

Does It *Really* Matter?

What does “Made in America” mean to you as a retailer? What does it mean to your customers? Does anyone really care today where a product is manufactured, or do they only care that the price and quality are compatible?

Those are tough questions. While we became accustomed to radios and televisions manufactured in Japan decades ago, somehow, there’s an incongruity when it comes to items of the Western culture, such as saddles, tack and apparel.

After all, these were created and initiated in the United States, and for years, attempts by other countries to knock them off were greeted with

guffaws and a dismissive wave of the hand.

Today, it’s common to find Western icon items stamped with a foreign-made label, and in many cases, the quality is fine, even great in a few instances.

Since there’s never been a huge trend toward manufacturing tack or apparel for English riding in this country, there is less of an issue when it comes to the origin of those products.

There’s almost no product in our industry made in the United States that doesn’t have a comparable product made overseas. Generally, the difference is quality, but not always.



At the BETA International Trade Show, I examined a line of Western saddles made in Pakistan. The quality was good, although the design was slightly off. The most amazing difference was the price point for the foreign saddles, which was considerably lower than for a similar, American-made saddle.

Many of today’s most popular Western apparel lines are already made outside the United States, and most companies that sell them don’t see that changing anytime soon. Exploring this issue has led me to a number of conclusions.

- If you believe your customers will pay for quality, you probably want to purchase American-made products for your store. If you think consumers have become trained to buy the cheapest, regardless of quality, you won’t mind stocking products of lesser quality but at the lowest price points.

- American-made can mean just about anything. Some companies import parts from other countries and make products here, calling them “American made.” The number of truly and completely American-made products in the equine industry is small and getting smaller every day.

- No one is more committed to an ideal than those manufacturers who are still making products in the United States. They’ve weathered the storms and resisted the temptation to take their products offshore for bigger profits.

- It’s only going to get worse for those hoping to continue to find American-made products. The reason: China. There’s almost nothing the Chinese can’t produce more cheaply and with nearly the same quality as anything made in the United States. What they aren’t able to produce today, they will be able to produce tomorrow. There doesn’t seem to be an end to the onslaught.

Quite likely, this issue will be the subject of ongoing debate until the last American-made product disappears from the shelves. If you have an opinion on this topic you’d like to share, please share it. We will continue to cover this topic going forward. 📧

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