



Catching a Ride on the Taillights of Opportunity

Follow these marketing tips to avoid being left in the dust this year.

by *Bruce Derksen*

As 2019 closes, it becomes gut check time for purebred producers as they settle into the early portion of the new year. Time marches on and no one wants to sit in the dust watching the red taillights of opportunity round the bend and disappear from sight.

For some, hard work is the answer, and while it is honorable, it will never be the end all. Purebred associations are filled with hard-working cattle people putting on yearly bull and heifer sales and open houses and attending shows and sales. Hard work needs to be the standard of any enterprise, but it is only one step in the right direction.

Seeing from the buyer's point of view

Mark Cowan of American Marketing Services thinks it is important for producers to view the marketing of a purebred operation through the eyes of potential buyers.

“From a buyer’s perspective, I think it’s vital that the seedstock provider has an impeccable database. Parent verification, genomic-enhanced EPDs

[genomic-enhanced expected progeny differences], all of those things are designed to give a more accurate ability to select the proper seedstock.”

In a world of data and access, today’s buyers are not just customers but also consumers of information. “If I’m buying a bull, I want to buy one from a seedstock producer that’s on the cutting edge of whatever developments are coming down the line in science and technology.”

Purebred breeders almost exclusively love their chosen occupation and working with their cattle, but they also need to sell their product. No one can sell everything to everyone. Addressing the entire cattle industry is not practical and is a waste of time, money and energy. Just as buyers need to decide what is critical to their operation, sellers must do the same. Narrow the focus. An inferior watered-down product will not benefit anyone. Why save the razor’s edge genetics for only potential buyers?

Once purebred producers are comfortable with the continually improving quality of their own livestock, their marketing philosophy will follow suit.

Marketing the entire operation

Cowan says negotiables such as pricing can be manipulated but counts a competent herd health plan as mandatory to any successful enterprise.



Staying up to date on scientific trends and technology is crucial for seedstock producers, Mark Cowan of American Marketing Services says. Customers are consumers of information.



"Dare to be different" with your advertising efforts, Cowan advises. A new catalog design is a great way to make a statement.

Disease should never knowingly get on the trailer with the stock. Reputable breeders will always provide individual bull or female health records along with vaccination program specifics and dates.

Advertising is always on the agenda but can seem like blowing your own horn and many people's personalities balk at this, but it is never wise for the customer to be unaware of the supplier. Basic things like business cards, ranch logos, and a sign at the end of the driveway are easy, but consider other options such as social media, a website, direct mail brochures, newsletters and sale catalogues. Dare to be different.

Purebred operations are not just promoting a prized yearling bull but offering themselves, their family and their farm for all to see. Even for those who despise the limelight, efforts that may be out of the comfort zone should be made. Possibly an outgoing personality from the family could attend local and regional events to interact with as many people as possible. Tours and field days could be hosted to show off the farm or ranch.

Building a trusting relationship

Trust is crucial for buyers and sellers to make a lasting connection, Cowan states. "Do potential buyers have confidence in what they are being presented to help them with their decisions?" he says. "The trust and confidence buyers have in the breeder is paramount."

And part of creating that lasting confidence is nurturing growing relationships. "I think it's imperative for seedstock producers to give service beyond the sale," Cowan says. "Make contact six months later. Ask how things are working out. Are there any problems we need to take care of? Little things count." He says producers need to be familiar with their customers' operations and be able to help with any and all selection decisions.

He suggests visits to customers' farms, as following up on successes or failures will help keep the connection strong. Be the

informational expert reminding them of your own herd genetics and qualities as they have likely forgotten the specifics of their original purchases. When they sell their calf crop at the auction barn, be there to buy them lunch. If previous customers are ignored, they will surely ignore sellers on the next sale day.

Bulls are a large part of a purebred breeder's sales and the reality is sometimes they can fail. When they do, buyers need to be sure they are dealing with full service genetic providers, not shadowy traders. Be professional and get guarantees solidly in place. "Spell out what happens in the event of a product failure," said Cowan. "Seedstock producers have an obligation to stand behind their bulls. And the quicker you can fix things the better and more long term the relationship is going to be with the customer."

Recognizing new opportunities

Watch for the potential of new sales throughout your region. If producers notice friends, neighbors and acquaintances who did not have acceptable results from their last calf crop, offer them an alternative. If breeders truly believe in their product, why not share the benefits?

With the new year firmly in place, it is the perfect time to strip down the positioning and the potential of the seedstock operation with an honest eye. Employ the cutting-edge technology and genetics buyers crave. Focus the marketing and bump the advertising budget, even if only a small amount is possible. And try to look at things from the buyer's standpoint. If the tables were turned, what would you demand? Be professional, build trust and follow up. It may seem like a lot to tackle, but even moving in the right direction will have the operation catching a ride on those taillights of opportunity. **HW**



Hosting tours and field days is an effective way to showcase your operation and to make connections with potential customers.