

Think About Your Brand, Review Goals

Our world is inundated with brands — from the clothes we wear to the vehicles we drive and the food we eat. Most things are purchased with some acknowledgement of the “brand” they represent.

Brand marketing is not new to beef producers either. Seedstock producers are keenly aware of their brand and their relationships with customers, so too are most auction barns and feedlots.

But in today’s world of “ag advocacy” and the image that agriculture represents to the public, branding is becoming critical for everyone in ag production. Portraying a positive image for public perception and community relations is becoming increasingly important for the future of agriculture.

That said, there are some other benefits that can come from putting some time into considering the “brand” you want your farm or ranch to portray. Identifying your brand can help you, your family and your employees really prioritize your values and goals for the business. It may help build your relationship and serve to be an effective employee-recruiting tool or to attract future customers to the products you are raising and marketing.

More than a logo

While many people initially associate a brand with a logo, the essence of branding actually goes much deeper. Developing a brand is about what the farm or ranch stands for and represents — honesty, hard work, service back to the community or industry, and use of leading technology are some examples.

To crystallize your brand, answer this series of questions: Who are you? What makes you different? What are you known for? What do you want to be known for?

Then, it is your actions that portray that brand image to others,

that help tell the story of your farm or ranch. Do your actions bring forth an image of your “brand” to their mind? For example, a farm or ranch with a well-kept yard and nicely painted fence and buildings would likely help build the brand of a farm that takes good care of things and pays attention to details.

As you strive to develop your farm or ranch brand, ag consultant Dean Hefta offers these tips from his marketing column:

- Ask yourself and key people involved on the farm: What would we hear if we asked suppliers, landlords, employees, neighbors and people who have just heard of us to describe our farm in one sentence? (Now you know what you believe your brand is.)
- Now ask some of those people to describe your farm in one sentence. There may be gaps or blind spots between what you believe and what others believe. Look for patterns among the comments.
- Consider your approach as the farm leader in how decisions are made, actions are carried out and values are upheld. A congruent, positive brand requires that you be intentional and proactive in your leadership.
- When you’re clear on who you are as a farm, how work gets done and where you are going, take it to the next level by working with a firm to help you with your professional presentation. Then, your logo, letterhead and web presence will consistently communicate your farm’s brand to all who interact with it.

Annual review

In today’s fast-paced, 24-7 technological world, it can seem like there is never a “slow season.”

Especially in agriculture, the year can often feel like one long string of activity without an opportunity for slowing down.

In spite of that, every business, whether its seasons are set by the weather or not, needs to create and utilize an “off-season,” suggests Hefta, who works as an ag business consultant. Everyone needs time to recharge his batteries and refocus his priorities.

While every business’s off-season is going to look a little different, Hefta suggests a few common elements.

- **Review/learning:** Sit down to learn from the things that didn’t turn out so well. Look for ways to make changes in the future in those areas.
- **Skill development:** Learn a new technology or skill that will be helpful in the future, or seek advisors that have those skills.
- **Planning:** It can be hard to do long term planning when you’re in the middle of the fire. Use the off-season to step back from day to day operations. Consider where the farm is going and explore different ways to get there.
- **Writing new plays:** An important role of the leader is scripting the plays for the players in the upcoming season. Take time to plan the details so everyone knows what’s next.

Hefta emphasizes that it is important to schedule your off-season time so one season doesn’t just run into the next. Then, consider which areas, if worked on, would make the biggest difference to your ag business over time. From that, focus your efforts and see what a difference it makes. **HW**