



Marketing Mistakes

Give your beef business a marketing makeover by avoiding these common mistakes.

by **Kindra Gordon**

With the spring bull sale season complete, perhaps you find yourself breathing a sigh of relief and hoping for a few weeks of downtime — that is, of course, until you need to gear up for fall when female and calf sales move back into full swing.

If this scenario matches your marketing efforts, you are likely overlooking some key steps to maximize your business's potential. And, even if your marketing goes a few steps beyond the above scenario, chances are you still have marketing improvements that could be made.

Jay Conrad Levinson, author of the popular *Guerrilla Marketing* series of books, says in the introduction to one of his

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books, "...failure to upgrade your marketing effort is a symptom of corporate demise. Success-found companies are either growing and changing or dying."

He continues, "A key to prospering with guerilla marketing is the art of paying attention. You've got to be constantly attuned to the media, the competition, the customers, the current events, the whole scene."

That said, take a minute to review this list of marketing dos and

don'ts from Levinson's expertise, and your efforts just might add profitability — and efficiency — to your business's bottom line.

Mistake No. 1: Having a lack of year-round marketing

Plain and simple the most common mistake made in marketing is a lack of a continual presence. For example, many seedstock operators advertise heavily in the weeks leading up to their annual bull sale, but once the event is over, their presence in their industry and with their customers subsides until their sale comes around again the next year.

Levinson emphasizes that marketing is a process, not an event. He says marketing should be a "series of events with a beginning and a middle but not an ending — because it should always be ongoing."

Once you understand this, you'll recognize that there is a difference between advertising — which simply tells buyers what you have to sell — and marketing, which communicates what your cattle program is focused on, why you are different, and what would be the benefits of doing business with you.

Levinson defines marketing as "every bit of contact your company has with anyone in the outside world." That said, you'll see that marketing is a 365-day-a-year task.

Mistake No. 2: Ignoring customers

In the 1990s a new concept emerged: "The customer is king." With this revelation, customer service has reshaped all industries and continues to do so. In fact, in today's business environment, Levinson says striving for customer satisfaction isn't enough. Now,

he says businesses should aim to provide "customer delight," which he says is achieved by doing anything the customer wants you to do.

How do you surpass customer expectations? Start with customer follow-up after the sale. Levinson notes that research has shown 68% of all business is lost due to ignoring customers after they've made a purchase.

Continually be thinking about what you can do to help your customers succeed. Sending simple thank-you postcards, making follow-up phone calls, visiting their herds, or hosting an annual appreciation supper are all ideas that help show your interest in and appreciation for their business.

Providing information to customers is also becoming a powerful tool to show them that you are working to help keep their ranch business successful. Ideas include providing them a quarterly newsletter offering information about the industry and specifically about your operation — what sires you are breeding to and why; how calves out of sire groups are looking; what carcass and ultrasound data you have received from calves, etc. Information is power, and the more you can provide to your customers, the more they'll appreciate you.

Additional ideas might be to host a speaker on a beef related topic and invite customers and prospects to attend. Or, if you are attending a beef industry meeting, invite a few customers to ride along with you to the event. Providing a customer with a gift subscription to a regional livestock newspaper can also keep him informed of industry happenings, as well as remind him each time it arrives in his mailbox that he is your customer.

Another marketing tip from Levinson: He advises directing the bulk of your marketing efforts primarily to customers, instead of prospects. Here's why: Studies indicate it costs one-sixth as much to sell something to a customer than to a prospect. Focusing on customers makes sense. Work to keep the customers you have by surpassing their service and quality expectations, and their word-of-mouth compliments will bring you new customers with ease.

The bottom line is that customer relationships will be the key to long-term success.

Mistake No. 3: Thinking that a small operation can't compete with "the big guys"

So, you've got a small seedstock operation and a limited budget. Does that mean customers are going to ignore you and go straight to the big operators? Not necessarily.

In fact, in business Levinson says being a small business has its advantages — such as the ability to offer personalized service and convenience. Therefore, make being small and local work to your advantage for customer service. You know folks on a first-name basis; you can visit their herds and talk with them more than once or twice a year; you can support their kids in 4-H or FFA events — the list goes on.

Remember the core principle of business: People like to do business with people they like. This means people must buy you before they will buy what you are selling. So, size doesn't really matter. It's the people and the service that make the difference.

Also recognize that convenience is a huge value to customers. If they can drive a short distance to your ranch and/or sale and find a top quality bull that you'll deliver and stand behind if there are any problems, you'll have some folks who will be customers for life because of that convenience. As a small operation, use that to your advantage and cultivate those local ties.

Likewise, Levinson says you don't have to invest a lot of money in marketing to be successful. Investing

Networking 101

Networking can also be an important part of the marketing process. Defined as "building mutually beneficial relationships," networking is an opportunity to promote your business or causes that you believe in.

Darla Crown, based in Rapid City, S.D., has amassed her own networking talents during a 30-year history in various officer positions with the Army and National Guard.

Most importantly about networking, she says to recognize that it is give and take. "If you want to get something from someone, you have to be willing to give back."

Additionally, Crown says networking is not another name for sales. "It's not about expecting everyone you meet to buy something from you. It's about relationships."

She adds that the process takes time, and "People build relationships with people they know, they like and they trust."

Crown offers these tips to enhance your networking skills:

- 1) Never leave home without your business cards. These should include your name, company name, address, e-mail address and phone number. Pass the cards out discriminately to people whom you meet and may work with again. Do not pass out brochures (unless they are requested). Crown says that is too much information, and it's expensive.
- 2) Practice your handshake. A firm clasp — as opposed to the jellyfish or a knuckle breaker — exudes confidence and intelligence.
- 3) Create your own self-introduction, sometimes called an "elevator speech." Crown says this is essentially a 30-second statement about yourself and what you do. It should include your name, where you are from, the name of your company, and a short statement about what you do specifically. She advocates practicing this at home so when you are put on the spot — like in an elevator — you can deliver your message and sell your program. **HW**



time, energy and information can be just as valuable to you and your customers.

Mistake No. 4: Not using a variety of marketing resources

For many, marketing amounts to a few newspaper, magazine and radio ads. While those are solid choices, they need to be enhanced from time to time.

First, make sure that the advertising you are doing is effective. Ask people where they saw or heard your ad or which publications they read the most. Then, target your advertising to those media outlets, which are most effective.

Second, in addition to the sale offering you are promoting, make sure your print and broadcast ads always communicate your core message along with your business name, suggests Levinson. This is simply a four to five word phrase that you've identified as your focus or competitive advantage. For example, Wheaties is known as "The Breakfast of Champions," and another universally known tagline is "You're in

good hands with Allstate."

What do you want customers to think of when they hear your ranch name? What do you offer? Determine that core position (it might center on quality, service, convenience, expertise, attention to detail, willingness to help, etc.); then include it on all of your marketing materials — from business cards to ads and even your ranch sign.

Third, in addition to traditional media resources, today's technology-savvy consumers demand that you provide them a Web site and e-mail. (Remember the goal is customer delight.)

Using multiple resources really will enhance your marketing efforts. Through your print and broadcast ads, you can direct people to your Web site for more detailed information. As well, a Web site can provide information 24/7, and e-mail makes it convenient for customers to contact

continued on page 78...

Mastering

Marketing



you at any time, with any question. That said, you've got to be detailed about responding to e-mails and keeping your Web site up to date.

Lastly, Levinson emphasizes the importance of keeping your marketing consistent — with the graphic elements, the core message, and a continual presence within the industry. He suggests, "Instead of running a couple of large ads every few months, run smaller ads more frequently."

Of this strategy to keep your name in front of customers and prospects, Levinson says, "Consistency breeds familiarity, familiarity breeds confidence and confidence breeds sales."

And he adds, "Keep in mind that your competition gets smarter

every single day, so you've got to continually be beefing up your Web site, working with customers, and keeping them excited about what you offer."

Mistake No. 5: Looking at marketing as an expense, instead of an investment

Yes, marketing will cost you money. But, Levinson says rather than being an expense, marketing is an investment that will grow and benefit your business over time.

That said, you must be committed to your marketing program. Levinson uses the analogy of a marriage, posing the question, "What makes it work?" The answer is "commitment."

He says the same is true with your business. Levinson admits there will be ups and downs, when you think

your marketing isn't doing anything, but you've got to stick with it. He commonly sees business owners change their marketing efforts or drop them altogether before they see results. Marketing takes time and it can be a slow process. Thus you must remain committed. Patience is commitment."

From his years in the advertising industry, Levinson says it can take 20 or more times for someone to see an ad and be persuaded to act. He concludes, "Mediocre marketing with commitment works better than brilliant marketing without commitment." **HW**