

Retailer

TIP OF THE MONTH:

Casual Day Every Day

In some industries casual Friday is every day. Many credit the Levi Strauss Corporation with setting the trend in the early 1990s when it launched its casual-dress campaign.

Certainly, employees dressed in three-piece suits, selling tack or feed, are out of place. However, it's not wise to show up for work in torn jeans and a dirty T-shirt, either.

Dress codes vary widely among mainstream equestrian retailers — from matching shirts or vests for sales associates, to employees dressed from top to bottom in company apparel. Relate your dress code to the nature of the work and, generally speaking, in the western-wear industry that could mean well-pressed jeans or slacks and a dress shirt.

Personal appearance is part of working in an apparel store. Employees' attire says a lot about your business. Encourage them to think about your company, their customers and the responsibility of their position when reaching into the closet.

Success Tip: Employees can be walking advertisements. If you run a western-apparel shop, outfit your personnel with western hats, belts or other small accessories. If you cater to the English crowd, make sure your people dress appropriately for that enthusiast group. Products sell quickly when customers can see them worn and enjoyed by your staff.

These Boots Were Made for Walking

Next to a quality hat, nothing is more important to a cowboy than well-fitting boots. Proper boot fit contributes to better break-in and wear patterns, and typically, a return visit to the same store to buy a new pair when the old one wears out.



Annie Justin, wife of Justin Boot Company founder H.J. Justin, figured this out more than a century ago. Annie developed a fit kit in the early 1890s to give cowboys a comfortable, properly fitted custom boot. The kit included a tape measure and an instruction chart for taking accurate measurements. Cowboys often took the kit on long, cross-country journeys.

The need for proper boot fit is just as important today. Retailers who discuss customers' needs, and then match the proper boot styles and sizes to shoppers' feet can expect higher customer satisfaction, a decrease in returns and an increase in high-dollar sales.

What did a custom pair of Justin's cost nearly a century ago?

In 1910, the company sold Justin boots for \$11 per pair to 26 states, Canada, Cuba and Mexico. ■

Save Time With E-Mail

Offering e-mail for customers' comments allows store owners and managers to do the following:

- Quickly hear about problems that need to be addressed.
- Avoid telling customers, "I'll have to find out and get back to you." Instead, there's written record in the customers' words, making it easier to collect the information you need before responding.
- Reduce fax, telephone and letter-writing expenses.

Customers can:

- Compose and send messages, as well as retrieve your responses, at their convenience.
- Offer more specific details than they would on the telephone.
- Save time: Typing a short e-mail is faster than composing a letter.

Power Up Your Sales Force

A retail store is only as good as the people who run it. You can spend all your money on lavish trappings, but without a competent, talented sales force profits are inevitably lost. According to research conducted by J.D. Powers and Associates, 25 percent of customers who leave a car dealership without buying do so because of something the salesperson said or the way he or she treated the customer. Are you missing valuable sales because of poorly trained, lackadaisical or downright impolite employees?