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EXCLUSIVE

An Exchange Professional Speaks : Q & A with Optix's John Doyle

Q & A with John Doyle



National Handicapping Champion and creator of [OptixEQ](#)

HM: How did you come up with the idea for Optix?

JD: We just created a platform for the way we handicap. Initially, we were not really looking for it to be commercial. You know the expression, “Work smarter, not harder?” We basically wanted to take the key elements we used to analyze a race, and present that in a visually dynamic way, so that instead of spending a half-hour or so handicapping a race in great detail, we’d only have to spend five minutes—yet still have superior information.

Our focus has been more on trip- and pace-handicapping, but we have many facets to the platform, including our own speed figures (OptixFIGs). The best part about OptixEQ is that the information is presented in such a simple, visual way—yet the data and analysis behind the visuals is so high-level.

When we were building the platform, we also wanted to have a consistent approach so that we could validate and measure what was working and what was not, which is why we came up with certain keywords and color schemes in our OptixNOTES past-performances and for the metrics used on the OptixPLOT. We consider ourselves a visual handicapping platform with an emphasis on analytics.

HM: Often times when someone creates a new product, he or she dives really deep into their handicapping and learns new things, or perhaps finds out something about their handicapping tenets they thought was right, but wasn't. Has the process made you a better handicapper? Did you learn anything from the process of interest?

JD: Yes, it's been a very introspective journey. We started to realize what was important to us—and what would be important to the end-user. We found that our traditional handicapping had a lot of information clutter. There was a lot of information that we overused or emphasized too much, like pedigree and trainer analysis. Now I don't want all the trainer and pedigree experts throwing stones, because there is value in what they do—it's just that we wanted our approach to be more focused on the horse itself. We understand the trainer plays a pivotal role, but from a handicapping perspective, that information is secondary to the horse itself.

I love some of those trainer stats that get mentioned. I wonder if a trainer even knows he's really good third off a layoff with blinkers off stretching out a horse to a mile for the first time. I assume most trainers have their methods, but they are most likely not tailored to that level of specificity. We are trying to work on a trainer product and find the right balance between the trainer patterns and some of the more qualitative data (i.e., workouts, trips, horse's style, and physicality).

Also, and I know I will get into trouble for this one, but from a handicapping—not breeding—perspective, I think pedigree analysis is well overblown. It may be because I'm not that good at it, but it's my opinion that once you've seen a horse physically and seen how they run, then that trumps what his mother or father or their offspring could do.

We remain open to incorporating all handicapping methods, however, and, over time, we will continue to evolve our products and adjust to changes—especially based on the feedback of our customers.



HM: Trip notes have been a real pencil and paper struggle for many handicappers. Can you tell us what goes into your trip notes?

JD: OptixNOTES is a really integral part of our platform—and it's not just because we think our notes are superior, but it's also because we are able to do analytics based on the data (performance grades, keyword descriptors, projections, etc.) that we have collected.

But as far as making the notes go, we first start with making sure that the people doing the trip notes are really good and have a passion for doing it. Anyone who has ever done trip notes for any period of time knows they can be a real grind. We have an excellent NOTES team lead by Emily Gullikson and Donald Harris, who have been a part of Optix from very early on, and it's quite impressive to see the vast repository of trip notes and grades we have amassed. When you view these notes and grades as part of our integrative past-performance platform, you are seeing information—really valuable information—that no one else has.

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I think part of the reason our OptixNOTES product has been so successful is because we have a specific methodology that everyone on the team adheres to—and that makes our notes, grades, and keywords consistent, no matter what the circuit, so we can accurately assess a horse's form and also pick up on form-cycle patterns that can't be discerned from just looking at the running lines. And when I talk about "methodology," I mean there is an approach to not only cataloging the data but to collecting it as well—from paddock and pre-race activity all the way through the gallop-out. We also have quality-control built into the process, so we can be sure that the information provided to our customers is the best it can possibly be.



HM: While many of us as long-time handicappers tend to be married in our ways -- we get used to the form, or other paper past performances or figures etc - younger people betting DFS, Sports etc are very different. Do you think products like yours and some of the other newer products have a better chance to reach a new market?

JD: An OptixEQ handicapping approach is much more visual, and if you trust your eyes and our information, you should be able to eliminate bad horses and just focus on contenders much more rapidly than anything else. Like I said, we are trying to remove the clutter so that the handicapping process is much more streamlined and efficient, freeing up your mental energy so that you can be creative with your wagers.

How many players tell you that they are great handicappers but terrible bettors? A lot—and that's because they spend 90 percent of their time handicapping and only 10 percent of their time writing tickets. Traditional handicapping is a lot of work—and the brain is only capable of processing so much information at a time. OptixEQ makes the handicapping process so much more efficient and a lot more fun.

As for your generational point: we have found that some of the younger players have taken to our stuff much more rapidly as compared to the more established players who tend to be set in their ways. The younger players are less intimidated by the way the interface looks, and they dive right in, partly because they are used to digesting

information in a visual way.

We understand that it's hard to change something you've been doing for twenty years—and if you are doing well and winning tournaments, then why change? However, we have found that the players who were on the cusp of taking their handicapping to the next level and were looking for an edge have done very well incorporating our products.

One of the strongest things we have going for us is our learning curve—it's quite easy. If you presented our platform to a new player and put it next to a traditional past-performance product, I can guarantee you that the new player will gravitate to our product first because it's intuitive and easy to use. You can instantly look at an OptixPLOT and understand the pace dynamics and the shape of a race.

HM: Whether you are selling figures or new handicapping products, horses, hay or feed, or are a fan or bettor or owner, we all want to see the game grow; to broaden the tent. Where do you think the sport can improve, to increase handle, bring more people into the game, and grow again?

JD: I think innovation is a key component. One area that needs improvement is the whole information space. I'm being a bit self-serving here, but racing can do a better job if it provided more open access to information while also supporting innovation efforts to present and educate new players on the use of that handicapping data.

If you're a new player in the game today, you essentially have to learn the game the same way I did 45 years ago. Someone hands you a Racing Form and wishes you good luck. I don't see that cutting it with this generation. They do a lot of online self-learning, and they want their information more quickly. They aren't necessarily looking for the answer; they just need products that cut through the clutter and help them make better handicapping decisions more quickly. I'd like to think that OptixEQ is a game-changer in this regard.

Horseplayer Alert!!!

STATS LLC and Equibase Company entered into a strategic partnership last year to develop products and services for horseplayers. The goal of the partnership was to develop a product to improve horseplayers' experiences while handicapping.

This product is now ready for review and Equibase is seeking potential BETA testers. That is where you come in! All participants who test the product and complete an online questionnaire will receive complimentary access to the product for three months once it is launched.

If you are interested in participating as a BETA tester, please take a brief survey at the link below.

Survey Link:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/FF5XG6R>