

Equine retailers often think of themselves more as traditionalists than trend-setters, yet their customers ride out with global positioning systems attached to their belts and pull trailers with trucks that have interiors resembling the cockpit of a jet airplane.

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Since the first saddle-maker plunked his first saddle onto a stand and affixed a price tag, the issue of product knowledge has been a topic for discussion. When the saddle-maker was the only employee in the saddle shop, it was a major hurdle. As retail operations began to grow and associates came along, the saddle-maker had to transfer his knowledge to his hirees.

Today, equine retailers generally hire sales associates off the street. Some have equine background, some don't. Training programs vary. Depending upon newly hired employees to know the merits of everything in a store can prove difficult.

#### That's where technology comes in.

Think about this. What if you had an informational kiosk in your saddle department with several well-produced presentations on such topics as saddle fit, leather care or stirrup selection? Since most customers today are already familiar with checking out products online, this added interactivity inside a brick-and-mortar store goes a long way toward enhancing the retail experience.

With a kiosk, it doesn't matter whether the regular saddle person is working that day, customers will still receive high-quality information on which they can rely.

#### That's just one example.

What if your customers could pass through the checkout and pay for their purchases simply by having their fingerprint scanned and entering a personal identification code? Horse owners are some of the busiest people on the planet. Anything that saves them time and speeds them back to their chores is appreciated. Are you ready for biometrics?

How much more effective would your customer service be if everyone on your sales staff could communicate easily, quickly and quietly? Associate communication systems are springing up everywhere in retail. The technology gets more advanced and less expensive each month.

Would you sell more jeans or breeches if customers could scan their body and electronically dress themselves in products available in your store? Some would, no doubt.

#### The possibilities are endless.

No one is suggesting that adding a ton of expensive technology to a retail business will automatically make it more profitable.

Consumers often view technology as a mixed bag—both opportunity and threat. A retailer must first understand his customer base and their willingness to accept technology. Perhaps they'd be fine with an electronic capture signature pad for credit card purchases but would think biometrics was over the top.

Generally, consumers react favorably to anything that makes their favorite retailer look progressive, just as they attempt to be forward-thinking in their business and personal endeavors.

To succeed in today's retail climate and to begin to attract the tech-savvy customers of tomorrow, some paean to technology, or at the very least a careful consideration of the topic, is required.

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