



Hereford breeders are implementing new marketing strategies to reach new customers.

by **Robin K. Kleine**

Breeders must be willing to give the extra effort or go the extra mile to get their cattle sold, says Dale Stith, an auctioneer and sale manager from Maysville, Ky.

“One has to have the visual material available like photos and videos to interest the buyer sitting at the computer. The product has to have the EPDs (expected progeny differences) and pedigrees to fit the marketplace. Presentation is paramount,” Stith says.

Fieldmen, breeders and sale staff agree presenting cattle in the most positive manner and providing a little bit of quality customer service will get the cattle to the right homes.

“Making a customer happy will always make you money,” Stith says.

Auction formats

John Meents, American Hereford Association region 5 fieldman, says he thinks the future of live auctions will be in cooperative auctions with three to six medium-size breeders.

“People love to buy cattle at auctions, and people love to sell cattle at auctions because they bring more. In terms of live cattle, they want to see them before they write the check,” Meents adds.

But, it’s not always possible to attend a sale across the country. Matt Macfarlane spent his childhood on an Idaho ranch and showed Hereford cattle. He started M3 Cattle Marketing based in Sheridan,



Matt Macfarlane of M3 Cattle Marketing encourages producers to post videos of sale offering to give potential buyers a chance to evaluate the offering.

Internet Bidding

facebook

You Tube

What’s New in Cattle Marketing

Bid Board

Bid-Off Sale

Website

Live Auction

Video



Mud Creek Farms hosts a bid-off sale the first weekend in October.

Calif., in 2001 but has been in the cattle marketing business in the Western U.S. for nearly 20 years.

Macfarlane says Internet bidding can really add to a live auction. He explains that 2012 was the first year he used videos for the Western Nugget National Hereford Sale in Reno, Nev., and it was the highest average in the sale's history.

"Videos help because you can see everything about the cattle structurally that you can't see on a picture, and give you a better overall view of what you're potentially buying," Macfarlane says.

Stith agrees that online bidding adds to a successful sale.

"The Internet has definitely broadened the market at my auctions. There are specific buyers that have participated by Internet bidding that have never attended one of my auctions," Stith says.

Besides live auctions, other formats are being used in Hereford sales. Mud Creek Farms, German Valley, Ill., uses a bid-off sale the first weekend in October. Andrew Garnhart, his wife, Christy, and their two young boys, as well as his parents and sister, run the 60-cow operation. 2013 will be the fourth year for the Football Frenzy Bid-Off Sale.

"We wanted to find a way to drive more traffic to our farm. There are so many options to buy cattle in Illinois and this was a cost-effective route," Garnhart says.

Mud Creek Farms sells approximately 20 heifers and steers each year. All cattle are on display starting Saturday morning and bidding closes at dusk on Sunday. As Garnhart says, it's a reasonable way to sell cattle and get personal contact with every person bidding in the sale.

"I'm out there the whole time, and people can come and go as they please. I can talk to them about their needs and look at animals that will work for them," Garnhart says.

He adds that word-of-mouth is the best way of getting people to their farm, but he uses their Facebook page, Mud Creek Farms, to market cattle and to create business exposure. He also has a large e-mail database to connect with the farm's customers, in addition to its website — *Mudcreekfarms.com*. In 2012, because of these complementary marketing efforts, Mud Creek Farms sold cattle to nine states.

One of the highest averaging state sales in the nation, the Maryland Hereford Association's Celebrate Maryland Sale, is held annually the second Saturday in October. Every year there are approximately 50 lots, and the auction rotates among different members' farms. Current Maryland Hereford Association President Jay Stull and his wife, Shelly, have hosted the event five or six times at their farm, East Side Farm in Frederick, Md.

"I think it's been so successful because of our sale manager, Dale Stith, doing the selections by hand," Stull says. "He visits each farm, looks at every nomination and says yes or no. We only bring the very best to the sale."

In 2012 the Maryland Hereford Association began a bid board for the steer calves. The bid board began two hours before the live auction and was geared toward the junior members.

Maryland Hereford Association member Bobbye Schmidt initiated the idea and dealt with the actual bidding process. The calves were all groomed, halter-broke and ready for the 4-Her, Stull says. Having the calves ready for the buyers also helped the prices for the breeders, as the steers brought more this way, and set a positive tone for the rest of the sale. Stull believes the association will continue with a bid board for the steers in the future.

"It was really cool to see the children getting involved, they were going back and forth to their parents and studying the animals, and doing their own bidding," Stull says.

Utilizing videos

As another alternative, Journagan Ranch at Missouri State University, Springfield, has been using video of the lots during its Genetically Yours Sale for the past three years. The lots are filmed in late August, and three large screens show the videos at the time when the cattle are normally run through the ring. The cattle are also on display the entire week before and on sale day at the William H. Darr facility in Springfield, Mo.

Marty Lueck, manager of Journagan Ranch, says switching to using video

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Since 2010 Journagan Ranch has utilized videos of sale lots compared to running cattle through the ring.

instead of running cattle through the sale ring has been a “win-win” for both him and his customers.

Along with showing the videos during the sale, the videos are also posted prior to the sale on *BuyHereford.com*. This allows potential buyers who travel to Springfield and those who buy on the phone a chance to look at the cattle before the event.

“We have not had one bad comment,” Lueck says. “There are so many benefits to hosting the sale this way.”

He lists the benefits of:

- 1) Quickness of the sale. He says this format cuts 15-20 minutes off the sale.
- 2) The cattle are more comfortable. They are available to be viewed out in the pens but they do not have to go through the sale ring.
- 3) Cleaner sale area.
- 4) His crew can watch the sale.

The Internet

In the past five to 10 years, the Internet has supplemented cattle sales everywhere with information readily available on Facebook and YouTube, as well as online auction sites.

M3 Cattle Marketing uses the Internet for business every day. Today Macfarlane manages 15 to 20 sales per year and works as a ringman at sales all over the West with the *California Cattleman Magazine*. He says there is a slower transition to the Internet in the cattle industry but the younger generation relies on it.

“I don’t know anyone who is successful in this business that doesn’t have a web page or some sort of Internet activity. It’s so easy to simply search for them,” Macfarlane says.

Meents suggests another avenue for marketing is *BuyHereford.com*. The *BuyHereford.com* website was created to offer Hereford genetics in an online format. This resource is a low-cost avenue for breeders, Meents says, and many have successfully used it to sell embryos and semen, as well as live cattle lots.

Macfarlane also uses Facebook and YouTube videos to connect with potential buyers. He puts information of all the sales he manages on Facebook, including links to sale catalogs and to the videos of cattle on his YouTube channel, Matt Macfarlane. This information is supplemental he says, as most people still look forward to getting a sale catalog or magazine in the mail.

Stith believes that the Internet makes high-quality photography and videos even more necessary and valuable. All serious breeders need a website that is kept current and visual, he adds.

“I have always been an advocate of high-quality photography and at the same time refuse to run photos that ‘reduce value.’ There is a fine line here and most breeders are not photographers — use professional and the cost will come back to the seller over and over,” Stith says.

Follow up

One thing is certain: customer service never goes out of style. Macfarlane says he believes today’s market is a lot more about a specific program rather than the individual cattle.

He adds, “If you don’t follow up on what you’re selling, you’re not going to maintain those customers.”

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