



# Branding Iron

► by Eric Grant, president & general manager

## Nipping at our heels

*Robo-dog and other technological advancements could change the way we do business.*

### We've come a long way

A decade ago, everyone was concerned with the connectivity of rural America. The oft-repeated question was, "How will we ever get high-speed Internet into isolated, country homes?" A lot of farmers and ranchers simply bypassed the need for hardwires to their desktop computers when they started using mobile devices.

Today, the widespread use of smartphones and tablets by rural Americans is remarkable — and nowhere is it more evident than on [www.angus.org](http://www.angus.org), one of the cattle industry's most highly used websites, where nearly 40% of daily activity now happens on mobile devices.

Think about that.

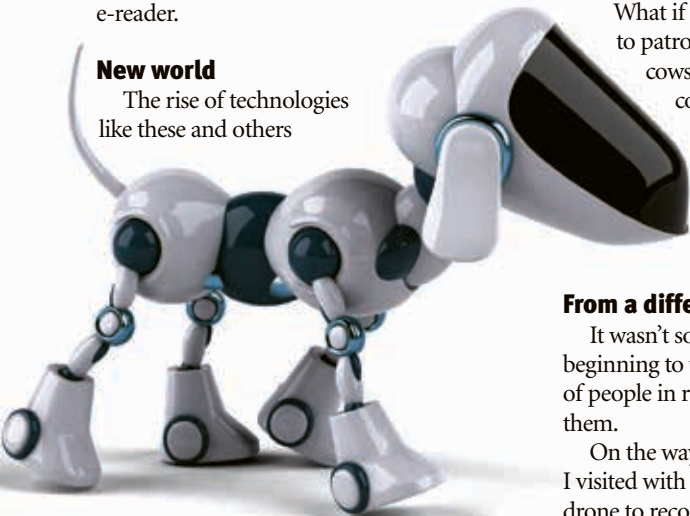
These mobile technologies didn't even exist a handful of years ago, yet worldwide there were 1.75 billion — that's billion with a "b" — people who used a smartphone in 2014, according to eMarketer.

The iPhone didn't even come into the market until 2007, and I'd bet that none of us could have expected at that time to be managing our cow herds with an "app" like Angus Mobile. Nearly 25,000 people do today.

The tablet arrived later, with widespread usage beginning in 2011, but the impact has been far-reaching and pronounced. Pew Research Center recently estimated that 50% of American adults now own a tablet or an e-reader.

### New world

The rise of technologies like these and others



presents unique challenges and opportunities for Angus breeders, particularly as they look to maintain pace with their customers who are moving fast into new technological platforms. For instance, websites built before the dawn of mobile devices just a few years ago are less competitive than websites built to be "responsive" and usable across all platforms, from desktops to smartphones.

The breeders who understand this first — that it's about delivering information to buyers in ways they want it, not the other way around — will be in a key, competitive position moving forward.

Furthermore, no one really knows where all of this takes us, but it does pay to keep a close eye on new technological breakthroughs.

Google announced last month it had developed a four-legged, robotic canine dubbed "robo-dog." It's a new technology that's capable of running at relatively high speeds, climbing steep hills and navigating difficult terrain. Internet videos even feature the robo-dog maintaining balance after being kicked by its handlers.

While Google is primarily developing the technology for military applications, the potential uses of emerging technologies like this on agriculture could be enormous.

What if robotic devices could be used to patrol our pastures, monitor calving cows and heifers, or even text us GPS coordinates when it finds a sick or injured animal?

None of this is that far-fetched — and the days of widespread use of ag robotics may not be too far away.

### From a different angle

It wasn't so long ago that we were just beginning to talk about drones. Now a lot of people in rural America seem to be using them.

On the way home from Texas last month, I visited with a ranch realtor who uses a drone to record properties he has for sale.

The whole setup cost him about \$1,000, yet it has added a significant amount of value to his company by providing his customers with unique perspectives.

It works like this: A GoPro HD video camera (about the size of the palm of your hand) is cradled in a remote-controlled "quadcopter," which allows him to shoot aerial footage across the entire span of the property. The footage is then imported from a memory card, edited together on his desktop and uploaded to his website for prospective buyers to watch.

"I edit all of this stuff myself on iMovie,"

boasted the realtor who, notably, is in his 60s. "It's really helped to sell more listings."

Like the realtor, producers are beginning to take a serious look at this emerging, potentially game-changing technology.

Farmers are using drones to scout their fields for insects and disease. There's no reason why every ranch in the country couldn't soon be using drones to check pasture conditions, water and salt, making sure all the cows are accounted for and where they need to be.

So what does this mean from an advertising and marketing perspective?

It means the times are changing. It means technology is changing everything and fast. It means the way we manage our businesses and communicate with the outside world will be reshaped in unexpected and far-reaching ways as we move into the future.

Just a handful of years from now, most of us could be gathering in our living rooms around a virtual fire, a sleeping robo-dog at our feet, a holographic *Angus Journal* in our lap, wondering how all this change happened so fast — and wondering how on earth we ever got along without it.

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**Editor's Note:** Look for "Branding Iron" to become a regular column in the *Angus Journal* featuring tips for marketing Angus cattle.