

Working the Web

Creating a quality Web site can increase connections with current and potential customers.

by **Christy Couch Lee and Julie White**

With advancements in technology, the world has become smaller. And, cattlemen with a high-quality Web site can reach customers once thought to be out of reach.

John Denton, co-owner of Denton Designs, Blue Rapids, Kan., creates Web sites for a wide range of clients, including many in the cattle business. He says creating a quality Web site can make the first impression you desire.

“The nice thing about Web sites: that’s your face,” Denton says. “Someone going to your Web site may not have met you or know you, but you can sway their perception of you based on your Web site. It’s important to put a lot of thought into that.”

Chad Crane of Crane Herefords, LaSalle, Ill., has discovered that putting the ranch’s image on the Web has led to an expanded customer base.

“We weren’t getting our cattle spread out, but our Web site has helped us get new business.”

Since Crane Herefords launched www.craneherefords.com in October 2009, the site has led to numerous cattle sales.

“A family from eastern Kentucky found us through our Web site and bought a heifer,” he says. “A local family used a search engine on the



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Internet and just punched in our area code. When our Web site came up, they were able to connect with us.”

Making these connections can be great for business. But, before you establish a Web site for your farm or ranch, Denton suggests a few key items to consider.

Tips to get started:

①— Know your goals

Denton says a marketing goal is the most important factor to consider when building a Web site.

“First, you must figure out what you want to market about yourself,” Denton says. “You can then base everything else around that.”

For example, he says, if your operation is weak in certain areas, it may be best to not place focus on those aspects of your farm or ranch. Instead, he says, play up the areas in which your operation excels.

②— Have quality content

Although Denton says each farm or ranch site varies, some key components are needed on most sites. “If the Web site’s content isn’t what people hope to get, they’re going to leave.”

He says most cattle sites contain sections labeled “About Us,” “Herd Sires” or “Herd Bulls,” “Females” or “Donors,” “Cattle for Sale,” and a contact page.

Crane Herefords also supplies photographs and videos of bulls, females and sale cattle; expected progeny differences (EPDs); and full pedigrees of each animal shown on the site.

“Good pictures are key,” Crane says.

He contributes a significant amount of time prepping cattle for pictures and says he must have patience during the process.

“A great picture really does sell,” he says.

Crane Herefords also has added video of some sale lots, mainly bulls, to serve its potential customers.

“When looking to purchase a bull, I like to see it moving,” he says. “Through video we are able to provide the real deal.”

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③— Provide easy navigation

Regardless of what pages individuals have, Denton says, the navigation of the site and links should be clear.

“Whether the navigation is on the left side of the site or across the top, as tabs or bar, it must be clear and easy to navigate,” he says.

However, he says, if you have numerous buttons (page links) to include, it can be best to place them on the left side rather than lining them across the top of the site.

“You don’t want to make your visitors scroll horizontally,” Denton says. “It’s okay to scroll vertically – that’s to be expected.”

④— Stick to the basics

Denton recommends evaluating your competitors’ sites to see what works and what doesn’t.

“You don’t want to experiment with your Web site,” he says.

“You want to use tried-and-true techniques. Sometimes it’s okay to

push the envelope a bit — it can help set you apart. But, don’t hurt the functionality of your Web site.”

Research has proven page links should be located on the left, right or across the top and the logo should be located at the top of the page for ease of identification, Denton says. It’s also important to keep your page links consistent on all

pages of the site. Don’t have them on the top of one page and then on the left-hand side of another page.

“If your competitors are not doing it, there’s probably good reason why you shouldn’t be doing it, either,” he says.

⑤— Write it right

Well-written text is critical to an effective Web site, Denton says. Breaking up text with bullet points, headlines and photos can make your text more reader friendly, he says.

“Just like in a magazine article, it’s good to break up long sections of text,” Denton says. “A long line of text can be daunting. Most people don’t read; they scan, looking for something that interests them.”

Including key words and phrases is also important.

“An important part of search engine optimization is including key words and phrases that potential customers may use when searching for you on search engines,” he says.

⑥— Keep it fresh

Denton recommends updating your Web site as often as you are able.

“I don’t think you can update your site too often,” Denton says. “When you update your site, you’re keeping it fresh for your viewers. No one will keep coming back to

your Web site if it doesn’t change. Updating your site entices people to come back, and it may draw in new visitors, as well.”

⑦— Locate the experts

When selecting the firm to create your site, Denton suggests doing your research. And, locating a company with experience in the cattle industry is important.

“Based on past experiences and speaking with some of our clients, using a local advertising agency can be trouble,” Denton says. “If they’re not knowledgeable with EPDs, pedigree tables and the norms for how those items are laid out, it doesn’t always work out that well.”

He recommends selecting a company with which you feel comfortable and one that has exhibited success in the past. In addition, he says, reviewing the company’s portfolio can provide a good sense of the quality of its work.

⑧— Get it linked

Denton says it is important to get your site linked from other Web sites and to advertise your Web address. “Do all that you can to drive people to your Web site,” he says. “For example, Hereford breeders can have their Web site linked off the AHA “Links” page for no cost. Don’t forget to include your Web address on all your print advertising, business cards, farm signs, brochures and any promotional items you develop.”

By placing focus on the critical elements of an effective Web site, you can bring a world of customers to your operation with a simple click of the mouse. **HW**