

Connect With Your Cattle Customers

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What would you say is the most important aspect of a cattle operation? Quality is a mainstay, though depending on whether the operation is a seedstock or commercial operation, that quality shines through in genetics or beef. However, no matter the quality of your cattle, selling them is necessary to survival.

Marketing those cattle has evolved into a much larger job. No longer is successful marketing done only a few weeks before a production sale, says Brett Spader, director of operation of DV Auction. With so many technological options, marketing is more accessible, yet more overwhelming. Where do you start?

Organizing a marketing plan

“When producers are developing a marketing plan, the first thing they need to consider is that it’s a year-round effort,” explains Spader. “One of the first questions I ask is, ‘Who are you currently reaching in terms of the folks that are engaged in shopping for and purchasing from your breeding program? Who do you want to

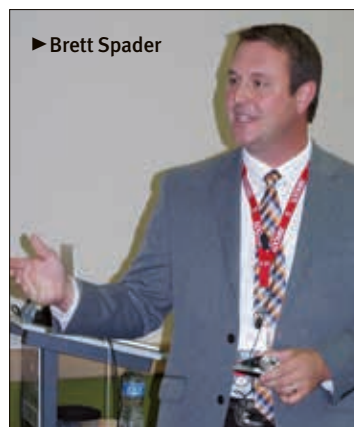
Much of marketing is communication enhanced with a strategy.

Story & photos by Kasey Brown, associate editor

reach?” That brings into play a whole idea of a marketing plan and a week-to-week effort that it takes to go out and find those new leads.”

Figure out your target audience: Are you trying to reach other breeders, or are you trying to reach commercial cattlemen? Spader says knowing this focus helps determine the best ways to reach customers. While it may seem obvious, taking the time to really identify the operation’s goals and objectives will help focus and bolster the marketing efforts. He emphasizes there are so many ways to market.

Once the objectives are narrowed, Spader helps organize customer touch-points. “One of the first things that I do with clients is sit down with a 12-month calendar. Then we



► Brett Spader

PHOTO BY BARB BAYLOR ANDERSON

identify the points where we’re actually going to create a touch-point between us and the prospective customer. Then we use that calendar to map out our plan of attack.

“We identify all the steps that we need to take and the framework that’s necessary to communicate our goals and reach out to those people. Then we map it all out on the

calendar so it’s very easy,” he adds.

This organization works for any type of marketing scheme, whether it is for a production sale, online or private treaty. He says marketing gets to be fun once there is some organization to it.

“It’s too daunting sometimes for folks to look at a marketing strategy and be able to

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break that down in a week-to-week basis. The organization also allows you to relieve some of the stress on yourself by spreading that work out all across the year rather than doing the manic pace a few weeks before the event,” Spader says.

By easing some of the pressure, marketing can stay more enjoyable, which is necessary to successful and continuous marketing.

Tool options for all sizes

Once a touch-point strategy is organized, it is time to think of which tools you are comfortable using. More and more tools are becoming available to aid in marketing efforts. Production sales will never go away, nor will private treaty, but more online tools are blossoming.

Online auctions, video sales, email blasts and social media have opened up new ways to sell cattle. These can help keep your brand in front of potential customers in addition to print media.

“Whether it’s promoting your program on the *Angus Talk* radio show or *I Am Angus* or any of the digital properties or print pieces that are available through the *Angus Journal* or API (Angus Productions Inc.), I think that as we look to the future, those are all very valuable things to reach out to people,” Spader iterates.

He emphasizes, “You’ve got to understand that bigger operations are continuing to get bigger in terms of seedstock operations. If you’re a mid-level operator or smaller operator, you’ve got to be smarter and better about what you do.”

Knowing your options will help you do that. Here are a few choices:

- ▶ Print advertising in livestock publications
- ▶ Sale books
- ▶ Postcards
- ▶ Newsletters
- ▶ Websites
- ▶ Email blasts
- ▶ Online auctions
- ▶ Video auctions
- ▶ Production sales
- ▶ Social media page
- ▶ Radio ads
- ▶ Television ads

These options can be used exclusively or in a combination of your choosing. The goal is to reach out to potential customers, and determining where your targeted customers are looking will take some thought. Spader says that is why sitting down and organizing your approach is necessary. If you need help deciding the right mix, he recommends



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asking your regional manager for assistance.

Spader says there is no set combination of tools that works for everyone, but he does recommend adding digital supplementation to print efforts.

Whether you choose an online-only embryo sale to increase your brand reach or spread out your paydays; email blasts; a sale book, postcard or ad; or daily updates on a ranch Facebook page, there are plenty of ways to connect with customers. However you do it, Spader notes, the connection is crucial.

Communication is key

Good marketing is more than just marketing tools, he asserts.

“It’s not necessarily a marketing effort, it’s a communications effort. We’re trying to find new customers and find new leads. We’re also trying to satisfy and keep in touch with the people that have already believed in our breeding program enough to make a purchase,” Spader explains.

“You have to reach out and make true and honest connections with those potential buyers. It’s too easy for them to go 5 miles up the road or 500 miles up the road and find similar genetics to what you have to offer. Smart marketing plays a role in that.

Continued efforts in terms of your marketing plays a role in that.”

Brand differentiation — and

communicating that difference and added value — is a real key to marketing cattle in the future.

Customer service is a great way to communicate that differentiation. All breeders offer cattle or genetics, he notes, but all buyers are looking for customer service. He suggests reaching out to convey what you can offer in terms of genetics, support or knowledge.

“Sometimes we have to help people find what they want, and sometimes we have to help people find what they need. You cannot really, truly do that until you have a regular and steady presence of touch-points with those potential clients that you keep active all year long,” he recommends.

“Certainly the communication flows both ways. It can be as simple as picking up the phone and calling a past customer to find out how the genetics worked for them. Obviously, it can be as refined as that yearlong marketing structure of strategies that you can apply to your marketing efforts. To me, communication is certainly one of the most important things that’s out there,” he concludes.

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— Brett Spader