

heardabout

Promoting Western Outside of the Box

HOW IS THE WESTERN PORTION of the equine industry like milk? I've been asking myself that question ever since I heard Jeff Manning speak a few months back.

Manning was one of the creative minds behind the "Got Milk?" campaign, and his advice has played an important role in the formation of some sort of comprehensive promotion plan for the Western industry.

Manning's thoughts have been a guiding influence in the Western-English Trade Association marketing committee's deliberations, considering how best to build interest in the Western lifestyle.

"Got Milk" was catchy, and the advertisements produced for the campaign were legendary and genuinely appealing. If you have to watch TV commercials, they should all be as good as these.

Yet, it's difficult to get beyond the nagging question: How are we going to pour the entire Western industry into a carton of milk?

Milk, pork, cotton and other such single-dimensional products are easy to promote generically. Milk—all milk—is white and liquid. Western and the Western lifestyle aren't that simple to refine into an all-encompassing image. Even within the industry, there are those who differ on what is Western and what isn't.

Let's imagine that some method is developed to present Western in a generic mode. Where are the millions of dollars going to be found to launch a promotion even remotely as grandiose as the "Got Milk" idea? Even if every manufacturer (it's a relatively small industry) were willing to kick in thousands of dollars, the total would still be slightly less than

\$1 million by one account and much less by other reckonings.

Perhaps it's not possible to successfully promote the Western industry with just one massive marketing blitz; perhaps it will require several smaller efforts.

One of the smartest ideas forwarded thus far came from WETA president David Crumrine, who suggested forming a membership-based Western lifestyles promotional organization similar to the fan clubs Professional Bullrider's Association and Professional Rodeo Cowboy's Association use.

Such an organization would be invaluable to Western products manufacturers, who would have a built-in audience and thousands of their own spokesmen.

There are probably dozens of other similar ideas that, combined, would help push the Western industry into the forefront of minds around the world.

Despite the brilliance of the "Got Milk" campaign, consumption of dairy products has been on a downward slide since its peak in the mid '40s. While it could be argued that without "Got Milk" the decrease in milk consumption would have been even more precipitous, the figures point to the fact that even a great idea sometimes doesn't have the intended impact.

Most Western manufacturers generally aren't sitting around hoping to find a marketing scheme that will slow their decline. They're banking on an idea that will boost their business, like during the "Urban Cowboy" era.

Unfortunately, that answer may not be found in just one carton. ☐



 Paul Wahl, Editor



Editorial and Production

Editor
Paul Wahl

Promotions/Production Manager
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Advertising Production Coordinator
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Advertising Sales

Advertising Sales Manager, Western U.S./International
John D. Rosenthal

Phone (214)387-4602 Fax (214)387-4603
E-mail jrosenthal@tackntogs.com

Advertising Sales Manager, Eastern U.S.
Dustin Rossow
Phone (952)930-4375 Fax (952)930-4362
E-mail drossow@tackntogs.com

Classified Advertising
Sarah Haslerud
Phone (952)930-4357 Fax (952)930-4362
E-mail shaslerud@tackntogs.com

INDIA

K.S. Giani/A.S. Gianni
Westcott Bungalow, 37/17 The Mall,
P.O. Box 175, Kanpur-208001, INDIA
Phones (91)(512) 360528, 268491 or 315259
Fax (91)(512) 311356 (GIANI/57) or 311627

Corporate Officer

Publisher
Sarah Muirhead

Editorial & Advertising Sales Offices

Miller Publishing, 12400 Whitewater Dr.,
Suite 160, Minnetonka, MN 55343
Telephone (952) 930-4390
FAX (952) 930-4362

Web Site Address

www.tackntogs.com

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