

Industry's Newest Organization Taking Shape

There is strength in numbers, and quality never costs—it pays. Those are two of the major premises on which the equine industry's newest organization is built.

The Equine Quality Alliance was formed as a New Jersey corporation in December with seven charter members: Leather Therapy, Healing Tree Products, Ringer Products, Grand Meadows, Equissentials, Mackinnon Icehorse and Wahl Clipper.

"Together, we can accomplish so much more than any one of us alone," explained Pino Blangiforti, CEO of Unicorn Editions, manufacturer of Leather Therapy products. "It's difficult for individual small companies in today's market to have the resources to market their products properly."

Besides being able to combine resources for ad buys and trade show booths, the alliance's members—who join by invitation only—are also committed to quality of product, integrity and service. Every effort is being made to assure that only one alliance member from the various avenues of the equine market is chosen.

According to Blangiforti, the alliance will eventually serve as a resource for consumers and retailers.

"For instance, if you have a question about wound care, you'll talk with Dr. Eric Witherspoon of Healing Tree, and if you have a question about leather care, you'd talk to me," Blangiforti said.

A major saddle manufacturer is likely to be the next member.

David Nelson, owner of Ringer in Milaca, Minn., said the economic synergies are what attracted him to the idea.

"It's just plain tough out there when you're a small manufacturer," he said. "With the alliance, there is a lot of help."

Nelson said sometimes the products offered by large companies aren't as good of quality as those offered by a small company, but because the small company has fewer marketing resources, the word never gets out.

The chance to implement a way for retailers and consumers to determine definitively which supplements on the market are what the manufacturers say they are was a major impetus for Nick Hartog of Grand Meadows to join the alliance.

"There are a lot of garbage products out there and

really no good attempts at branding within the industry," Hartog said.

He hopes the alliance eventually will establish a seal of approval to help define standards in his sector of the industry.

Self-improvement is a major goal for Wahl Clippers.

"Our purpose is to pool our resources and become better suppliers and manufacturers to our dealers by improving product availability, advertising and promotions," said Ken Duncan, spokesman for Wahl. "Everyone will benefit."

The origin of the idea was a cross promotion between Leather Therapy and Wahl, Duncan explained.

"We currently offer Leather Therapy in our StablePro clipper kit as a bonus item," Duncan said. "We were looking for something of value and realized that horse owners own leather, and a quality leather cleaner is a product that offers value to the consumer."

According to Blangiforti, the alliance has established a relationship with Hocking College in Nelsonville, Ohio. The college offers four different horse-related programs of instruction in hands-on settings.

"We hope to listen to the students and learn from them and also help teach them about the industry," Blangiforti said.


Hocking students will one day be field-testing products manufactured by members of the alliance.

The active participation dovetails with the college's goal of immersing its students in the real world to prepare them for the job market of tomorrow.

Blangiforti said he didn't know how large the alliance would become eventually, but about a half-dozen manufacturers are lining up to join.

Hartog said he expects there to be a high demand for membership once the organization's efforts become better known.

Although quality assurance and cooperative efforts are the primary stated goals of the alliance, Blangiforti said there's also an economic element to the organization.

"We hope what we do will fall to the bottom line of the association member companies," Blangiforti said. "All of us are in this for the long term." 

—Paul Wahl