

Bloggging for Business

Telling your story through a blog can connect your business with customers and the public.

by **Christy Couch Lee** and **Julie White**

The word is out: it's time for cattlemen to tell their stories. Whether it's sharing with cattlemen or the public, a blog can be just the tool to speak their minds.

"Blog" is a shortened term for "web log," which is a Web site usually maintained by an individual who provides regular entries of commentary or other material. Blogs can be diverse, from providing news to serving as an online diary.

"Good blogs need quality writing and interesting subjects," says J. Scott Vernon, California Polytechnic State University department of agricultural education and communication faculty member. Photographs, links to other Web sites and articles, and the opportunity to comment on a blog post are common components.

Providing real connections is what *BEEF* magazine's *BEEF* Daily blog is all about. Amanda Nolz, *BEEF* Daily editor, presents beef industry news and commentary four times a week on www.BEEFmagazine.com.

"The blog began with the question of how to increase traffic on our Web site," Nolz says. "We wanted to create an online community and provide articles pertinent to the beef industry. It is a combination of personal interaction and news."

"Blogs are a useful tool for beef producers because they allow real people to connect."

— Amanda Nolz



Monday through Thursday each week from her home on her family ranch in Mitchell, S.D., Nolz provides timely industry news along with details of her experiences as a young agricultural professional. Her blog has driven 320,800 page views to *BEEF* Daily since her first post in September 2008.

Also from South Dakota, Troy Hadrick and his wife, Stacie, are fifth-generation ranchers in Vale. They began *Advocates for Agriculture* four years ago, speaking and blogging to tell a positive story for American agriculture.

"In 2002 Michael Pollan interviewed us about the beef industry for *The New York Times* article titled 'Power Steer,'" Hadrick says. "The article turned out to be much different than what he told us it would be. We were frustrated by that and realized we had to tell our story."



What began as one speech to a local Women in Agriculture group has grown to a daily blog begun in 2008, www.advocatesforag.blogspot.com, and dozens of presentations each year across the country. In the past year, the blog has experienced more than 40,000 visits.

"You can spend a lot of time on the Internet, trying to keep up with the latest news regarding agriculture," Hadrick says. "Our blog is a place for people to spend a couple of minutes each day to learn about what's going on in the industry. It's also a chance for us to talk with consumers and tell our story."

Blogs allow cattlemen to share stories, concerns and encouragement, Nolz says.

"Blogs are a useful tool for beef producers because they allow real people to connect," Nolz says. "As a young person getting my start in production agriculture, I often ask readers for their advice. We share our triumphs and we share our struggles. The best blogs are transparent and honest, creating an open community for dialogue."

Hadrick says a blog can keep a cattleman connected to the outside world, even when personal contact isn't a possibility.

“A blog never replaces the handshake and visiting with folks eyeball to eyeball,” he says. “But, it’s hard to be two places at once, especially with a job that already takes up all of your day. There’s no better way to talk to others around the globe and get work done at home, too.”

To make these connections, Hadrick says, all it takes is a few minutes, an Internet connection and a little planning.

Make a plan

Hadrick says that although it may seem intimidating, the logistics of beginning a blog are simple.

“I had never created a blog before Advocates for Ag,” Hadrick says. “Using www.blogger.com only took about five minutes to set up. It’s easy to do, and they make it easy to use.”

Before you begin a blog, Hadrick says determining your focus is critical.

“It’s important to have a focus from the beginning,” he says. “When you open up that brand-new blog and look at that blank screen, you may think, ‘What do I have to say?’ It can get discouraging. If you go in with a focus, you’ll do a better job of staying on task.”

Hadrick says updating your blog regularly keeps readers engaged.

“When I look at a site and see it hasn’t been updated in two months, I’m never going to come back,” he says. “I get the feeling that no one else is paying attention to the blog, so why should I?”

Updates are made to the Advocates for Ag blog once or twice daily. And, Hadrick says, if he’s entering a busy time, he lets readers know he’s traveling or away from the computer and he’ll begin posting again soon.

“I always want readers to know someone is behind the blog and it hasn’t been forgotten,” Hadrick says.

Blog posts are best read when they’re short and sweet, he says.

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— Troy Hadrick

“People are more likely to read four sentences rather than four paragraphs,” Hadrick says. “No one wants to sit down and read a manifesto or 8,000-word essay.”

Once the blog is written, he says, it’s also critical to tag each post with keywords that will lead newcomers to your blog.

“Think about what people will search for and what they want to know about,” Hadrick says.

Integrating a blog with Facebook and Twitter can also increase traffic to a blog, Hadrick says. As he posts something new to the blog, Hadrick provides links on the Advocates for Ag Facebook and Twitter accounts.

“Instead of readers being forced to visit the blog for updates, the updates come to them through Facebook and Twitter,” he says.

Even with proper promotion, traffic to a new blog and audience growth can be slow, Hadrick says. But, he encourages cattlemen to be persistent.

“Keep after it, and do a good job,” he says. “Let your customers know when bulls or seedstock are available. Post photos of your calves as they grow through the summer. If you do the little things and keep after it, success will come.” **HW**

How to get started with Blogger™



- Visit www.blogger.com
- Click the box “Sign up now.”
- On the page “Create Google Account,” provide required information, including e-mail address, password, display name and birth date. Click the orange “Continue” arrow.
- On the page “Name your blog,” provide your desired blog name and blog URL. Click the orange “Continue” arrow.
- On the “Choose a template” page, select your desired blog layout from the choices provided. This can be altered once your blog is established. Click the orange “Continue” arrow.
- On the “Your blog has been created” page, review the information provided, then click the orange “Start blogging” arrow.
- You will then be taken to the “New Post” page, where you can create your first blog post. Type a title into the “Title” box and the blog information into the text box below. You may alter text using the buttons at the top of the text box, and upload photos using the box featuring the image of a photo. You may label the post with relevant keywords in the “Labels for this post” box at the bottom of the text box. Click the orange “Publish Post” box to publish your post.
- You will then be taken to a page with the heading “Your blog post published successfully!” On this page you may view or edit the post or create a new post.
- You may also edit settings, posts and layout using the tabs at the top of each page.
- Click “Dashboard” in the upper right portion of the screen to be taken to your Dashboard, where you may view the statistics on your blog posts and view updates on blogs which you follow. Help information can also be found on this page. **HW**