

“Retailer Thoughts”



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Jeff Harris — DH Tack, Kansas

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Marilyn Brown—Marilyn's Tack Shop, Oregon

“Being located in cotton country in West Texas, our consumers like American-made products with American-grown cotton. It's difficult to offer American-made products with American-grown cotton and be competitive.”

Ken Fincher — Geba's Distributing Co.

Many retailers believe equine consumers are already softened to the idea of imported products from their shopping experiences in mainstream retail outlets.

“People have become accustomed to the fact that everything is made somewhere else,” said Pat Lorenzo, owner of Pat's Tack in Southern California. “They look for the best quality for the price they can afford and don't worry about its point of origin.”

Lorenzo sees a lack of loyalty to American-made products in her customers.

“Everyone has to buy foreign on so many things that it no longer bothers them to buy all foreign and save money,” she said.

Pam Farrior, president of Broad Axe Horse Supplies in Pennsylvania, tries to educate her customers on the topic.

“I try to impress upon them the fact that something is USA-made so that even if they didn't think of it before they were in my shop, maybe they will give it some thought,” Farrior said. “I don't mind paying a little extra for USA-made, providing the quality is as good as the overseas product.”

The number of people willing to pay a premium for American-made products is shrinking.

“I think so many consumers have become victims of big box practices that they only care about the price,” said Jeff Harris of DH Tack in Kansas. “For those consumers in the minority willing to support manufacturers in the United States, I have found they are willing to pay more for an item, but they are a shrinking minority.”

The issue was bigger with consumers five years ago, says Bryan Bechtel of Western Edge, a retailer in Nebraska.

“Newer, cutting-edge companies in the Western market, like Cinch and Ariat that have basically never produced in the United States, have helped to move the import goods into acceptance,” Bechtel said. “It's a challenge to find USA-made goods for customers who demand it.”

Price, not quality, is a significant factor for a great number of their customers, retailers believe.

“Consumers are getting price savvy with discount catalogs and the Internet,” said Errin Funke, a retailer in northern Wisconsin. “I have to be competitive with my pricing, which has me looking for other sources to help keep my profit margins good.”

The Internet is also blamed by others for creating consumers that are purely price-driven.

“This past year, customers have been using the Internet and really pushing for lower prices and have not been very nice in the way they ask and keep asking,” said Marilyn Brown of Marilyn's Tack Shop in Oregon.

“There is a lot of hype about American-made products and anecdotal evidence suggests that consumers are willing to pay more for them, but we seldom hear that,” said Tony ElChaar of CHAAR Saddlery, Farm & Pet in Pennsylvania. “As a retailer, we base our purchasing decisions on quality, price, service and consistency, with country of origin last on the list.”

No one would question the loyalty or patriotism of retailers, but when it comes to keeping the doors open, buying decisions can change.