Beyond Promoting

Marketing seedstock stretches beyond the next ad to developing deep, industry relationships.

by ***Katie Maupin Miller***

There are two types of marketing — promoting and attracting — according to Debbie Norton, president of Cogent Ideas Inc., an agri-marketing company.

"I see people who promote. Then, I see people who work to attract. I think those are vastly different. Promotion, to me, is a lot about shiny objects and how fancy we can be. When I see people attract, they have a sound message — a brand identity that has a lot of integrity and substance behind it," Norton says. "Attraction is customer service. It's genetics. It's honest data. It's the longevity of the producer and the cattle. Those are the anchors of our business."

Norton cut her teeth as a commercial artist, illustrating advertisements at the dawn of desktop publishing. She's seen a lot of changes over the years in the ways seedstock producers market their stock, and she's gleaned many valuable lessons along the way that help her clients of all sizes attract success.

Mark Core, executive vice president and chief marketing officer at Vermeer Corporation, also sees marketing strategies in these two categories, though he labels the buckets differently.

"Revenue (marketing) is really about doing marketing to generate revenue in the next few months; reputation (marketing) is 12 months and beyond," Core says.

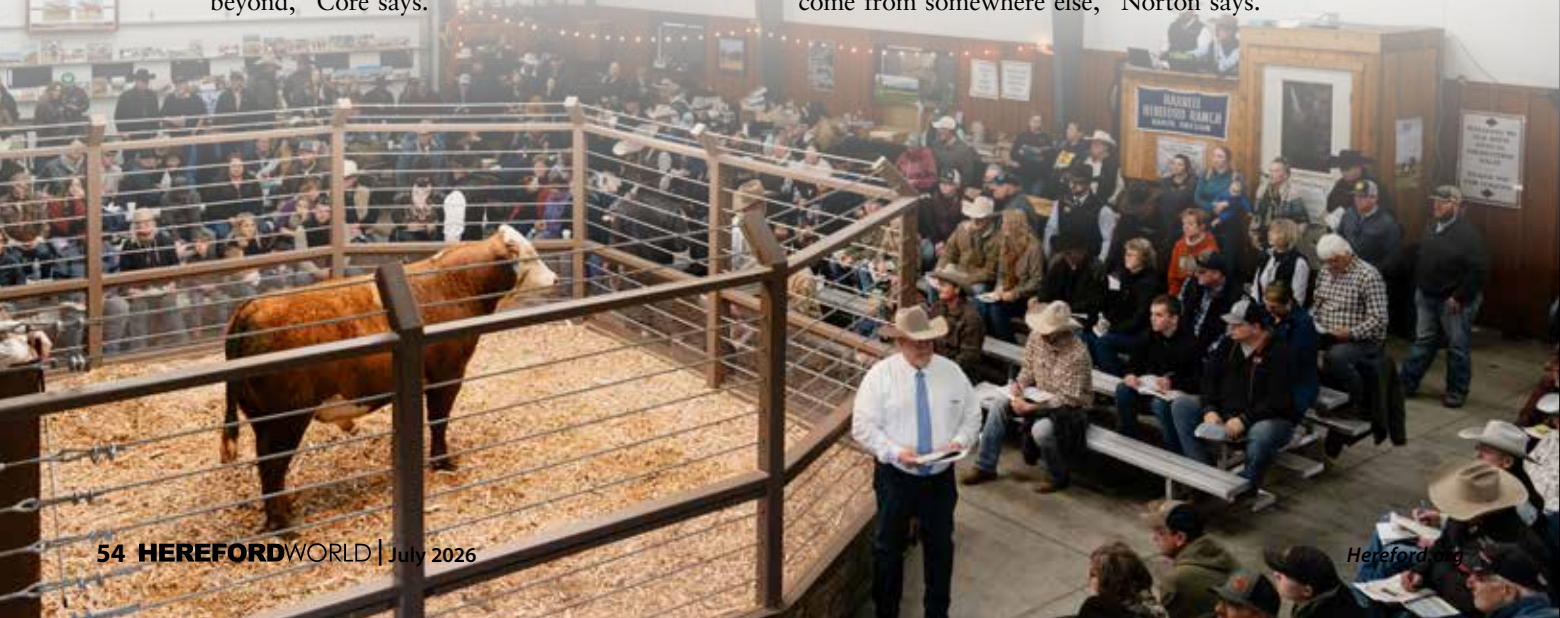
The difference may seem subtle at first; after all, isn't promoting your genetics, sale date or show results a key part of marketing your operation? But as these experts agree, true marketing looks beyond flashy tactics to grab immediate attention — although an eye-catching campaign is useful — and focuses on carving out an identity in the industry.

"When I got into this business, the only tool we really had was promotion. Seedstock producers promoted, and sometimes you promoted against somebody. But the win was then, and is now, really short-term," Norton says. "When you think about this in terms of trying to build brand messaging for the long term, then transparency is key. A very well thought-out, responsible message that you can stand behind long term is what keeps you relevant."

Mature markets and marketing

Like it or not, the seedstock industry is what marketing professionals call a mature market. This means there are not many new clients entering the industry, and the number of potential buyers is stable.

"If I'm working with a client and we are cooperatively agreeing that we're trying to attract new buyers, the reality is those buyers have to come from somewhere else," Norton says.



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>
> **— Debbie Norton, Cogent Ideas Inc.**

Simply put, to sell a bull, a seedstock producer will have to convince a potential buyer to buy a herd sire from their sale rather than someone else's, whether that someone is a fellow Hereford breeder or an Angus producer down the road. This dynamic can make it hard to enter the seedstock industry or to last in the long term. As Norton says, it is estimated that most seedstock producers last about seven years. To put that into perspective, that is about the same amount of time it would take for a commercial producer to buy a bull from a sale but not return when they're ready to replace him.

Customer loyalty is hard won, and brand building starts with knowing your foundation.

"The pure sense of marketing is not just doing something once you've created a product. It's a part of defining what product you want to create," Core says. "It's getting and keeping the customer."

Knowing what you have and what you want to create can be challenging, as Norton notes.

"I think the biggest mistake is that they simply don't know what they have. They have the ranch sign out, and they painted the fences white. They have cattle running around out there, and they're all pretty. But, they don't know what they have," Norton says. "Today, our industry is way more progressive and way more demanding."

There are ways for seedstock producers to realize what they've got, though. Performance data, genomic testing and herd records all help, but so do opportunities to see how your genetics measure up in real-world commercial settings.

"That seedstock supplier becomes so much more important as a reliable consultant, but they can't do that if they don't understand the diversity and complexity of our industry. Simply put, you have to have skin in the game," Norton explains. "Very few seedstock producers have fed a pen of cattle. It will be hard to convince commercial customers that you're the best in the business if you've never fed a pen of cattle. You have to understand the risk, volatility and the challenges that every aspect of our industry faces."

This reality makes resources, like the Hereford Feedout Program, valuable opportunities for serious seedstock producers committed to building better cattle to serve their commercial clients.

Not all that glitters

Often, marketing is associated with its outward-facing products — sharp ads, shiny sale books, engaging social posts — all anchored in creatively garnering attention. But, as Core says, creativity isn't the linchpin for good marketing.

"Creativity is like washing a pig," he says. "It's messy. It has no rules, no clear beginning, middle or end. It's kind of a pain, and when you're done, you're not sure if the pig is really clean, or even why you're washing the pig in the first place."

While creativity is great — just like metaphorically clean swine — it's not the most essential component to a sound strategy. "Simple

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Rising Tides

The saying goes, "A rising tide lifts all boats." The American Hereford Association (AHA) and its communications team work tirelessly to make sure that the tide is coming in for bald-faced cattle. Part of their efforts includes the new national advertising campaign — Stamped for More — which highlights how Hereford-sired females add fertility, efficiency and longevity, as demonstrated in an ongoing multi-year study with the University of Illinois (see Page 66).

"What keeps me excited today is knowing the roles that breed associations play in interfacing with universities and the industry at a different level to gain more information that anyone in the industry can use. That makes everybody better," Debbie Norton, president of Cogent Ideas Inc., says.

These ads and videos touting the Hereford advantage, along with previous national campaigns, can all be found online at *Hereford.org/media.*

"That is a point where every seedstock producer can become a missionary. We all have filler pages in catalogs. Run a breed association ad. Keep the continuity in that messaging … We have worked with every major breed association in America. One thing we tried to do with every association was provide ad materials for every state association and beg them to help them continue the message," Norton says.

By picking up AHA-created campaigns and passing them along, producers can keep those metaphorical tides rising and ride for the brand. HW

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is real, basic is fine, but deliberate effort is what wins the battle in marketing, particularly the spaces we're playing in," Core notes.

Today's marketing is a blend of art and science, much like breeding good cattle. Cool graphics certainly have stopping power, but using data to build upon a strategy is also essential. Norton notes that determining an ad's value stretches further than impressions to determine a return on investment and delves into how many viewers clicked or read further. This is where having a professional on your team to help sort analytic buzzwords can be helpful.

Back to you

Having professionals help with your marketing can help sort your strategy, but as Norton points out, the success of a brand always lies with its owner.

"If there's a problem with a bull, that bull buyer is calling the seedstock producer, not me," Norton says. "This is probably the only industry where you can pick up the phone and talk to the CEO about your problems."

And one of the soundest marketing strategies hinges not simply on making a sale, but on following through and building upon those relationships.

"Seedstock producers need to accept the reality that problems will happen, and you can't blink because that is who you are going to be," Norton says. "That has nothing to do with graphic design and nothing to do with marketing, but it has everything to do with brand building. It is the little things that on the surface don't look like much, but are everything for a producer to become successful in the long term." HW



The most successful seedstock producers offer potential buyers more than a shiny catalog, they offer genetics backed by proven performance and a brand built with purpose and integrity.

The POWER Behind
TEGTMEIER
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P44614962
AHA GE-EPD

4B CT EMPIRE 4184 ET
Calved: 11/25/24 • Homozygous Polled
Sire: HUTH CLC WF DELUXE K016 • Dam: 4B EMMY TIME 0007

BW	WW	YW	MM	FAT	MARB	REA	CHB$
0.7	67	109	30	0.045	0.46	0.82	175

- Empire has much to offer in a flawless, homozygous polled package with great bone and movement.
- Co-owned with 4B Herefords, Oklahoma
- SEMEN AVAILABLE



P44575139

HUTH MONUMENTAL DISTINCTION {DLF,HYF,IEF,MSUDF}
Calved: 5/1/24 • Tattoo: LE M030/RE Huth
Sire: KCF BENNETT MONUMENT J338 • Dam: HUTH G025 DESTINI K026

BW	WW	YW	MM	FAT	MARB	REA	CHB$
2.2	81	133	38	0.005	0.58	0.72	212

- 2026 Iowa Beef Expo Grand Champion Bull
- Co-owned with Merry's Green Meadows, Wisconsin and Bear Dance, Pennsylvania

Supporting Herd Sires:
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