

Business Strategy for Professional Farriers: *Information and Customer Service*

A successful commitment to customer service requires some planning. There is no doubt you have to be quick on your feet in dealing with your customers but you can't overlook the advantages of thorough planning. In the early stages of this planning you need to develop an information base. This can be a basic journal or notebook done manually, or a simple database on a computer system. The computers and software in the market today are relatively easy to work with and can make it much easier to keep your information base current. They also provide options for improving your customer service by allowing you to do mailing labels, form letters and other communication functions.

Customer information

- a. Customer name(s)
- b. Category - owner, trainer, rider?
- c. Addresses - both billing and horse locations
- d. Phones - get all of them; home, barn, cellular
- e. Billing Method - Cash, open account, credit card?
- f. Veterinarian (for specific customer or horse) and number
- g. Comments - keep relevant notes about the customer and their horses

The customer information is pretty straight forward but invaluable as you move forward to improve your service level.

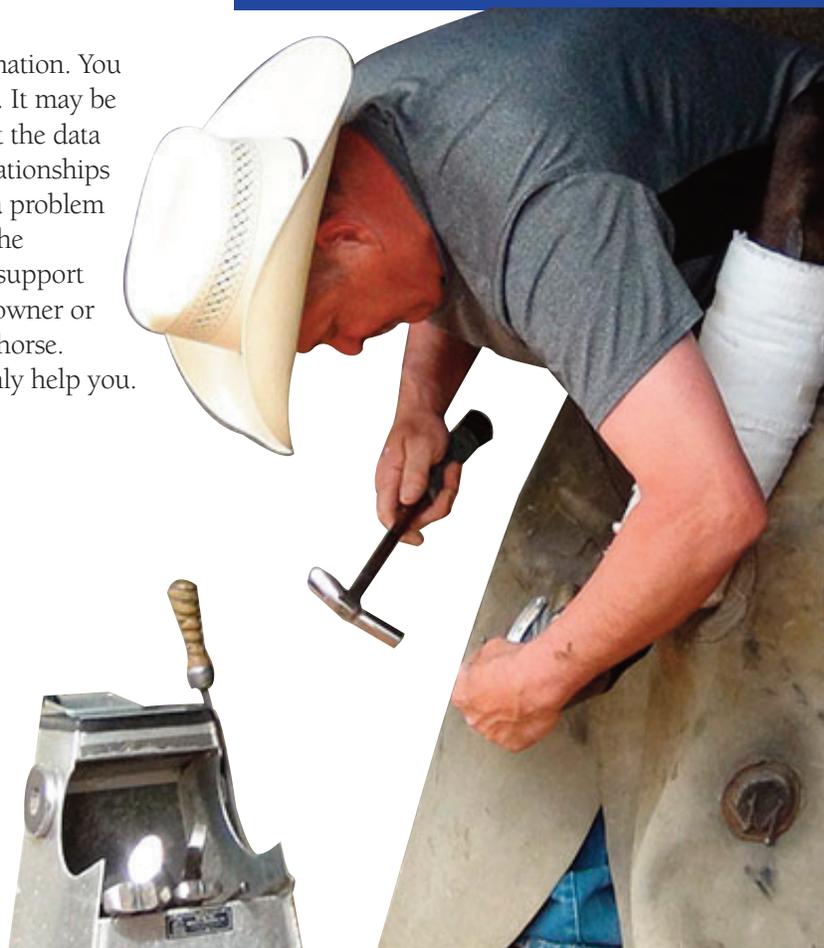
The next step would be development of the horse information. You need to determine what information is important to you. It may be that too much information creates unnecessary work but the data you gather and develop can be used to enhance your relationships with your customers. In a worst case scenario, suppose a problem develops with one of the horses you have worked on. The information and history you have on file can be used to support your position. It can help you explain to a veterinarian, owner or other interested party exactly what you know about the horse. Information on the horse - accurate information - can only help you.

Horse information

- a. Name of horse(s)
- b. Breed, age, other specifics
- c. Basic owner/trainer/rider
- d. Veterinarian
- e. History /comments

Once you have compiled your customer and horse information you can then put it to work. Communications, using the database, is the next step.

Don't expect the gathering and entry of data to happen all at once. You are building a foundation; do it as thoroughly as possible.



Communications

Billing. This may be the most important “communication” you have with your customer. Without it, you’re out of business. Make sure your billing is prompt and accurate. Try to do your billing by invoicing, at least once a week- don’t wait to do monthly statements. Monthly statements can be helpful - to be sure your customers know you know where they stand. The improved cash flow of billing as you go will be important to you. Make sure your customers understand the terms and meet them.

Maintenance issues. You need to communicate regular maintenance issues to your customers as well as any special instructions for individual cases. You may not see the owner when you shoe the horse but you need to be sure they are aware of what’s going on.

Education. As you get more comfortable with the use of your database you can expand your services by sharing educational information with your customers. This can be something as simple as a single page on hoofcare tips or reprints of articles, newsletters or website information. Your position will be much stronger if you have tried to help your customers understand what you do to help their horses. You can start by sending information with invoices or doing two or three mailings a year.

Don’t expect the gathering and entry of data to happen all at once. Work on it as you have time but complete the process in a reasonable timeframe. You are building a foundation; do it as thoroughly as possible.



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