

# *Horses of Iceland*

**BRING YOU CLOSER TO NATURE**



## **Goals – Activities – Results 2019**

## **MAIN GOAL**

The purpose of the Horses of Iceland (HOI) project is to increase the awareness of and strengthen the image of the Icelandic horse internationally. The main goal is to lay the groundwork for increased value creation and increased foreign currency income from the sale of Icelandic horses, related products and services with professional and progressive marketing under the slogan Horses of Iceland – bring you closer to nature.

## **EMPHASIS**

Emphasis is placed on wide-reaching collaboration between members of the Icelandic horse community around the world to ensure that the message delivered through marketing is unified and to give the project increased weight. The project is carried out with long-term goals in mind.

Special emphasis is placed on digital media, the project's website and social media, to reach as large an audience as possible, all around the world. Synergy in marketing with other industries represented by Promote Iceland – such as tourism through Inspired by Iceland and promotion of Icelandic culture through Iceland Naturally – is also important.

## **TARGET GROUPS AND MARKETS**

When the project was established in 2015, the main target groups were identified. There are three main target groups one of them is in focus in each given period.

The target groups are as follows:

- 1 – Foreign parties already involved with the Icelandic horse.
- 2 – Foreign tourists in Iceland.
- 3 – Owners and riders of other horse breeds.

In 2019 as well as in 2018, the main emphasis was placed on reaching target Group 3: Owners and riders of other horse breeds, in the hopes of increasing awareness of the Icelandic horse and encourage increased trade, services and recreation in connection with the Icelandic horse.

In addition, work continued on reaching target Group 1: Foreign parties from all over the world already involved with the Icelandic horse in one way or the other, and Group 2: Tourists in Iceland and travellers passing through Keflavík International Airport. For example, promotional material was published in the in-flight entertainment system of Icelandair.

Funding was put into promoting the Icelandic horse in international shows, where numerous breeds are demonstrated, for example in Sweden, USA and Germany.

HOI also funded horse-related education and presentations given in Iceland in cooperation with the Icelandic Horse Association (LH), the Champions League (Meistaradeildin í hestaíþróttum) and other parties of interest within the Icelandic horse community.

It is possible to reach people strategically on digital media by country, gender, age and hobby and this is something which is taken advantage of, especially on Facebook.

## MARKETING ACTIVITIES, PROMOTIONAL MATERIAL AND EVENTS IN 2019

Shows and events:

1. FEIF meeting in Berlin, Germany, 1-3 February
2. Equitana, Essen, Germany, 9-17 March
3. Collaboration with the Champions League
4. The International Day of the Icelandic Horse, 1 May (held annually)
5. The National Day of Iceland, 17 June in Reykjavík
6. Falsterbo Horse Show, Sweden, 6-14 July
7. World Championships of Icelandic Horses, Berlin, Germany, 4-11 August
8. Ministers on the Nordic Council of Ministers met in Iceland in late August
9. Press trip to Laufskálaréttir horse roundup and visits to partners 27-29 September (*CP Creatives, Canon, CNN Travel and Metro Online*)
10. Press trip to Víðidalstungurétt horse roundup with HOI partner Íslandshestar, 2-6 October (*Icelandair Stopover* in-flight magazine along with live broadcasts on HOI's social media)
11. Stand at Equine Affaire in Springfield, USA, 7-10 November (in cooperation with the United States Icelandic Horse Congress)
12. Photography and social media course on 20 November at Eldhestar in South Iceland with Gígja Einarsdóttir and Gunnar Feyr Gunnarsson, Icelandic Explorer. The course was full within a day with waiting lists.
13. Stand at the Sweden International Horse Show in Stockholm, Sweden, 28 November-1 December (in cooperation with the Swedish Icelandic horse association)
14. World Horse Culture Forum, Hohhot, China, 29 November-1 December
15. Promotional collaboration at the Pferd & Jagd fair in Hannover, Germany, 5-8 December

It should also be noted that the project has been promoted at numerous other occasions, including the annual meeting of the Horse Breeders Association of Iceland and more.

### **The highlights of 2019:**

#### Events in Iceland:

##### The International Day of the Icelandic horse, 1 May:

This year a video contest was organised, and a grand prize was given to the producers of the most popular video, which received the most views and votes from HOI social media followers. The response was excellent with over 30 videos submitted to the contest. HOI can use the video material for marketing purposes. Following the video contest, subscribers to the newsletter increased by 1000.

HOI cooperated successfully with the Icelandic Horse Association (LH) on introducing the initiative to all member associations. As a result, many member associations organised presentations and events for their members, as well as members of the general public. It's pleasing to observe that the International Day of the Icelandic horse is becoming a tradition with programmes in Iceland and abroad. A great number of Icelandic horse lovers share the joy on this day, open their stables to members of the public, invite them to go horseback riding, organise shows and competition. Naturally, all events are shared on social media with the *#horsesoficeland* hashtag.

The following associations organised events:

1. **Sprettur** Garðabær/Kópavogur. A show in collaboration with the Agricultural University of Iceland called Reiðmaðurinn ("The Rider"), where students competed for the Reynisbikar trophy. Riding schools from the area introduced their operations and invited children to sit on hand-led horses. Children and teenagers from Sprettur demonstrated horse football. Hólar University College promoted Knapamerkin, the Icelandic Riding Levels, demonstrating the top levels for spectators. **HOI sent a journalist and a photographer** to Sprettur to take interviews and photograph the event and stream live on social media. Photos sent in by others were published on HOI's social media channels.
2. **Skagfirðingur** Sauðárkrókur. The show Æskan og hesturinn where young riders demonstrated their skills.
3. **Geysir** Hella. A show with young riders.
4. **Hörður** Mosfellsbær. A show in the riding hall, open for everyone.
5. **Sleipnir** Selfoss. Children invited to sit on hand-led horses in the local riding hall.
6. **Glófaxi** Vopnafjörður. An open house in the stable in Norður-Skálanes and children invited to sit on hand-led horses.
7. **Sörli** Hafnarfjörður. A show in the riding hall, open for everyone.
8. **Freyfaxi** Egilsstaðir. A competition among local businesses in Stekkhólmi.
9. **Dreyri** Akranes. A competition among local businesses in Æðaroddi.
10. **Snæfellingur** Snæfellsnes. A sports competition in Grundarfjörður. Open house and children invited to sit on hand-led horses in five riding halls in the Snæfellsnes region: Ólafsvík, Grundarfjörður, Stykkishólmur, Hallkellsstaðarhlíð and Lýsuhóll on the occasion of HSH's sports day.
11. **Práinn** Grenivík. Group ride and other events.
12. **Fákur** Reykjavík. The show Æskan og hesturinn where young riders demonstrated their skills.

To make it easier for associations to advertise the Day of the Icelandic Horse in a consistent manner, a document was made accessible on HOI's website. The document could be filled out electronically with the programme of each association, printed out and used as posters and/or flyers. The arrangement proved successful and the idea came up to make the document available in more languages this year.

#### The National Day of Iceland - 17 June, central Reykjavík:

Last year, HOI and LH cooperated on promoting the Icelandic horse on the Icelandic National Day, 17 June, in the city centre; inside the City Hall and in public park Hljómskálagarðurinn by the Pond. In the City Hall, brochures, postcards and posters were distributed by HOI representatives to the public and people were also given the chance to try HOI's popular VR-headset. By the Pond an area had been fenced off where horses and riders demonstrated the different gaits. Afterwards, they put on a show with a few circus acts. During the show, a presenter explained what was happening and shared general information about the Icelandic horse.

#### Events abroad:

##### Equitana:

Horses of Iceland participated in Equitana in Essen, Germany, in March. The fair, which is held every other year, is the largest of its kind in Europe, attracting approximately 200,000 guests. It was among the most extensive projects HOI participated in last year. The Icelandic horse was promoted in a large stand where guests could, for example, watch a 360-degree video of the Icelandic horse outside in Icelandic nature with the VR-headset and through virtual reality, travel to its natural habitat. The initiative proved very popular; very few people had experienced virtual reality before. HOI partners were also promoted at the stand and HOI screened a video about the Icelandic horse on a 90 meter screen in the exhibition area for the duration

of the fair, every day of the week, five times a day. During the fair, 700 people signed up for the HOI newsletter. At Equitana, the goal was to reach people who own or ride horses of other breeds and bring the qualities of the Icelandic horse to their attention.

#### Falsterbo:

HOI participated in the 2019 Falsterbo Horse Show, making it the first time that the Icelandic horse was presented in this fabulous show. First held in 1920, Falsterbo will celebrate its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. The show has very strong roots and traditions within the international horse world. It runs for nine days in early July every year. Falsterbo has one of the eight competition areas in the world where FEI Nations Cup Top League competitions take place, meaning that the world's best horses and riders in show jumping and dressage compete there. Falsterbo Horse Show is Scandinavia's largest FEI event, attended annually by 60,000-65,000 guests. Events with the Icelandic horse were held after the competitions were finished on the Wednesday and Thursday. These were finals in four gait, five gait and tölt, as well as demonstrations of "champagne ride" (tölt were the riders held full champagne glasses without spilling) and flying pace. The acts proved very popular with 2,000-3,000 people watching each night. The horses were superb. Interested riders had applied for participation rights and when choosing riders and horses for the show, their position on FEIF's World-Ranking list was taken into account.

#### World Championships for Icelandic Horses:

The World Championships were held in Berlin, Germany, in early August. HOI and IPZV, the German Icelandic Horse Association, shared a large tent on the competition grounds, along with a few businesses. At the HOI stand, HOI partners FEI, LM2020 (Landsmót – the National Horse Competition in Iceland) and WorldFengur were also represented. The stand was busy with daily presentations and lectures, about social media, photography, Icelandic curb bits, Knapamerkin – the Icelandic Riding Levels, the history of the Icelandic horse and more. The Icelandic national team in equestrian sports sold T-shirts for supporters of the team at the stand and therefore there was a steady stream of people through the tent. Live Icelandic music was played, various old and new videos of the Icelandic horse were screened. HOI and FEIF collaborated, celebrating FEIF's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the tent and Vikingyr served Icelandic lamb at the occasion.

#### World Horse Culture Forum in China:

HOI travelled further than ever before at the end of November, to Hohhot in Inner Mongolia, Northern China, to participate in the 2019 World Horse Culture Forum. At the forum, representatives of various breeds from 30 countries gathered to discuss Chinese horse culture and world horse civilization. Horsemanship, especially leisure riding, is in rapid growth in China. At the same time, Chinese tourists are coming to Iceland in growing numbers, despite an overall downturn in tourism. There was a 16% increase in the number of Chinese tourists in 2019, compared to the year prior. The forum was primarily a platform for people to talk and network. This was the first time that someone was there to represent the Icelandic horse and there was no representative from the Nordic countries. After the forum, HOI received a statement from CHIA saying that the association is interested in sending a delegation to Iceland to learn more about Icelandic horse culture. HOI has also made an analysis of the possible marketing opportunities in China.

#### Equine Affaire:

HOI participated in Equine Affaire in the USA, a four-day show, where 50 different horse breeds come together. The promotion was a collaboration between HOI and USIHC (The United States Icelandic Horse Congress). It is estimated that more than 100,000 people attended the show. This year, the show team Knights of Iceland were part of the evening programme. They performed their act four times and approximately 5,000 people watched each performance. Additionally, lectures and presentations of the

Icelandic horse took place during the day programme. Attendees at Equine Affaire have always taken a great interest in Iceland and the Icelandic horse and have been eager to pick up promotional material.

#### Sweden International Horse Show:

The show is held annually in early December. The estimated number of guests is 90,000. HOI organised an innovative demonstration where riding instructor Julio Borba taught both an Icelandic horse rider and a dressage rider, who then switched horses. There were also other demonstrations organised by SIF and SIF Avel (the Swedish Icelandic Horse Association and Swedish Icelandic Horse Breeding Association), and events on both Friday's and Saturday's evening programme. The number of spectators was 10,000-15,000 each night. HOI was the main sponsor of the Icelandic horse events. An advertisement poster from HOI was placed at the track during competitions and shows and video material was played on a giant screen during competitions and shows, also during intermissions. Shows and demonstrations were of a high standard, featuring world champions and professionals from the Icelandic horse industry from around the world.

#### **Horses of Iceland website:**

The website *horsesoficeland.is* is intended to be a platform for content connected with the Icelandic horse and is now entitled: "The official site of the Icelandic horse". On the website, the most important information on the Icelandic horse can be found, including gaits, colours, breeding goals, qualities, etc. HOI's brochures are accessible on the website. The website is in four languages: Icelandic, English, German and Swedish.

Emphasis was placed on making content which is updated regularly more visible with better placement higher up on the website, such as our stories, events and photo gallery. Every month one or more stories on Icelandic horse-related subjects is published on the website, for example, about special relationships between horses and humans, famous stallions which have passed away, Christmas stories featuring the Icelandic horse, travel stories, etc.

On the website, information about HOI partners and their websites can also be found. All questions about the Icelandic horse which are sent to HOI or Promote Iceland are referred to the project's partners.

#### **Research, surveys and collection of data:**

HOI has cooperated with various educational institutions on research, surveys and collections of data connected to the Icelandic horse.

Ingibjörg Sigurðardóttir, assistant professor at Hólar University College, has compiled various statistics and data concerning the Icelandic horse, including about the value of the Icelandic horse breed, export, sale of horse products to foreign tourists, the value of horse-related tourism, the number of horses compared to human inhabitants in each region of Iceland, and more.

HOI is researching the capacity, organisation and operations of riding schools in Europe and North America.

Hrafnhildur Helga Guðmundsdóttir, a postgraduate student in Marketing and International Business at the University of Iceland, carried out a survey on the awareness of and brand value of Horses of Iceland. She studied positive and negative associations with the Icelandic horse, whether the aspects highlighted in HOI's campaigns had reached target audiences and the likelihood of participants buying an Icelandic horse, among other items. Participants came from many different countries.



### Brochures and marketing material:

A detailed brochure about the Icelandic horse was made in 2016, when the project was launched. Today it has been printed in five languages: Icelandic, English, German, Swedish and Chinese.

In the past year, the brochure was updated and republished in Icelandic, Swedish and English. Postcards with the Icelandic horse have proven very popular and printed in tens of thousands of copies.

### Campaigns:

HOI and LH are preparing a campaign in Iceland to encourage more people to become leisure riders. Commercials are being prepared for national broadcaster RÚV (do you want to be a horse person?) where people are told that they can find more information on the websites of HOI and LH.

### Newsletter mailing list:

People can sign up for the HOI newsletter through the website and currently more than 6,000 people from all around the world receive news from us on a regular basis. The newsletter contains information about the events HOI participates in, what happened during these events, the latest stories on the website and the latest news from the Icelandic horse world.

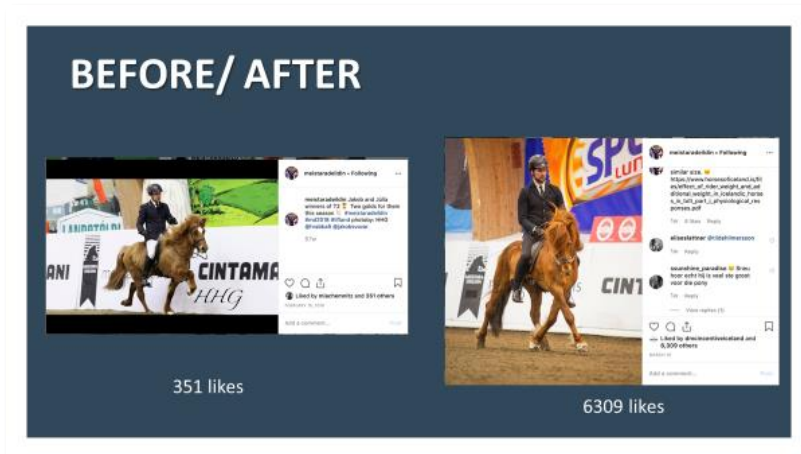
It has proven successful to get new people to sign up for the newsletter with various games, quizzes, etc. This medium has become quite influential, reaching readers in all corners of the world.

### Social media:

The Icelandic horse is very popular on social media. We have more than 110,000 followers and they grow in number every day. Facebook and Instagram are our main media, along with YouTube.

HOI has also assisted its partners in building up their social media, for example, the Icelandic Champions League in Equestrian Sports (Meistaradeildin í hestaíþróttum). In less than three months, their number of followers increased by 150%!

You can find a detailed analysis of social media further down in the report.



## Videos:

First after the project was launched, in 2016-2017, HOI produced some large-scale videos which have been very effective in promoting the Icelandic horse. We have made very good use of these videos, republished them regularly and used clips of them for promotions and commercials. In 2019, emphasis was placed on live streaming from the events and shows HOI participated in and use the video material for other promotions and videos. These events include the World Championships for Icelandic Horses, Falsterbo Horse Show, Equitana, 17 June in Reykjavík, Sweden International Horse Show, etc.

New videos were also released in 2019; HOI and FEIF – the International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations cooperated successfully on producing a promotional video for the “Riding horse profile”.

It has become more common that foreign news media who come to Iceland on HOI’s invitation make videos about their stories, including *CP Creatives* and *Metro Online*.

FEI TV visited the country in 2018 to attend Landsmót in Reykjavík and produced two documentary shows, which were aired in February 2019. It is estimated that these episodes reached 240 million people.

Equus WorldWide produced a documentary about the *Mývatn Open – Horses on Ice* tournament and Hólar University College. It is estimated that the show reached 45 million people.

The presenters of US television series *Gentle Giants* came to Iceland to learn about the Icelandic horse. They produced a 20-minute programme which was broadcast on RFD TV in the USA. Approximately 250,000 people watch the channel every week.

*Tails of Iceland* is a documentary about the Icelandic horse and its connection to the Icelanders. The film was produced by April Anderson with the assistance of HOI. The film premiered in Bíó Paradís cinema in Reykjavík and screened at the EQUUS Film Festival in the USA.

In 2019 we also started preparing the production of videos that are larger in scale and will be released in 2020. These include a video on the development of riding culture in Iceland, looking back more than 100 years.

All videos are made accessible on the HOI website, YouTube and Facebook.

## Partner promotions:

At the end of 2019, HOI had 65 partners.

Partners who support the project by ISK 150,000 or more earn the right to have their company/operations promoted on HOI’s social media. The partners who were promoted in 2019 are as follows:

- |                         |                          |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Hornhestar           | 12. Litla Brekka         |
| 2. Hrímnir              | 13. WorldFengur          |
| 3. The Champions League | 14. Hólaskóli            |
| 4. Íslandshestar        | 15. MAST                 |
| 5. Íslenski hesturinn   | 16. Kjarr Horse Breeding |



- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 6. FEIF  | 17. Íshestar                             |
| 7. Landsmót 2020                                 | 18. Vesturkot                            |
| 8. Vík horses                                    | 19. USIHC                                |
| 9. Eldhestar                                     | 20. Söðulsholt                           |
| 10. Hagagæði                                     | 21. Riding Iceland                       |
| 11. The Horse Breeders Association of<br>Iceland | 22. The Icelandic Equestrian Association |
|  | 23. Blesastaðir                          |

The partners who have participated in the project for the longest time have been promoted twice and we try to arrange for them to have the promotions made during different seasons. Afterwards, the partners receive photographs, or a short video, which they can use for their own marketing purposes.

The partners who support the project by ISK 300,000 or more are entitled to access to the stand at all shows and events in which HOI participates. There, they can use the facilities to promote their respective companies, give short presentations, distribute promotional material, screen promotional videos and have their logo printed on one of the stand's walls.

#### **Public relations – newspapers/magazines/media/television:**

- Advertisements were published in horse magazines and at international shows and competitions around the world, including the USA, Sweden, Germany and Denmark.
- HOI was visible on Icelandic television, including in the Champions League (RÚV).
- Through good partnership with Inspired by Iceland and other projects within Promote Iceland content from HOI was shared and published on their platforms.
- Representatives from *FEI TV*, a subscription television channel run by the International Federation for Equestrian Sports, were invited to the country in July 2018. They filmed at Landsmót and at some of HOI's partners. The episodes were published in early 2019 with an estimated reach of 240 million.
- A journalist from *Spiegel Online* was invited to the country to join a horse tour in Skagafjörður in North Iceland with a HOI partner. The online magazine has 20 million subscribers.
- A journalist from Britain's largest online newspaper *Metro Online* was invited to Laufskálaréttir horse roundup. She made a short video about the roundup which was aired at the newspaper's outlets. It has 12 million subscribers.
- An article about the Icelandic horse appeared in a new Icelandic magazine on outdoor recreation for children and teenagers called *Hvað*.
- A journalist from CNN Travel was invited to Laufskálaréttir horse roundup. The resulting feature appeared in the media outlet's online magazine which usually has around 33 million readers.
- British influencer Esme Higgs came to the country to get to know the Icelandic horse. She made a video called "Icelandic Horse Adventure" which can be watched on YouTube and has 70,000 views.
- A video made by *The Trip Sisters* about the Icelandic horse was released on *National Geographic Travel's* social media, which has 5.8 million followers.
- The representatives of *CP Creatives*, a marketing agency which has a strong social media presence, were invited to the country in cooperation with Inspired by Iceland. Their social media posts and entries reached more than 2 million people through *Canon Photography* channels. .
- A journalist from *Icelandair Stopover* in-flight magazine was invited, along with a photographer, to go on a four-day horse tour to Víðidalstungurétt horse roundup. A feature with photographs will appear in the magazine, which is placed in the seat pockets of all of the airline's aircraft, in 2020.

The journalist also wrote a story about the trip for HOI’s website. Live streaming from the tour on HOI’s social media proved very popular.

- Award-winning photographer Drew Doggett came to Iceland to photograph the Icelandic horse. His photo series “In the Realm of Legends” has garnered considerable attention on social media. Drew won an award for the photo “Endless Dream” from the series.
- A commercial and video from HOI were screened in the in-flight entertainment system of Icelandair.

### Social media – detailed analysis:

Since the project was launched in 2016, content from HOI has appeared in the news feed of several million people on social media, primarily Facebook and Instagram.

This is probably the largest and most extensive promotion of the Icelandic horse in times of digital media. Followers on social media numbered 110,000 at the end of 2019 and continuously increase. For the first time, followers on Instagram overtook followers on Facebook. There are now approximately 46,000 followers on Facebook and 64,000 on Instagram.

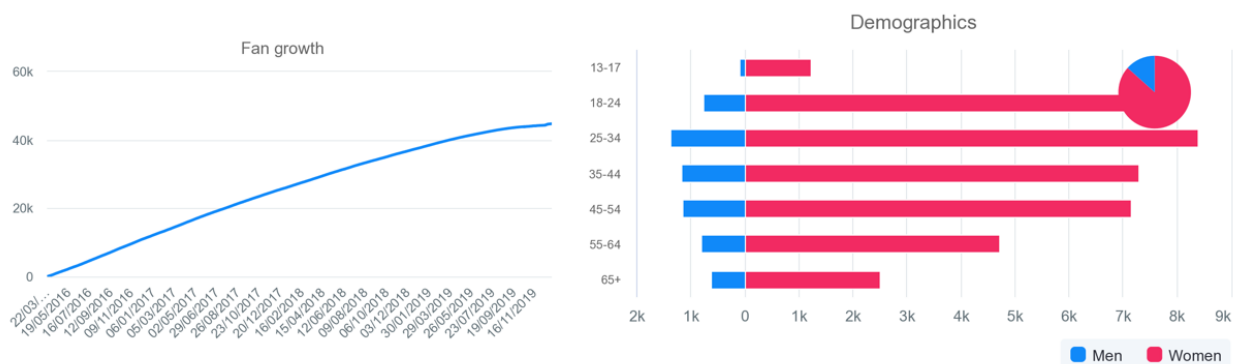
What characterises our followers is how active they are - our posts have a very high “engagement rate” which indicates how many people like, comment on and share our posts. This makes our social media a great platform to reach this large group of Icelandic horse lovers and provides our partners with a great opportunity to advertise and promote their operations.

Using a special formula, it is possible to estimate how much value the brand has created on social media. Value creation on Facebook and Instagram in 2018-2019 was **USD 580,200**, or approximately **ISK 72 million**.

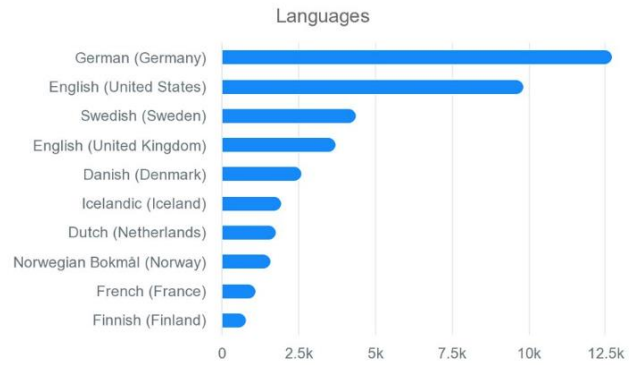
Actions taken in order to keep followers active included phrasing posts on social media as questions, encouraging followers to respond and publish photos from their private collections, for example in relation to Halloween and Christmas.

In 2019 some well-known individuals from the international horse community were asked to “take over” HOI’s social media for a few days at a time. These include award-winning photographer Drew Doggett among others.

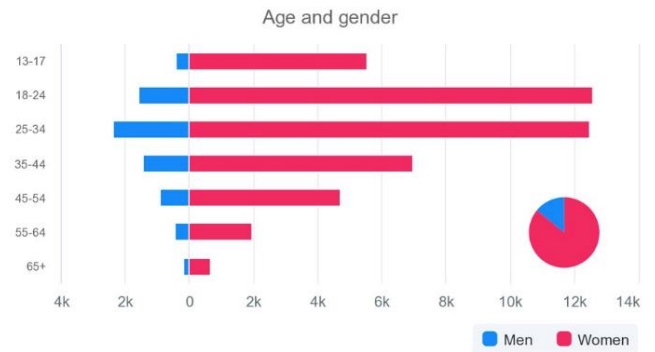
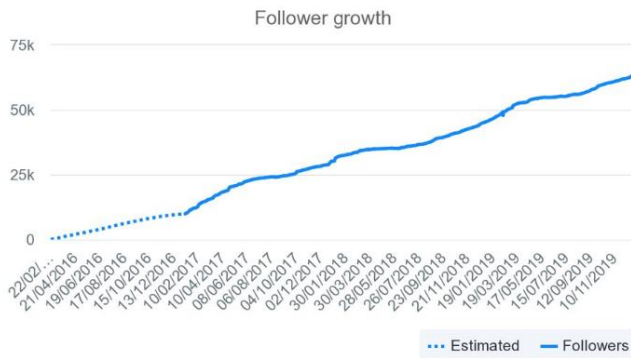
The development of followers on Facebook by age group:



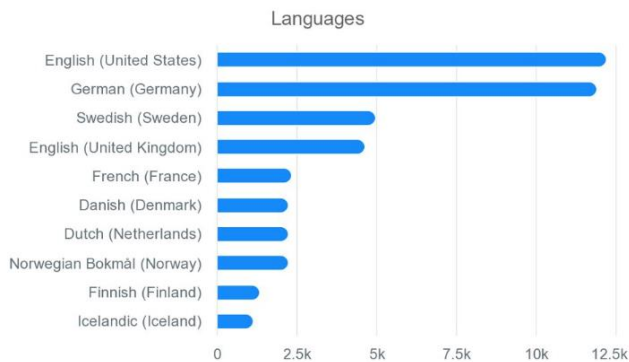
The division of followers on Facebook by country:



Instagram community development 2016-2019:



Division of followers on Instagram by country:



### **The future of the marketing project Horses of Iceland:**

Preparations for the marketing project Horses of Iceland began in 2015. In 2016-2019 the project was funded equally by the Icelandic state and partners from the industry. In early 2020 an agreement was reached with the state on continued funding for another 18 months while a new long-term agreement is being worked on to guarantee that the project will carry on prospering well into the future. Those interested in participating in the project can contact Horses of Iceland project manager Jelena Ohm.

### **GAIN FROM PARTICIPATION IN THE PROJECT**

Participants in the project gain the following:

- Synergy – to be a participant in group of collaborators who are all keen to contribute to marketing the Icelandic horse.
- Attending meetings two to three times a year to review the policy and determine the focus of marketing.
- Networking with other participants – access to the HOI network of contacts.
- Access to information about marketing activities, conclusions of studies and practical knowledge.
- The opportunity to be included in marketing activities and events, such as in relation with Landsmót and the World Championships, where the project is promoted.
- Visibility and promotion of the participant, for example have the company's logo and a link to its website published on the project's website; visibility at events; have promotional material included in a media package distributed to journalists who come to Iceland in connection with the project; and promotion by direct target mail (note: this depends on the amount contributed to the project).
- Permission to use the project's slogan (Horses of Iceland – bring you closer to nature) on the company's website with a link to the project's website and access to HOI's marketing material.
- Various other opportunities, including on social media.

Further information is provided by project manager Jelena Ohm, [jelena@islandsstofa.is](mailto:jelena@islandsstofa.is).

See also:

[www.horsesoficeland.is](http://www.horsesoficeland.is)

[www.facebook.com/horsesoficeland](https://www.facebook.com/horsesoficeland)

[www.instagram.com/horsesoficeland](https://www.instagram.com/horsesoficeland)