



Step Up Your Game

Effective marketing requires a solid plan.

by **Barb Baylor Anderson**, field editor

There's more to merchandising cattle than placing an ad in a magazine or producing a sale book. To make the most of your marketing bucks, think bigger picture. You may want to hire a professional to identify your niche and build your farm's brand through a solid long-term plan.

"An advertising campaign is just like a breeding, nutrition or financial program. They are all important to your business success but don't work without a plan," says

Julie French of McMahon French Promotional Strategy, Beaverton, Mich. "Don't just advertise your cattle here or there. Commit financially and highlight the unique aspects of your program through a long-term plan."

Deb Norton, Graphic Arts of Topeka Inc., Topeka, Kan., agrees.

"Many producers market their cattle in a short window relative to a production sale," she observes. "Building a brand identity is an investment over time to communicate who you are and not just what you sell."

The advertising challenge for Angus breeders, Norton continues, is that producers have to find ways to keep their operations sustainable in a mature market.



"In other words, producers must determine their competitive edge in the marketplace. A seedstock producer can't just focus on advertising a sale. They have to focus on selling what is industry-relevant," she says. "They may not know what building a brand can do for their operation. Part of our job is to help educate. There is enormous value and longevity in building a brand."

Understand value of assistance

By hiring an outside or third-party marketing agency, freelance marketing specialist or working with *Angus Journal* staff, you may get a fresh perspective and expertise.

Rachel Cutrer, Ranch House Designs Inc., Wharton, Texas, encourages producers to begin by getting an evaluation of their marketing strategies and farm strengths.

"We always tell our clients, 'You never want to spend a dollar on advertising without a plan and an evaluation. Staff members from *Angus Journal* or other firms are professionals in marketing and advertising. They want you to succeed,'" she says. "Use them to your fullest advantage. We can help our clients know what other producers are doing, know what bloodlines are popular, and know what current marketing tools generate the most return on investment."

In addition to expertise, French says a big difference between creating your own advertising and promotion and paying someone else to do it is the time it takes to do the job right.

"One of the challenges to advertising in general is that people get easily discouraged with the deadlines, especially in print where you may have to work a full 30 days ahead," she says. "An agency will keep you disciplined. They understand the market and the breed, should offer both design and writing talent along with advice on when to adjust or change a campaign."

Where you sell cattle is just part of the analysis, adds Norton. She encourages producers who are not happy with previous advertising results to look at where they have spent their marketing money in the past. Changes should be made according to what worked and what didn't work.

"The traditional focus is photos and sale ads. One of the most important pieces today is to understand the intrinsic value of having a working and dynamic website also. It should be part of the strategy to have a virtual ranch headquarters you can operate at almost no cost. You can use video and

21 rules of branding

Becky Weishaar, director of Creative Media with Angus Productions Inc., oversees API's branding and business-development efforts. Here are the 21 rules of branding she presented at the Angus Means Business National Convention & Trade Show in Kansas City, Mo.:

1. No one has all the answers.
2. Be a contrarian. It's OK to be different and to think outside the box.
3. Whoever tells the best story wins. The most powerful aspect of the story you tell may be the human element.
4. Hire a kid. Put a college-age person on your payroll with social-media expertise.
5. Capture, store and maintain customer information in a system you will use and update.
6. Put some hay in the barn. Photos, words and video are the currency of advertising and marketing. You will need to rely on these when marketing.
7. Develop a social media and Internet presence.
8. Be smartphone friendly. For example, be sure your website works on mobile devices and has active links to contact information.
9. Build a simple website that you can update.
10. Launch a YouTube channel. You can exponentially reach more people and post videos of cattle for sale, for example, and direct buyers to them.
11. Measure results. Find out the analytics behind your online presence.
12. Get moving. You still must go see people face-to-face to be effective.
13. Color is everything. Be consistent, just like John Deere.
14. Get a great logo. API can design one, or you can seek out other professional help.
15. Go old school. Write thank-you notes and written communications to clients.
16. Write. Build a personal touch, produce a newsletter.
17. Maintain contact. Have regular contact with customers, ask about their farm and family. Reconnect in 72 hours or less with new contacts, or you might lose them.
18. Create a story not just around you, but around specific things you have to sell.
19. Teach. Angus breeders set the pace for the industry. Share that knowledge.
20. Repeat, repeat, repeat. While you may be getting tired of an ad, it may just be beginning to have an impact on prospective customers.
21. Understand the tools you have to work with, and choose one or a few. You do not have to engage with every possible social media avenue.



PHOTO BY BARB BAYLOR ANDERSON

Becky Weishaar

social media to supplement what you are doing," she says.

Select the right team

So how do you choose an agency or marketing specialist? French says start by looking at ads and sale books and other material to see what you like or don't like.

"If you find something you like, call the producer and find out who does their work," she says. "You need to bring in someone who can be a member of your team. If you have had challenges in the past, share them. You know more about your program than anyone, so write down what describes your

herd and list the goals and features of your program. You have to trust your agency with all of this information for them to help you make the best decisions."

Norton says it also is important to choose someone who understands the complexity of the industry and not just the

seedstock sector. "You want someone who offers plausible strategy behind your advertising and not just single-use ads. Be sure your agency of choice offers direction, not simply an ad to meet a short-term deadline."

Cutrer recommends asking about tactical details, including pricing, turnaround times, payment policies and ad conceiving. She likes to have five business days to work on an ad, and charges a rush fee for projects on shorter deadlines. Availability is another question.

"Our firm is a professional firm. Our office hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. Some designers may work nights and weekends. Either of these have advantages and disadvantages to certain people's schedules," she says. "Visit the firm's website, learn about their employees, [and] how long they have been in business."

Build a relationship

In addition to having a long-term plan, French says consistency and frequency of messaging are important to the plan's success.

"Oftentimes, producers can tell you what they don't want more than what they do

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want. It's best if they can describe in words the look they like, and you can decide on a style together," she says. "Producers should also communicate regularly with their marketing team, not just when they need something. Pick up the phone and don't just email. Build a relationship with the people you are working with."

Regular communication is a key for Cutrer, as well.

"Decide what you want to do each month, so you have plenty of time to get pictures,

gather material and give your designer time to do their magic," she says. "Most publications have ad deadlines and camera-ready ad deadlines. There is so much more that goes into designing an ad than just two or three hours at the computer."

As producers become comfortable with their marketing specialists, working an ad campaign gets easier.

"Strive for a long-lasting relationship with a firm. Over time, the firm will learn your style and preferences," says Cutrer. "I have

some clients I can almost design for without any input now because I know them so well."

Measure your results

Once your plan is active, both directly measurable and less tangible ways are available for you to find out if your plan — and the dollars you invested — are working.

"The easiest way is to simply ask people how they heard about you," says Cutrer.

"Once a sale catalog is in the mail, I encourage producers to carry a spiral

notebook with them, and record each new and unique information request they receive. Do some market research about who is contacting you and find out how buyers heard about you," adds French. "That is the type of information that will help you become more clear on what messages to deliver."

Phone calls and emails are a traditional way to measure marketing success, but the advent of digital communications offers another easy and cost-effective way to measure your impact.

"Any time we have a new buyer at our ranch, I always ask how they found us. The answer is usually a Google search. This tells

me I need a great website," says Cutrer. "If you use Facebook advertising, there are some amazing analytics tools that tell you how effective your ad is and that has become my preferred advertising measure."

For a recent production sale for example, Cutrer invested \$50 in paid Facebook advertising on a post that directed people to request a sale book online. From that \$50, she generated 145 new sale book requests, nine of whom placed a sale bid and one who was a buyer.

"I like that digital communications is so measurable. We can easily look at data and show the number of impressions and

clickthroughs on a website," says Norton. "There are infinite marketing opportunities today, but you have to change your mind-set and see value in putting all of these pieces together and doing things differently for it all to work."

French sums, "Bottom line, remember, this is *your* money and you want to meet *your* goals and feel good about the person or agency you choose to work with on your campaign."

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Editor's Note: A former National Junior Angus Board member, Barb Baylor Anderson is a freelancer from Edwardsville, Ill.