



It's a Digital World

With new technologies redefining communication, producers must redefine their approach to reaching customers.

by *Christy Couch Lee and Julie White*

With the click of a mouse, you can view and purchase a herd bull without leaving your home. From one Web site, you can read current cattle industry news for the day. Posting a question on a blog can connect you to thousands of producers who have been in the same position and can give you an answer.

The Internet has changed how the world connects; it is no surprise it is changing how producers market cattle and interact in the beef industry.

Through the use of interactive Web sites, blogs and social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, producers can launch their operations into the new decade. Hereford producers, beef industry leaders and agricultural enthusiasts are using these tools successfully to reach countless consumers across the country and connect with fellow producers from coast to coast.

Web sites, blogs and social networks can and should be used together, says J. Scott Vernon, California Polytechnic State University department of agricultural education and communication faculty member.

“These components are integrated; one drives the other,” Vernon says.

Vernon was a key player in creating “I Love Farmers... They Feed my Soul,” a project used to facilitate conversation on agricultural issues. The program took off following the November 2008 vote in favor of Proposition 2 in California, which created laws changing the way confinement livestock is raised.

“Organizations like the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) were better at communicating the issue,” Vernon says. “We lost to HSUS, and they want to bring down animal agriculture.”

“I Love Farmers” uses its Web site, www.ilovefarmers.org, blogs and social media networks to target 14- to 24-year-olds and invite them into the conversation. Vernon describes the site as provocative with an “in-your-face” approach to discussing issues.

“We wanted to approach issues in a different and creative way,” Vernon says. “Lots of young people are passionate about agriculture, and we want to leverage that passion today.”

Vernon says the agricultural industry has made great strides in utilizing the Internet, but the industry still has room to grow.

“In the livestock industry, ranching is being redefined,” he says.

With the push for a change in the way cattle are raised and fed out, Vernon says, producers must get into the dialogue.

“If people are talking about you, know what they are saying,” he says.

The Internet and its components are not going away, Vernon stresses,

and it is important to learn how to use tools available.

“The young people grew up in a digital world,” he says. “The people in their 50s are digital immigrants; they must learn.”

The Internet allows for low-cost production with high impact.

“It is a powerful communication tool,” Vernon says. “But it requires work, time and energy. You have to be present to win.”

On the following pages, you will learn about the many tools your operation can utilize to better market your cattle, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Web sites and blogs.

You can also find information about Hereford’s online tools available such as online registry, HerefordMarketplace.com and BuyHereford.com. This issue also includes a breed/herd improvement technology section

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that includes information about DNA testing, sexed semen and the new Heifer Calving Rate Expected Progeny Differences (EPDs).

Take a few minutes to get up to speed with these new technologies, and help take your operation into the next generation of marketing. **HW**

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