

HORSE-BASED

Ever dream of being your own boss and running a horse-related business from home? Get inspiration (and advice) from four horse lovers who've figured out how to turn their good ideas into profits.

The alarm wakes you up for another workday, and you wish you didn't have to face it. Maybe it's because you dread the commute, or you're stuck with a boss and co-workers you don't respect. Maybe you work long hours for inadequate pay, or just plain find yourself bored and restless by the humdrum nature of the job. Maybe it's not your job that's the problem, but your need for money over and above what it pays. Or, perhaps you're simply longing for an outlet for creativity that's been locked in a stall for too long.

In any case, wouldn't it be great if you could find some way to earn money from home, doing work somehow related to horses?

You're not alone in having that

thought. We'll introduce you to four fellow horse lovers—"equi-preneurs," if you will—who've had that thought and acted on it. Each one started and now runs a home-based business, and each one has a clientele made up of other horse people. For inspiration, we'll share their stories and their best advice. We'll provide a few of our own smart-start biz tips as well.

Go ahead and hit that snooze button a couple of times. You've been late for work for flimsier reasons than taking time to read about something that could be your springboard to a job with built-in enjoyment and satisfaction.

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SHOW RIBBONS, PUT TO USE

Equi-preneur: Jean Christopherson, Cave Creek, Arizona. She and her husband have three grown children, all of whom have left home. The family's horses have left home, too, going with one of their daughters. Jean stays connected to the horse world through her business.

Horse-based home biz: Barn Smart, www.barnsmart.com; barnsmart@earthlink.net.

What she does: Jean's business is based around her ability to sew. Besides making stall drapes, stall bags, and custom-fitted horse clothing, she also turns customers' show ribbons into quilts, wall hangings, stuffed animals, pillow covers, and other items.

HOME BIZ

BY JULI S. THORSON

Inspiration: “I’ve been sewing since I was a child, and got into sewing show clothes and slinky-type horse hoods when the kids and horses were still at home. Everything just kind of grew from there. The ribbon-based items came about after someone approached me with a request to make something from her ribbons. Ironically, she never ordered anything from me, but I took the idea and ran with it.”

Clientele: Jean has a variety of customers, ranging from trainers who’ve learned to count on her for textile-based items, to owners who want their ribbon collections turned into colorful conversation pieces.

Marketing measures: Along with her Web site, and distribution of fliers and business cards, Jean relies on word of mouth, and on exhibiting her wares at horse shows. For instance, she was among the vendors at this year’s Scottsdale Arabian Horse Show staged a few miles from her home.

Key materials/equipment: According to Jean, her most important pieces of equipment are “great scissors and a great sewing machine.” She also needs the computing and communications equipment required by most other businesses, plus a generous-sized workspace.

Behind the scenes: “People probably don’t realize the number of hours that go into the kinds of things I make,” says Jean. “It’s a time-intensive business. When it comes to the ribbon items, the design process is different for each project. The ribbons themselves dictate what I can make with them, and I have to let the colors speak to me before I can come up with a design.”

Greatest satisfaction: “I love people’s reactions when they get their ribbon projects back,” she says. “They’re usually so thrilled to see that box filled with years’ worth of ribbons turned into something they’re proud to display.”

Biggest headache: “Selling! I come from a Minnesota Scandinavian background, where modesty’s seen as a virtue, and I’m hesitant to promote myself. But, I keep working at it.”

Home/horselife impact: Jean’s husband works from home as a consultant, and she says they both find it difficult sometimes to turn their work off. “I often have to remind myself to do other things besides work on sewing,” she confesses. “We don’t have horses at home anymore, so there’s no impact there.”

If she’d only known: Jean claims she wouldn’t do anything different if she

were starting her business today. “This is the first job I’ve had, other than being a mom, that I really, truly love. I love the scheduling flexibility of working from home. And that every day is different. That makes it fun.”

Advice to you: “Jump in and follow your heart. Don’t hold back from doing what you love just because you don’t have experience in running a business—you can take a class, or find good books, or get good advice from others on that aspect. And, once you are in business, listen to your customers. Some of the best ideas come from them.”

Note: This article is edited from the full article published in Horse & Rider magazine, May 2007.