

A Good Marketing Program Starts with the Basics



Sarah Aubrey

In a simple way, building your own branded beef business is a bit like another task many of us undertake every year: caring for baby calves. Just like with the newborn calf, when you first begin a new business venture, you may be unsure, but with continual effort and nurturing, you, too, will begin to thrive!

Theoretically speaking, if a meat business idea is the *birth*, then marketing is the *rearing* of your business, making marketing truly one of your most important jobs on the farm. Start by consciously creating the image you want to present. Even if you're already selling Hereford beef, spend some time evaluating your image and its success in the marketplace before you set out for this season's farmers markets.

Be sure the customer understands how your breed of beef is different. Customers today want to learn about where their beef comes from — capitalize on this opportunity.

Develop your image/logo

If you're taking product to market or inviting consumers out to the farm, you're creating a brand identity in those consumers' minds as soon as they are first exposed to your product. What is your beef's niche? Is it Hereford, and have you considered "branding" your product as Hereford? If so, are you

explaining that message to the customer over and over?

To develop an image, simply think about how you want the customer to see you and your business. For example, if you are targeting high-end clients, don't head to the farmers market in your worst apparel or use sloppy packaging with no eye appeal. By the same token, if you are calling on environmentally conscious consumers, don't appear wasteful and excessive with your packaging or in the design of your displays. Be sure to also point out sustainable agriculture measures in the cow herd.

Developing a logo is simply a way to use the concept of image in a singular, very recognizable form. Logos don't need to be expensive; simple word processing programs or graphics programs can help you design your own. Or, draw your logo and have a printer typeset it. You may prefer to use a professional to design it. No matter which of these methods you choose, the creation of a logo should be something that in one image sums up your message to the marketplace.

Put your logo on everything, including stationary and envelopes, business cards, product stickers, brochures, clothing, and gear such as organic cotton shopping bags. The options for utilizing your logo are limitless!

Always own your logo and maintain it on a CD, as hard copy and in an

e-mail format. If someone else develops the logo, be certain that *you alone* own that artwork once it's done. You do not want to get into a situation where you need permission or have to pay a fee for the logo every time you want to use it.

Marketing ideas

To get your message about Hereford beef promoted, there are bundles of marketing ideas that can be done inexpensively or are even free! Here are some I've either used or seen used successfully by our peers. Try one of these this summer, if you haven't already. Consider doing several at once.

• Newsletters and

correspondence: Many customers enjoy regular contact from their beef producers. Always ask before adding someone to your mailing list and keep it handy at every selling location; ask every new customer to join.

• Promotions and coupons:

Offer things like discounts as rewards for referrals, to drive sales or use as gifts. Set and publish any parameters around your promotions and honor them at all times.

• Contests and raffles:

Customer appreciation events can build sales by involving customers and possibly giving them a reward for their enthusiasm. Find out if your state has a law against raffles before you begin.

• Customer participation:

Customer participation works really well in agriculture because there are so many "chores" that urban people have never

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Editor's Note: This is the first in a series of "Brand Building" columns. Sara Aubrey, farm-based business owner and author of "Starting & Running Your Own Small Farm Business," will share her experience in launching a small ag enterprise. For more about Aubrey, see February issue Page 50.

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done. Host days where customers can do simple, pleasurable things like putting out hay, experiencing calves being born or just picnicking on your grounds. Be sure these activities are covered by insurance in case of an accident.

- **Cookbooks:** Consider offering a simple customer cookbook with recipes demonstrating how others have prepared your beef.
- **Good will donations:** Giving back to the community not only feels good but also really sends a positive message about you.

- **Hosting:** Hosting customers for clinics, demonstrations or just an educational experience can be a tremendous sales building opportunity because as people learn more about raising animals, they'll develop a better feeling about buying your beef. Have beef for sale, of course, on the day of your event!
- **Testimonials and referrals:** Happy customers talk! Ask customers for testimonials and referrals and publicize these at all times.
- **Press releases:** Use the media to generate business. I recommend every new business at least draft a

press release to announce that it's open for business.

- **Interviews:** Another way to use media at no cost is to be interviewed. Contact every magazine, newspaper and specialty publication and invite them out to the farm.
- **Flyers and posters:** You can make flyers on your home computer and print them for just cents a sheet. Hang announcements everywhere your target audience might be, but get permission first. **HW**