

# When You're Successful, Everyone Wants to Be You

Western footwear is hot, but the boom has left manufacturers and retailers facing new issues.

The latest upward cycle in the Western sector of the equine industry has put a smile on their faces of most retailers and manufacturers. It has also meant fending off challenges from companies outside the traditional core market, that want to take advantage of what they see as a quick-profit fad.

By Paul Wahl, Editor

**F**or retailers, that means occasionally having to go head-to-head with the major department stores in their areas, jockeying for customers who aren't as aware of quality issues as core Western shoppers.

Manufacturers are also discovering that mainstream footwear companies have become part of the competition, muddying the waters for them and their loyal retailers.

The challenges have also sparked occasional disagreements between retailers and manufacturers.

Western retailers believe that occasional shortages of product—especially around the holiday shopping season—are because manufacturers are selling into the mainstream. These retailers say that they have been loyal to many of these brands through thick and thin, and that loyalty should be returned when times are good.

They say that footwear manufacturers, some of which are publicly owned, are putting the interests of their stockholders ahead of retailers and the industry as a whole.

Manufacturers believe that they have done a good job of treating everyone fairly, and have tried to help retailers capitalize on the Western trend by providing a variety of boot styles to keep them on the cutting edge.

## Demand Is Up

For many leading Western footwear manufacturers, business has increased dramatically, which most admit has caused some glitches along the way. New strategies have had to be developed to help eliminate the problems.

For Justin Brands, the key to making sure customer demands are met is communication, “across the board to all stakeholders,” according to Randy Watson, president of the company. “We communicate to our dealers that we are a stock house and have the ability to fill in on a regular basis. When they communicate their needs to us, then it allows us to plan ahead and talk to our suppliers ... to ensure timely deliveries.”

The communication continues down the line, he said, so that sales reps know when product will be available for delivery.

With the popularity of Western fashion, the temptation to place product in other distribution channels was strong for Durango Boot, part of Rocky Brands, said sales manager Larry Miller.

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