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Celebrating 32 Years Serving the Nation's Riding Instructors

Today's Instructor —Are You Ready to Go Mobile?

By Mary Hamilton

USING A LITTLE TECHNOLOGY can save you time, keep you organized, and improve your professional riding instruction services. Technology has changed the way I manage my business (RidersElite.com) and improved my clients' experience. I'm happy to share how mobile technology has helped me change how I deliver services. It's my hope that you will find a couple of tips to help improve your services and provide that "WOW" factor.

Like you, I love my horse and enjoy seeing my students' successes. A computer techie I am not. But I also realize that my client base is changing and I need to change too. Although my core principles of horse instruction remain constant, the way I deliver my services to clients is where I need to continually evaluate and make improvements.

A changing client base brings new expectations from my clients. I consider myself a basic user of my mobile devices (iPhone and iPad). However, living with a techie spouse, you get an extra push to learn to use the free and "pay for" applications on your mobile devices.

The following are some areas in which new technology has changed my business:

Client Communications Yes, I still have good old stand-by voicemail and email. However, I have found over the past couple of years that I need to adapt to how my clients communicate. More common now

is the SMS "simple message service," also known as *texting*, and social media by way of Facebook's Messenger app. These are generally short messages to confirm, cancel, or change lesson times, and even a few brief questions to which I am able to quickly provide an answer. Staying well connected with your clients adds value to the services you provide.

Client Scheduling

I have ditched the paper calendar for my smartphone calendar. I am able to make client scheduling changes with ease, verify upcoming lesson dates

and times, and even share my work calendar with my family. At the end of each lesson, I like to verify with my clients their next lesson date and time; this helps reduce missed lessons.

Client Contacts Keeping your client contact information on your smartphone is something that every instructor should do. Here is some of the client's information I recommend you keep too: client name,



contact cell phone, home phone, emergency contact information, name of client's horse, and other notes for that client.

Also, I keep facility contact information: on-site manager/owner, contact phone, and address. I have frequently seen callers in an emergency become quickly overwhelmed. They call 9-1-1 and then can't remember the facility address. I strongly recommend posting the facility address in strategic locations at all facilities where you instruct.

Photo/Video Using your mobile device camera to take still photos or videos can add value to your client's lesson. I have found that simply taking a 60-second video, then reviewing it with the client, has been very helpful. Now students can see exactly what they are doing or not doing. Using visual aids helps students learn concepts better than using words alone. As a bonus, I keep a video library of short clips on my mobile device. I use these clips to help illustrate teaching points.

And then there are the times that the perfect photo opportunity presents. A quick picture capture, hit send, and your client now has that photo in his or her inbox. Talk about a happy client—just one more value-added service you provided.

Ready for the Advanced App? I enjoyed reading Doug Emerson's article about checklists in the last issue of *Riding Instructor*. I too am a strong believer in checklists and systems to help keep me and my business on track. I use mobile apps as part of my organizational systems.

My absolute favorite app is Canvas. I mentioned in my Peer Profile in the Fall



2016 issue of *Riding Instructor* that I was working on developing a mobile app to help instructors for mounted police, mounted posse, and riding instructors, and Canvas is the result. There is a small fee for the Canvas app, but all the forms are **free**. You can even try Canvas for 30 days, free.

Some of the problems I was experiencing included not having the right form with me, outdated forms, time spent archiving and filing my paper forms and written lesson notes, less-than-professional-looking forms. I needed a better system to manage my forms and checklists. And it had to be simple, needed to save me time, and not break the bank.

Problem Solved Now I use my mobile device to collect, capture, and archive all my forms. And it is absolutely **simple**. All my forms now have drop-down lists (client names, horse name, and facilities), fill-in sections, the ability to add diagrams and photos, then one click, and it's done! A professional PDF is automatically emailed to my client and I get a copy saved to my digital file cabinet. And I love that my business logo/branding is clearly displayed and easily recognizable.


It is simple and it saves me time. Click, submit, and done!

Some Mobile Apps I Use

- **Student Riding Waiver**—includes a section for if rider is a minor and captures signature too.
- **Student Lesson Logs**—after every lesson, I complete an overview of the lesson, including homework and a diagram or photos for review. Parents love it. They can see the progress and even help with homework.
- **Horse Training Report**—if your service includes training clients' horses, this mobile app allows you to capture daily training information, then a PDF is emailed to the client's inbox for a daily recap for great communications with your clients.
- **Horse Care Report**—allows you to log your feeding schedule, veterinary services, aftercare, vet follow-up actions,

farrier services, plus include photos and any other horse care information.

- **Equine Appraisal Report**—I am often asked to assist clients with horse appraisals. This mobile app guides me through the needed information, documented research, and a final appraisal, all in a professional-looking PDF report.
- **New Horse Purchase Report** (phone interview and on-site evaluation)—great app for vetting via the phone first, which can help determine if an on-site visit is warranted. And when I am on-site, I use the app to include photos and documents (Coggins) directly into my report.
- **Barn Tasks—Daily Completion Reports**—great work flow for your barn help, keeps them on task and verifies all tasks completed as you have outlined.

Yes, I like checklists and processes—they keep me on task, save me time, and best of all, my clients absolutely love opening email to read their PDF reports. The next time you make a call on your smartphone, you might just want to take a second look at all the new opportunities you have. Want more information? Please feel free to contact me, I am happy to help. And you can find all the Canvas app information at www.riders-elite.com. 

About the author

Mary Hamilton is nationally known for her training expertise for mounted police agencies. She also shares these advanced sensory training techniques with her students, facilities, and riding groups. Mary is the owner of Riders Elite Academy. Readers can find more info at www.riderselite.com or contact her at mary@riderselite.com.



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