

Originally published in *Equestrian Retailer* magazine, January/February 2008  
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## Green is the New Black

Environmentally friendlier practices are within reach for equestrian retailers

By Lisa Munniksma

Green is the color of money, young horses, and—the most recent use of the word—the environment. It's also become the hottest trend in new construction and other industries. While a true push to become more environmentally friendly has not yet reached equestrian retailers, you might consider making some changes with a nod to the environment.

Along the green, sustainably manufactured-brick road, there are a number of efforts retailers can put into place. Not every idea can be easily implemented, yet some are so simple. Even small efforts can make a large impact on the environment, not to mention your bottom line.

Here, *Equestrian Retailer* looks at 10 ways retailers can go greener and some of the reasons that make these changes so inviting.

### 1. Use electricity intelligently

What kind of lighting do you use in your store? If you answered compact fluorescent light (CFL) bulbs, you get a green star.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy's joint Energy Star program, Energy Star-qualified CFL bulbs use 75-percent less energy than standard incandescent bulbs and last up to 10 times longer. Users can save \$30 or more in electricity costs over each bulb's lifetime. These bulbs produce 75-percent less heat, so they're safer to operate and can cut energy costs associated with cooling.

The rule of turning off the lights when you exit a room doesn't really apply to retail space, but lights in staff rooms, rest rooms, and storage areas don't need to stay on all day.

### 2. Just say "no" to plastic

A 2004 California Integrated Waste Management Board Statewide Waste Characterization Study found plastic comprises 9.5 percent of California's overall land filled material. Maybe that's part of the reasoning behind San Francisco's Board of Supervisors new provision outlawing plastic bags in large supermarkets and pharmacy chains.

You probably don't spend a ton of money purchasing plastic shopping bags for your stores. These things aren't expensive, after all, adding to ease of disposability and the associated environmental issues. Still, you have options outside of plastic bags.

Ask customers to bring their own bags. Offer them a discount or enter them in a monthly prize drawing for doing so. Or purchase reusable canvas bags. These are more expensive, but customers will reuse them, and they'll quickly become a form of promotion for you. Even recyclable paper bags, made from recycled materials, are better than plastic and not as expensive as canvas.

### 3. Communicate electronically

Use your website to keep in touch with customers and reduce the amount of mailed paper correspondence. E-newsletters are less expensive to produce than physical newsletters, cost nothing to mail, and don't waste paper. Today's bulk e-mail programs are not difficult or expensive to use.

Save paper mailings for truly important announcements a few times a year. Keep your mailing lists up-to-date to reduce wasted mailings.

### 4. Use office products responsibly

Even in a retail environment, an amazing amount of office waste can be produced. Printer paper, printer and fax cartridges, and notebook paper are just a few potential sources of trash.

You can spend a little more to buy recycled paper. Better yet, you can spend a little less to buy recycled cartridges—quality replacements are easy to find. And when you're finished, send both used products to recycling. Even sensitive paper materials like income and expense reports can be shredded and recycled.

When it comes to employee training materials, keep them online rather than providing hardcopies of a whole manual every time a new employee comes onboard. Print one copy of the schedule to hang in your employee area and give employees access to an online schedule so they don't need to print their own.

### 5. Set up a recycling center

This green idea may not be as easy as the others. Have you ever noticed how many paper feed bags, plastic fly spray and shampoo bottles, and other potentially recyclable materials go in and out of a barn in a year? Set up a recycling center at your location to assist your customers in disposing of these responsibly.

Contact your local recycling handler to see how to become a designated recycling drop-off center. You can set up a permanent facility for drop offs or hold a once-a-month

recycling event. You're not only assisting in cleaning up the environment, you're drawing customers to your store.

## 6. Educate customers

The equine industry is not particularly environmentally friendly. Horse people use chemical-based fly sprays, drive fuel-inefficient towing vehicles, and work with many synthetic and non-renewable products.

Still, there are ways your customers can make their horse-keeping practices more environmentally friendly. Educate yourself on these methods; then educate your customers. Better yet, invite environmental and industry experts to speak to your customers, write columns for your e-newsletter, and provide in-store educational displays.

## 7. Carry environmentally friendly products

Because people's minds have been on the environment more and more in recent years, there have been more and more green products being produced for horses.

Look into carrying organic hays and feeds and natural horse-health products. Not every horse owner is going to jump on the green-product bandwagon, but giving them that choice will prove you are concerned with the impact that this industry has on the environment.

## 8. Request compliance from suppliers

Do you know what your suppliers' manufacturing processes are? You should be willing to bet they could be greener.

Get together with fellow tack store owners and request that manufacturers employ more environmentally friendly practices. Some simple changes that can make a big difference include reducing plastic packaging, recycling or reusing wood pallets and cardboard boxes, and using recycled plastic and cardboard packaging products.

Encourage them to explore these and other options for increasing their green responsibility.

## 9. Build green

In new construction, explore the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System. LEED is a US Green Building Council benchmark program for designing, constructing, and operating environmentally friendly buildings. LEED covers everything from energy system design to the use of local and sustainable materials to healthy commercial interiors. There are even LEED guidelines for updating existing structures.

## 10. Encourage customers to reuse and resell

Consignment areas are often appreciated by customers. By giving them the option of reselling—rather than simply throwing away—unwanted tack, clothing, and equipment, you can contribute to your customers' environmental stewardship.

### Why go green?

The EPA estimates 245.7 million tons of garbage was produced in the US in 2005. This was about 1.6 million tons less than what was produced in 2004. Part of the reason for this decline is that nearly one-third of the country's trash was recycled in 2005. Recycling is a huge part of the green mentality, but it's only a small part of the overall environmental picture. Consider how much waste your store produces, and then you know why every little bit counts.

The reasons business owners have for employing green practices varies. Some get personal satisfaction from knowing they're doing their part to make their lives and the earth healthier.

A big reason to consider going greener is the customer satisfaction that can result. Just like some retailers sleep better at night for reducing their store's impact on the environment, some customers would, too. More people are shopping at natural food markets, purchasing hybrid cars, and exploring alternative energy sources. Wouldn't it be nice if these people had a green place to shop for their horses?

After you've put greener practices into place, do your part to let customers know about the changes. Be the first tack store in your area to debut a new environmental outlook, and you'll get some attention.

Perhaps the most compelling reason to explore greener retail practices is the tax breaks that are associated with them.

Owners and leasers of a commercial building who install interior lighting systems, heating, cooling, ventilation, and hot water systems that satisfy energy efficiency requirements or who take measures to save at least 50 percent of the building's heating and cooling energy can receive tax deductions of up to \$1.80 per square foot. Requirements are outlined by the Internal Revenue Service and can be discussed with your financial advisor.

Cities, counties, and states have their own incentives for LEED-certified building and renovations.

For instance, in Washington, the King County Council established a Green Building Grants Program that offers up to \$25,000 in grant funding to building owners who meet a minimum of LEED Silver for new construction or major renovation.

On the other coast, North Carolina granted permission to cities and counties to encourage green building practices by reduced permitting fees or partial rebates for construction projects that achieve LEED or another rating system certification.

Whether your reasons are personal or business, your options for greener retail practice are nearly endless. The ideas listed here are basic and can be built upon and steered in any direction. Green is growing, and it will reach even niche retail industries like yours at some point. Get started now, and you can be ahead of the curve.

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#### SIDEBAR: Retailer Resources

There are a number of organizations that provide guidelines and partnership in improving businesses' environmental practices. A few worth exploring include:

- \* US Environmental Protection Agency's WasteWise Program

800-EPA-WISE

[www.epa.gov/wastewise/about/overview.htm](http://www.epa.gov/wastewise/about/overview.htm)

- \* US EPA Energy Star

888-STAR-YES

[www.energystar.com](http://www.energystar.com)

- \* Tax Incentives Assistance Project

[www.energytaxincentives.org](http://www.energytaxincentives.org)

- \* Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design

800-795-1747

[www.usgbc.org](http://www.usgbc.org)