

Fingertip Marketing

Websites, social media play key role in reaching customers.

by Joann Pipkin



It all began in 2010 as a Christmas gift for their dad, Blaine Bruner. Blaine's children — son Travis and wife Ashley, son Trenton and wife Rachel, and son Ty — wanted to help the family's Drake, N.D., ranching business expand its customer base. They browsed the Internet and found other ranches that already had websites. They didn't want their operation to fall behind.

The Bruners reached out to Angus Media for assistance in developing a site of their own.

"To get started, we shared our ideas for colors, design and layout, provided some examples of websites that we liked and didn't like so they could see the style we were looking for," Ashley Bruner says. "[Angus Media] then put it all together. We made tweaks, and then went live with it."

Still, when Christmas rolled around, the Bruner children weren't sure what Blaine would think. "We got it all set up and wrapped up a laptop that was set to the website we had designed," Ashley says. "When he opened it up, the site was right there."

As it turns out, Ashley thought the website was a pretty good idea. "Here we are in our 20s and 30s working on the ranch, and we're no longer just selling to our parents' generation of ranchers, but now to our own," Blaine explains. "So, we need to communicate with them using the tools of our generation."

In this age of digital technology, websites and social media are just that — tools. While the very thought of them might intimidate even the savviest cowman, these tools are must-haves in marketing cattle today.

Build a marketing plan

Lacy Short, owner of MontiWest Design, Masonville, Iowa, calls it the age of online everything. Thus, she says, it's important to adjust livestock marketing to compete with a mobile-focused society.

"Mobile friendly and responsive web design, as well as consistent, engaging social media, are necessary for small and large producers alike to connect with customers and prospective buyers," she says.

With that said, launching a website for your

farm or ranch that will work hand-in-hand with your marketing program requires a little more forethought than just a few clicks of a button.

Creating a website and social media page should be high on the priority list in the overall scheme of marketing-plan development.

Naming your business, complete with logo and color scheme, is an obvious first step in building a marketing plan. Yet once that is finalized, it's time to begin thinking about the website and social media.

"The reason for this is so that people have a way to learn more about you," explains Rachel Cutrer, owner of Ranch House Designs, Wharton, Texas. "People are curious; your customers are curious. Let's face it, if someone hears your name, but doesn't know you personally, the first thing he or she will do is 'Google' you."

Once a business name and logo are established, Cutrer says you should put some thought into what information you would like to

feature on your website. Consider an "about us" page, a page that features some of your top cattle, and a "cattle for sale" page.

Then, choose photos for the site.

"Do a little homework ahead of time," Short suggests.

"Gather candid photos, reference female and sire photos and registration information to feature genetics used in your operation. Take a moment to record details about the history of your farm or ranch and provide points about your operation that set you apart from others."

Giving customers an inside look at their operation and family



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was important for the Bruners when establishing their website.

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Short also says to keep in mind that design plays an important role in representing your farm or ranch on the web.

“When we decided to launch a website, we worked with the designers at Angus Media to create a site that matched the look and feel of our operation, [and were] able to highlight photos of our cattle while being user-friendly and mobile-ready,” explains Nick Nesson, manager, Mountain View Ranch, Morristown, Tenn.

The value of good photos and videos for a website is especially important, Nesson says, as those make your program attractive and leave a good impression to viewers.

Clean, simple, user-friendly and easy-to-navigate were critical pieces to the website puzzle for Krebs Ranch, Gordon, Neb.

Longtime Angus breeders, the Krebs family has been on the web for more than 10 years. Kami Krebs Scott says having a website and social media presence has helped put their program at their customers’ fingertips.

“Our ranch is located in the Sandhills of western Nebraska and, put simply, we are a long way from anywhere,” Scott says. “Our website and social media page is a convenient way for us to take the ranch to our customers instead of relying on customers to come to us.”

Scott says their website is used primarily to market cattle, semen and embryos. The site houses current listings of commercial and registered females for sale, as well as a roster of their program’s herd sires complete with pictures, performance data and descriptive footnotes.

“We try and put as much content on our home page as possible so that customers can find the information they’re looking for as quickly as possible,” Scott says.

Avoid website pitfalls

While presence on the World Wide Web is paramount in today’s cattle marketing business, the buck doesn’t stop there.

“The biggest challenge is making sure we have the most accurate and up-to-date information online,” explains Ashley. “The saying, ‘You look good, you play good’ has some truth behind it and that carries over to our cattle and our marketing. We want to show the customer what they can expect to see at our ranch — hard work, consistency and pride.”

Do’s and don’ts of website and social media marketing

- ☛ **DO** consider using paid advertising on Facebook. “It’s the best practice to boost your engagement,” says Rachel Cutrer, Ranch House Designs, Wharton, Texas.
- ☛ **DO** include your family in helping with your social media plan. Teenage children are likely more comfortable using Facebook than you are, Cutrer says.
- ☛ **DO** make a plan for what you’ll post on Facebook. “Don’t just post for the sake of posting,” Cutrer notes. “Make it valuable, relevant information.”
- ☛ **DO** update your website as often as possible. Monthly updates are a good goal, Cutrer says. “The more you update, the higher you’ll rank on search engines,” she adds.
- ☛ **DO** have great content for your website. “Content not only helps your ranking in search engines, but also gives people something to read about you,” Cutrer says. “We recommend at least 200 words per page on your website.”
- ☛ **DON’T** wait until three months before your first sale to think it’s time for a website. Cutrer recommends starting a website as soon as you begin buying, selling, breeding or showing cattle.
- ☛ **DON’T** think your Facebook page can suffice as all you need for an online presence. Facebook is fleeting information, Cutrer says, and websites are permanent. “You need both,” she notes, “and both should work hand in hand. The website is your permanent reference and in-depth information. Your Facebook is day-to-day news, humor and fun.”
- ☛ **DON’T** use your Facebook page solely as an outlet to post pictures of your sale cattle two weeks before your sale. “People notice this, and it’s a turnoff,” Cutrer explains. “If you’re going to use Facebook, make it engaging and relevant year-round. Post things other than just sale cattle photos.”
- ☛ **DON’T** set up a personal account for your farm. For example, first name — Smith, last name — Angus. Cutrer also cautions breeds from using a group page for your business. “Not only will you get in trouble from Facebook, but also you will ultimately lose access to the powerful analytics and advertising features of a business page,” she says. Get started with a business page by going to <http://Facebook.com/business>.
- ☛ **DON’T** tag other people, or yourself, in photos of cattle. This is a major Facebook *faux pas*. Because Facebook uses facial recognition software, if you are tagging hundreds of people in a photo of a cow, Facebook will know. Cutrer says this is viewed as spam or abuse and will negatively affect your post engagement and positioning.

Nesson agrees. He views a number of websites containing outdated information.

“Take down your sale cards and flyers after the sale and put up something to keep your customers coming to your site year-round,” he advises. “Offer tips for handling diseases or post bulletins on nutrition, something that keeps people coming to your website more than at sale time.”

While technology and mobile usability has greatly advanced in recent years, Short reminds you that some rural locations still only have basic Internet coverage.

“It’s important for web developers to keep coverage limitation in mind when working with new web clients,” she says. “The challenge is

CONTINUED ON PAGE 116

Fingertip Marketing CONTINUED FROM PAGE 115

to create a flashy, yet functional new site with the bells and whistles, while giving consideration to all users of the site.”

Connect with your audience

Angus cattle might be your passion, but the people are who make the business rewarding, says Jena McRell, Angus Media digital editor.

“Social media is an avenue for connecting with friends in the Angus community, potential customers and other like-minded cattle producers,” she says. “It allows you to share a look into daily life on your farm or ranch, showcase your genetic programs and be available in a digital space where more likely than not your customers and friends are frequenting on a daily basis.”

From Facebook to Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn, Short says a variety of social media platforms can help Angus breeders connect with their audience.

Enabling your website to connect to social media pages by sharing recent updates rather than creating a new post on each social media outlet can even help you save time.

Join the conversation

Whether it’s Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or LinkedIn, social media platforms can help us tell our story.

However, knowing how and when to join the conversation is necessary to avoid putting forth a negative impression.

Jamie Johansen, professional social media marketer, Honey Creek Media, Columbia, Mo., compares social media to a cocktail party where you may not know people very well.

“You don’t just walk up to a group of people talking and dive into their conversation,” she explains. The same goes for social media.

First, listen and observe.

“Then, you might add a comment or two,” she says. “Once you have done your research and have thoroughly thought about how you might add something to the conversation, you then share advice or opinions.”

Social media is much the same. Listen, observe, research, comment — like, follow, share — then join the conversation.

Johansen reminds breeders that once something is published online, you have to assume it is there for life.

“Don’t post things you wouldn’t want your grandma to see,” she explains. “I tell young people entering the workforce that their social media accounts are their résumé. Employers will do the research. The same thing goes with business.”

Social media lets not only our cattle customers, but also our beef-eating consumers into our daily lives.

“It’s always easier to remember someone when you can put a face with the name,” Johansen says. “Social media is one way to put a personal face behind a brand. Your brand is your family farm or ranch.”

Johansen encourages breeders to create a social environment where consumers have a voice.

“Today, our consumer might not accept hard science like they used to,” she says. “Science doesn’t sell meat. We sell meat. Our story sells meat. Social media marketing is one avenue where we can share that message and communicate with the consumer.”



“A website provider can help connect social media accounts to your farm or ranch website,” Short says.

She adds that social media advertising is a cost-effective way to increase exposure on the web. “Facebook offers several paid options to promote posts, grow your page audience with likes, engage readers to click through to your website, and many more,” Short explains.

For Angus breeders like Blaine Bruner, Scott and Nesson, social media offers another opportunity for them to build relationships with customers.

In addition to announcing cattle offerings and promoting upcoming sales and events, Scott says they use their site to share lighthearted pictures and stories of daily happenings and events at the ranch, such as calving, moving cows or baling hay.

“Our goal is to identify a group of people who are true fans of our program,” she says.

Nesson concurs.

“Social media is about relational marketing, even if it is virtual,” he says. “Celebrate holidays, show off your kids, talk about the weather, share cattle industry news beyond your specific niche. [Post] what you would talk about at the coffee shop, minus the politics. Posts can be about having a conversation rather than just advertisement.”

Bruner, too, sees value in adding a personal touch through social media posting. “I primarily manage the Facebook page from my mobile phone, so it’s quick and easy for me to post a picture of us working cows, or of Papa Blaine and Grandma Kim with the grandkids. It’s a way to let our Facebook followers know that we are a family and this is what we do.”

She adds that customers have even been known to share their own photos of bulls they’ve purchased at work in their operations. “We share our events and locations when we’re out marketing our sale at ag shows, so that followers know we’re there if they want to stop and visit,” she says.

Repurposing content you’re currently using in advertisements, your sale book or on your website is a great way to amplify your message, McRell says.

“Shorter sentences and phrases perform better,” she advises. “However, always provide links to additional information or drive traffic back to your website.”

McRell also recommends posting early and often. “If you’re looking to spread the word about an upcoming sale, don’t expect to see results by only posting a week in advance. A social media community requires a consistent, year-round effort in order to receive the maximum benefit.”

Overwhelmed? Consider hiring a young person. McRell says that might be the best way to get you started with social media, especially if it’s not something you yourself use on a daily basis.

“Identify the goals you’d like to achieve, and then develop a schedule for them to follow,” she says. “It’s a win-win for everyone; you gain an established social media presence, and the young person you’re working with will learn so much in the process.”

Find your balance

Whether implementing a farm or ranch website or launching a new social media platform, finding balance is crucial.

“Start simple,” McRell advises. “Have fun with it, and try new things along the way.”

She cautions against having an “If you build it, they will come” mentality.

“Connecting with users in a digital space requires a lot of patience and dedicated effort,” McRell says. “You may not receive the traffic — likes, comments or shares — that you’d like when you first launch

your Facebook page. Keep working at it, and be consistent when posting content.”

Consider sharing something new four to five times each week, if not daily, she says.

Whether it’s a photo of the sunrise or a quick iPhone video of calves walking through the pasture, every day on the farm or ranch presents an opportunity to tell a story. Often, weekends are a great time to push an important message, McRell says.

Expand your reach

While websites and social media marketing help you connect with more customers, Nesson says the tools should never replace the value and necessity of personal relationships. “It does make for more introductions than we ever could on our own,” he says.

The bottom line, though, is website and social media marketing works.

“It is a timely, economical way to offer updates and new information immediately,” Short says.

A 2016 livestock marketing survey conducted by Cutrer’s business found that 63% of livestock buyers are checking Facebook more than once per day, and 85% say they look at a business’s website prior to making a purchase.

“These numbers are astounding,” Cutrer says, “and tell us that social media and online marketing is of crucial importance for today’s producers.”

While many tools exist in the marketing toolbox, they all work together. Cutrer says pairing a great social media presence with a great website and a steady print advertising campaign is a guaranteed win.

“Before social media, a producer would run their print ad and mail a catalog and then hope people remember their sale,” Cutrer explains. “Today, they can run their print ad, mail their catalog, and then go full-fledged promotion with Facebook and email marketing the week of their sale to keep their event top of mind. People are so busy these days, a producer has got to continually work to keep his or her name in front of the customer.”

Don’t be afraid to seek professional help, though, before you throw yourself — and your ranch — into the raging fire of the World Wide Web.

The team at Angus Media can help breeders create a digital presence.

“We can present quotes on websites, sale books and help establish a marketing strategy for your operation,” McRell says.

In this age of technology, website development and social media is a huge pill for many breeders to swallow, simply because it’s always changing and improving.

That said, do your homework before you start marketing at your fingertips.

“Ask a lot of questions and get different perspectives,” Scott says. “Spend time looking at other websites to get a feel for what will best suit your needs. Talk to others with successful websites to see what works and doesn’t work, and, most importantly, get a lot of advice from a professional.”



Editor’s Note: Joann Pipkin is a cattlemaster and freelance writer from Republic, Mo.