to obtain the necessary information.



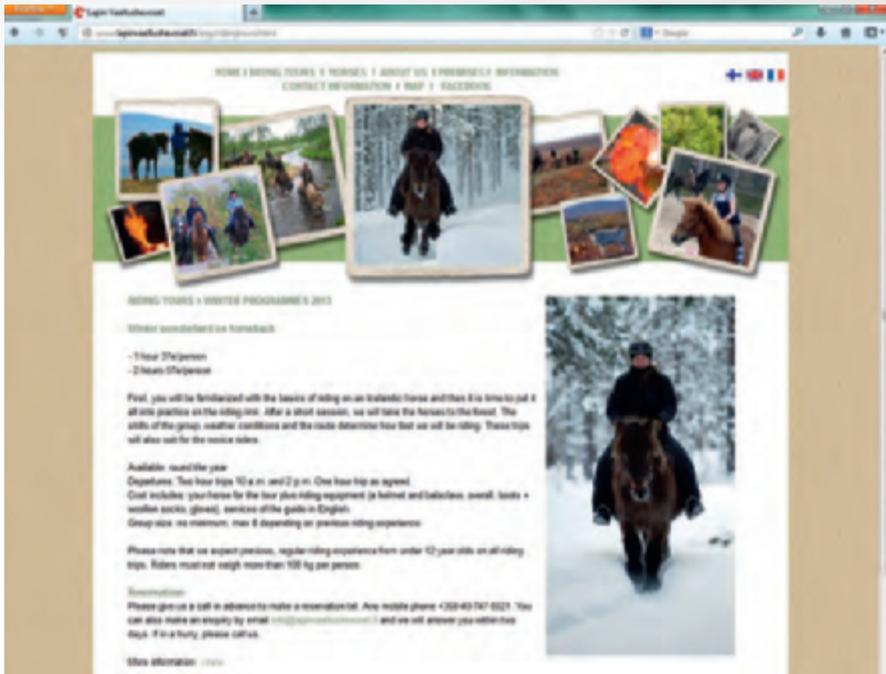
© LŠZAA

Another good example of informative home page is the Häst Sverige homepage, which is made in a collaboration between the Swedish University of Agriculture, National Veterinary Institute, The Swedish Horse Council Foundation, Swedish-Norwegian Foundation for Equine Research, The Federation of Swedish Farmers and Agria Pet Insurance. The homepage includes a broad range of practically applicable information about horse health, breeding, handling and managing of horses, riding tack and riding disciplines. The homepage also includes information about stable management, accountancy, laws and regulations and organisations of the sector.



© HästSverige

Homepages that are used for selling goods and services



© Trekking Horses Lapland Ltd

The other group of homepages is set up with the single goal to sell goods and/or services. In the equine sector most often these are homepages of the stables that advertise their services and/or the horses for sell, like www.lielceri.com in Latvia or <http://hastmarknad.hastnet.se> in Sweden.

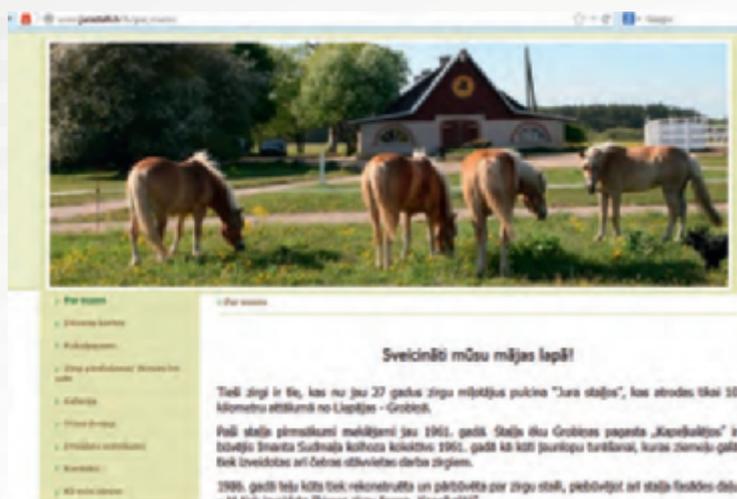
A good example in this group of homepages in Finland is a homepage of Trekking Horses Lapland Ltd (<http://www.lapinvaellushevuset.fi>) that advertises information about trail riding tours in Lapland on Icelandic horses. The homepage is visually attractive with a lot of photos where people using their services are shown, which is good and encouraging for the potential clients. In this homepage the services section is especially well designed and includes precise and understandable information. Additional information to introduce to this rather specific type of horses, safety rules and other guidelines (what to wear, to whom this type of activity is suitable, etc.) is given.

This homepage also provides the information about the stable owners and horses which is one of the ways to create an emotional bond with the potential clients and make them feel more welcome.

When you put together the description of your services remember that your potential clients may not be very familiar with the particular service and its attributes, therefore it is good to keep the information clear and easy to understand. It should also be rather short so that the person reading wouldn't have to spend more than 5 minutes for each section of information. In the mentioned homepage the services are clearly described and the information in the homepage is divided in sections; along with textual information, there is plenty of visual materials to attract customers.

Does and Don'ts in making and managing of a homepage What should be included in a homepage:

- Understandable information – the information in the homepage is clear, useful, divided into sections like – news; the stable; services and prices; about us; gallery; contacts, etc. The sections in the homepage will usually differ in respect to the purpose of the homepage. Less is more – it is better to make fewer sections than many overlapping or empty sections. In several homepages of the equine sector there are several with too many sections in them; the information is overlapping and some sections have not been updated for a long time – it is better to have fewer sections with clear and topical information. Most of the homepages in this sector usually have 7-10 sections.



© Jura Stalli
In the picture: a screenshot from Jura Stalli homepage – convenient layout with few sections and understandable information

- Information about your enterprise – potential clients will find it interesting to know a bit more about you and your stable and it will also increase the level of trust in the things you offer. If you have riding instructors you should also describe their professional background. If you breed and sell horses, it is nice if a person can find out more about the way you keep and train them. But if you provide livery services it is especially important to list information about the facilities of the stable. The information should be written in a simple and welcoming yet professional manner – it should provide a positive insight and welcome the client to your stable. The level of trust and empathy can be increased if you show the feedback from your previous clients – for example, if you sell horses, it would be nice to show the horses you have sold before and ask their current owners for photos and a short description.

- Lots of attractive photos – make sure they are in a good quality; it is good to show people using your services – for example - happy children riding ponies – the positive emotions in the pictures will attract the attention. Photos are important also if you advertise livery services and especially if you want to sell horses. For each purpose the photos will differ – the main things to think about:



© Ponihaka
In the picture: a screenshot from Ponihaka stable homepage – photos of riding instructors

- If you advertise a service, like trail rides, show the people that use the service and the benefit they are getting from it – most often for touristic activities the benefit is positive emotions and it should be also visible in pictures.
- If you advertise a place – like a stable you offer livery services, try to show all the facilities at its best – the stable; the riding arenas; trail riding tracks; paddocks and pastures. Also in this case it would be good to show how the facilities are used – the paddocks with horses, riding arena with riders, etc.

- If you want to sell a horse there are quite a few hints to follow. Firstly, you should show the horse at its best – clean, trimmed, with clean tack. Usually there would be several pictures – a picture of a horse standing shot from the side, preferably with all four legs seen (opposite to the conformation shots, where the horses should stand square), the photo of the horses head and if the horse is rideable - definitely a photo or several and perhaps a video with a rider. You should know whom you want to sell this horse – different disciplines require different photos.



© Chavallin
In the picture: a screenshot from Chavallin stable homepage – detailed description of the stable and its facilities

- In many cases there are too many elements in the homepage – texts, photos, animation – it is hard to use such pages; besides, the information is often written in small fonts, the pictures are unclear and the overall impression is messy. One should try to keep the design of the homepages simple and tasteful, in this case also less is more – one great picture that really describes what you offer is better than 10 average pictures. The choice of colors is important as well – one should think about the contrast of fonts and the background.

There are two basic options – dark background and light fonts or the opposite. The reviewing of several homepages indicate that mostly it is not very clear if the picture is used for the background – the texts are hard to read and the picture is not very attractive once it is pale.

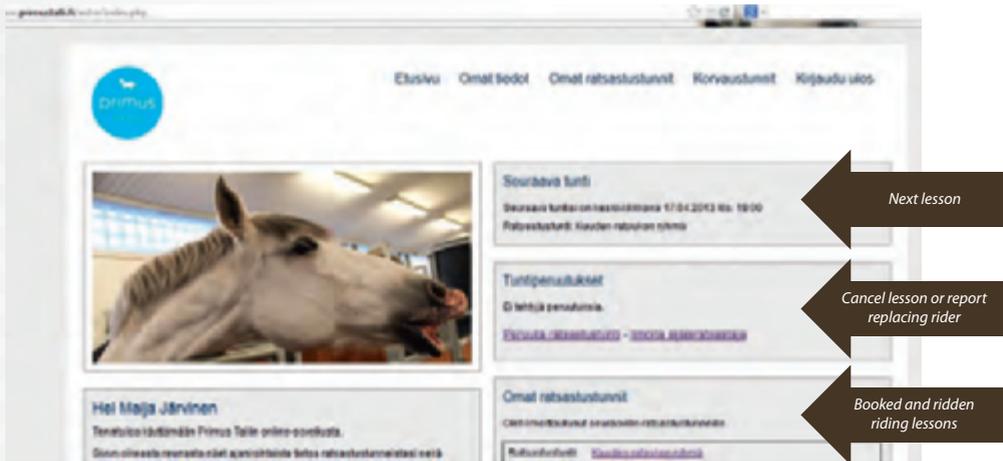


© Amin Siittola
In the picture: a screenshot from Amin Siittola stable homepage – a good example of contrasting colours and attractive photos

IT in the equine sector - managing riding lessons online

Primus stable in Finland uses EXTRA Internet – the service that gives customer a chance to manage their regular riding lessons via Internet. A customer logs in the extra service pages and is able to see the horses he/she's been riding, lessons in the future and cancel lessons or make known the name of the replacing rider. This system decreases the time needed on the phone and also customers can more freely cancel, buy and exchange their lessons. Primus stable also uses forum for exchanging and selling riding lessons, which makes compensation lessons less needed. Often riders who have to cancel their lesson just sell it to another rider and stable staff doesn't have to use their resources for organising replacements and compensation.

In many cases, if not able to use this kind of solutions, it would be easier for the stable to more widely use email and other Internet solutions than phone and old fashioned phone service times.



© Primus Talli



© Tihuse Stable

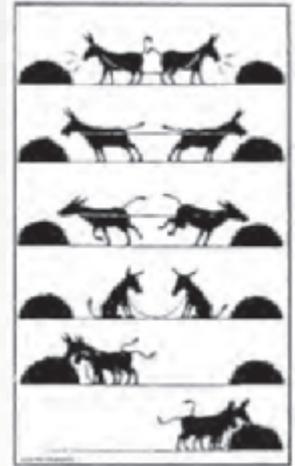
7. COLLABORATION AND NETWORKING – DRIVING FORCE FOR INNOVATION

Why to collaborate?

In terms of the equine sector cooperation relationships can alleviate structural and incidental problems of the industry as well as challenges faced by the particular actors and equine businesses.

Today the equine sector faces a number of challenges which require collaboration:

- Interpretation of what equine sector and horse-related activities are,
- Defining the role of horse-related activities in contemporary society,
- Defining policy objectives of the equine sector and its implementation,
- Tackling the environmental issues,
- Lack of skills (foreign languages, communication with costumers, doing business, marketing) and professionalism,
- Lack of collaboration between horse businesses in developing of innovative products and sharing experience,
- Popularization of the industry whilst urbanized and modern society experiences alienation from the nature and animals,
- Investigation of public interests, attitudes, needs and knowledge about nature, horses.



Collaboration and networking are very useful tools for you and help in the development of new products and services or ensure the existing ones. Cooperation itself might be good innovative practice for your business. Collaborative innovation is the product or service of a joint effort by more than one organizations or actors.

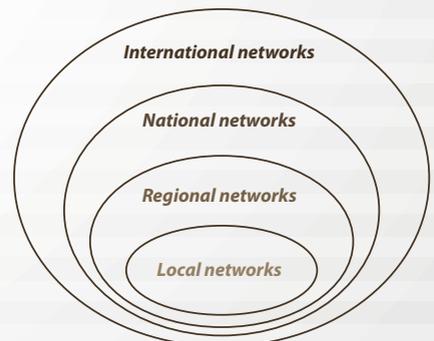
Levels of collaboration and networking

Collaboration can be developed at different levels depending on what your business orientation is, what your customers are, what the needs and requirements of your business are.

Thus your business partners and networks can involve other equine businesses, local people, craftsmen, guest houses, tourism information centres, sector associations, authorities of all kind of levels, mass media, schools, advertising and consulting companies, banks etc.

Think which of the networks you already have and which you need for your business!

- Face-to-face and online business networks
- Formal and informal networks
- Operational, Personal and Strategic networks
- Internal and external networks
- Vertical and horizontal network within a sector



Effective networking involves defining possible contacts, determining your networking purpose, developing an action plan, and committing the time and energy necessary to produce meaningful results.

Good Practices for Local Cooperation

Co-operation with neighbouring stables and land owners in building riding tracks (Finland)

Sometimes the disagreements with neighbouring landlords lead them to prohibit riding in their land. Sometimes disagreements are not present and riding is prohibited “just in case”. In both cases it is important to maintain good relations with the neighbours and discuss with them what kind of harm horses could do to the land, how horse owners can prevent or compensate those harms and what those routes would be, where horses could exercise. When all land and horse owners agree on routes and etiquette, all can benefit. Using horses old forest roads could be kept open, as well as areas under electric lines and borders between two land owners.

Collaboration with your neighbours (Latvia)



© Demora

If you have good and collaborative relationships with your neighbours, it can turn out as your greatest support. In case of the riders club ‘Demora’ neighbouring farms and guest house partially supply the club with tourists which are eager for riding. The guest house takes part also in organization of horse riding competitions by providing lunch for visitors. Neighbouring lands are used for pasturing and gathering of hay.

Horse exchange helps to balance demand (Finland)

Seasons clearly affect the demand, especially in tourism business. In the horse business this is a challenge, because the cost of horses is as high also outside the season. The lucky part is that seasons vary for different kinds of horse business. Summer may be a high season for tourism enterprises but not for local riding schools. One solution to minimize the risk of “useless” horses and on the other hand to get vice reserve for high seasons is entering into agreements on horse exchange with other entrepreneurs. With horse exchange two stables can use common horse selection and exchange them depending on demand and customer needs. Of course, contracts have to be updated and legally binding, considering rights and liabilities of every party. The ownership of the horses has to be clear as well as which party takes care of an injured horse.

Collaboration between horse entrepreneurs and farmers regarding manure (Sweden)

Horse manure is a natural and unfortunate expensive by-product from the animals. Horse entrepreneurs lacking sufficient land to spread the horse manure are faced with the problem of paying high cost for getting rid of the manure. Collaboration between a horse entrepreneur and a farmer could be a solution – the farmer receives the horse manure for spreading as fertilizer on his land or for alternative utilization (as energy source in incinerators or biogas plants), and the horse entrepreneur receives straw as bedding material or hay for horse feed. A win-win solution.



© Christina Lunner Kolstrup

Good Practices for Regional Cooperation

Horses for social activities – Case of Regional Collaboration



© Unda Egenderfa

Eight young riders from the equestrian club “Demora” in Ventspils (Latvia) came up with an initiative to promote social inclusion of disabled children and children from Ventspils orphanage by introducing them to horses and equestrian sport. Within the framework of the project supported by the youth international project agency and realized in cooperation with Latvian Children’s Fund as well as Ventspils orphanage “Selga”, children learned horse grooming, feeding, handling the horses and riding.

This cooperation resulted in a stage play “Power Stemming from the Horses” (*“Zirgi – vienojošais spēks”- in Latvian*), which was performed within the region and some other places in Latvia (during the competitions in Talsi, in the snow park “Lemberga hūte” in Ventspils, as well as other counties).

The play was also performed in the riders’ club “Demora” during the opening of the riding arena, which was constructed as a part of the LEADER project.



© Unda Egenderfa

Good Practices for International Cooperation

Adventure Ride has good experience in collaboration with various business partners abroad. They have established business contacts with marketing agencies, for example, in Germany and France. Tourism routes are developed together with stables from other Baltic states – Lithuania and Estonia. Adventure Ride is a member of Adventure Road Ride Association.



© AdventureRide

Riders club "Demora" in collaboration with Lithuanian partner has developed the project 'Training young people to communicate with horses (Baltic Hipo)' within a framework of Latvia - Lithuania Cross Border Cooperation Programme 2007–2013.

Lasting experience of international collaboration of Stud farm „Burtnieki” in Latvia



© Zirgaudzētava „Burtnieki”

Stud farm „Burtnieki” is the oldest stud farm in Latvia. There are about 150 horses there. Many worldwide known sport horses were born and bred there. Historically a very good collaboration with riders and breeders from countries abroad, especially from Russia has been established in the field of horse breeding and trade. Year by year other forms of collaboration have evolved. Riders from Russia have realized that “Burtnieki” is a very good place to stay during summer (competition season) – they come here with their horses, use horse boarding, training facilities, and the hotel. The location of the stable and facilities available give them opportunity to travel to competitions in Latvia and other neighbouring countries and after competitions again come back to “Burtnieki” to take a rest and prepare for next competitions.

Some of them came with their own ponies and horses, some used theirs. They lived on the farm for one month; they trained, enjoyed summertime, and participated in several competitions. The place and the lake are appropriate for such horse-related activities for children.

Last year “Burtnieki” hosted a camp of children and youngsters from equestrian club from Russia.



© Zirgaudzētava „Burtnieki”



© Ilze Pētersone

Strong traditions and wide networks: the case of the Ypäjä Equine College (Finland)

The Ypäjä Equine College in Finland is an excellent example of both strong traditions and local, regional and international networking. Having more than 300 students and approximately 100 staff members, and managing stables for 400 horses, area of 300 ha, four riding halls, several riding arenas, trotting track as well as variety of training roads, the college aims to educate equestrian professionals for the needs of the industry by providing basic vocational programmes and further education programmes (trotting trainer, bereiter, horse masseur, saddler, farrier, stable manager (specialization breeding)). It also provides education for therapeutic riding and horse in social therapy. The quality of the education programmes is ensured by locally and internationally recognized professionals and lecturers.



© Sandija Zēverte-Rivža

Other services of the college include competitions and events, training young riding horses and trotters, horse care and accommodation, horse shoeing, trail riding, summer camps, training centre for the Finnish Equestrian Federation and private riders, the Stud and Stallion centre.



© Sandija Zēverte-Rivža



© Sandija Zēverte-Rivža

The Ypäjä Equine College cooperates with MTT Equine Research Centre, Ypäjä Horse clinics, Hippolis, Finish Equestrian Museum, Helsinki University of Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences, and Turku University. The college is also a part of international networks and cooperates with Equestrian Educational Network, International Group for Equestrian Qualifications, European State Studs Association, and European Horse Network.

The college believes that “Finnhorse is the national treasure in riding, driving and trotting racing”, therefore it strongly stands for national trotting and breeding traditions.

Projects as a mean for collaboration

Collaboration can be established and well developed during the projects. Riders club 'Demora' is active in applying for funding to improve its riding areas as well to carry out its ideas. The riding arena was constructed within the framework of the LEADER project but the Mortgage Bank supported improvements of the outdoor arena and its lightning.



© Unda Egendorfa

Within the framework of Latvia - Lithuania Cross Border Cooperation Programme 2007–2013, 'Demora' in collaboration with the riders club 'Kentaura stāļļi' (Liepāja), and two other partners (horse breeding association and riders club) from Klaipeda (Lithuania) carries out a project that focuses on organizing riders competitions, experience exchange and youth activities.

Networking outcomes

Cooperation outcomes can be defined at various levels, and the main of them are:

- Newly developed businesses
- New business ideas
- Improved publicity
- Improved local economy
- Closer relationships between stakeholders within the equine sector
- Improved knowledge and competence
- Improved public awareness about the horse sector.

Networking is often useful as a mean to establish contacts, exchange experiences, to get inspiration for your business ideas and finally – to get them realized. 'Bowling alone' in contemporary rural economy may be very expensive and less effective for successful business activities. If you have great and innovative ideas but you cannot make it alone, do not be afraid to look for a partner. It can happen also that you as trustworthy collaboration partner may turn out to be the key of success for somebody else!



