

Western Video Market, 2009 Beef Industry Vision Award Winner

Strong Ties in the West and Beyond

The West's largest satellite auction service combines high-quality cattle offerings with a local marketing approach to merchandise cattle from the Pacific Ocean to the Plains.

by *Kim Holt*

For the last 20 years the western ranching community has been able to market its cattle products to a national audience, thanks to two visionary livestock marketing professionals who've always had their customers' best interests at heart.

In recognition for their innovative marketing achievements, Ellington Peek, Cottonwood, Calif., and John Rodgers, Visalia, Calif., co-founders of Western Video Market (WVM), Cottonwood, Calif., were presented with the 2009 Beef Industry Vision Award for Livestock Marketing.

The Vision Award, sponsored by Micro Beef Technologies in cooperation with the National Cattlemen's Foundation (NCF), is presented during the annual National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) Cattle Industry Convention and Trade Show. Its purpose is to bring recognition to cattle industry individuals, businesses and organizations who have incorporated innovation in order to enhance their business and the industry as a whole.

Formed with the rancher in mind

Ellington Peek and John Rodgers formed Western Video Market in 1989, specifically with the cattle producer in mind. According to Brad Peek, WVM general manager, his father and Rodgers, both reputation cattlemen, were looking for a better way to help western producers market their cattle

►WVM takes advantage of broadcast technology on DISH Network and the Internet. WVM General Manager Brad Peek says this year they've added three more sales that are Internet-viewing-only in order to hit different markets for customers. Brad says Internet sales (pictured here) are exactly like satellite sales. "You just have to watch them on the Internet instead of TV."



PHOTO BY KIM HOLT



PHOTO COURTESY OF NATIONAL CATTLEMEN'S FOUNDATION

► John Rodgers (left), Visalia, Calif., and Ellington Peek (center), Cottonwood, Calif., were presented the 2009 Beef Industry Vision Award for Livestock Markets by Bill Pratt, founder and chairman of Micro Beef Technologies, Amarillo, Texas. Peek and Rodgers, the co-founders of Western Video Market, were recognized during the Annual Cattlemen's Convention and Trade Show this past January in Phoenix, Ariz. The Vision Award is sponsored by Micro Beef in cooperation with the National Cattlemen's Foundation.

— one that would prove more dynamic and broader in scope.

The need for this marketing outlet grew as the feeding industry in California began to dwindle from drought and development.

"We were selling a lot more cattle to

out-of-state buyers," Rodgers explains. The expense involved in transporting cattle off the ranch and to a live auction was rising, and the big strings of cattle were bought in the country.

Then came WVM. It offered ranches with one or more load lots an opportunity to sell calves off the ranch while benefiting from open and competitive bidding and a wide base of buyers from across the country. And calves didn't leave home until shipping day.

No less, WVM offered the Peek family's same dedication to sellers and buyers that customers had become accustomed to from this family's Shasta Livestock Auction Yard's 40-plus years in business.

A unique marketing network

WVM may only have a few employees, but it's boasted a slate of allied partners, including

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PHOTO COURTESY OF WESTERN VIDEO MARKET

► WVM's larger sales — like the ones in Reno, Nev.; Cheyenne, Wyo.; and Ogallala, Neb. — gather a crowd of buyers and sellers to the sale site. Auctions in Reno take place at the Silver Legacy Hotel.

auction yards and bonded livestock dealers from as far north as Alberta, Canada, and as far east as Nebraska. This marketing network is in place so that ranchers can do business locally but, through WVM, can offer cattle to buyers nationally.

“A lot of the local auctions from around the country wanted to go to video, too, so they could offer that service along with their own, so we just combined,” Ellington explains.

Turlock Livestock Auction Yard, co-owned by Max Olvera, is a WVM representative in Turlock, Calif. Olvera points out that, even though producers are marketing to a national audience, their cattle can still be represented by their local auction yard.

“Now the local guys are bringing the national audience right to your ranch.” He adds, “Ellington and John had a vision of bringing video marketing not only to California but to the West. In terms of the respect they have in the cattle business, and the trust they have from people whom they do business with, it was a heck’uva good idea. After 20 years, the proof is in the pudding as to how it’s worked. It’s worked, and worked very well.”

Local, reputable, successful

In 2008 WVM marketed nearly a half million head of cattle from 17 western states, making it the largest satellite auction in the West, second nationally only to Superior.

WVM's track record of higher prices and lower commission fees isn't any surprise. Donald Doverspike, a WVM representative from Burns, Ore., attributes this to the personal relationships Ellington has with buyers, the amount of cattle handled by WVM and the quality of cattle sold. “The quality is, for the most part, the lead-end quality of cattle in the West,” he points out.

“Local” is also a specialty for this livestock video production company. “That’s been an advantage of ours,” Rodgers says. “We are pretty well-acquainted with most of our customers. A lot of customers we sell for on the video are customers we get to sell bulls to during bull sale season.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF CORNERPOST PUBLICATIONS

► One of two full-time auctioneers for WVM, John Rodgers has been in the livestock marketing business since the 1960s and says he can't remember ever not wanting to be an auctioneer. About receiving the Vision Award, he remarks, “It’s always nice to be recognized by your peers and the people you do business with. I know that Ellington and I both really appreciate it.”

Likewise, both Ellington and Rodgers have long histories in the cattle business, which contributes to WVM's success. Ellington began trading cattle in 1948 at 20 years of age. Livestock marketing ran in his family — his father was a well-known order buyer, too.

After returning from the Army, Ellington recalls, “a fella offered me an auction yard. I was just order buying and thought, ‘I should try that and see what happens,’ and this is what happened.”

With cattlemen for partners, Ellington went on to build, in 1966, the family's present-day Shasta Livestock Auction Yard. “I didn't start with anything. I just had a lot of good help from cattle people,” he says, adding, “A lot of the cattle [that] I handled order buying, we now sell on our video.”

In the auction business since the 1960s, Rodgers, who is an auctioneer, owned Stockman's Market in Visalia, Calif. Before he and Ellington put together their idea for WVM, they each had pursued video sales on their own. In the 1970s, slide shows were the chosen medium. But then came satellite.

“The real driving force behind us pursuing [video marketing] to the extent we did was Ellington's son, Andy, who unfortunately passed away in January 2008,” Rodgers explains. “Ellington did the soliciting and the gathering of the cattle, and Andy did



PHOTO COURTESY OF CORNERPOST PUBLICATIONS

► Ellington Peek built his family's Shasta Livestock Auction Yard in northern California with the help of fellow cattlemen. Today, Shasta is one of the largest livestock auction markets in the West and the headquarters of WVM. Peek is pictured with grandson Matt Norene, Wheatland, Calif., who is in the family business.

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the legwork. He worked night and day to keep Western Video going, and was real instrumental in making it the success it is.”

Rick Machado, a purebred auctioneer, has been another key figure since the start-up of WVM. He and John are WVM’s full-time auctioneers and are two of seven World Champion Auctioneers involved with the video. As WVM’s general manager, Brad oversees operations and says auctioneers from affiliated auction yards help when WVM holds its bigger sales in locations such as Reno, Cheyenne and Ogallala, where sellers and buyers often come together.

This year WVM has 13 sales scheduled — nine based in California, two in Reno and one each in Wyoming and Nebraska

— something Rodgers says he would have never dreamt when they first started out.

“I really hadn’t envisioned that we would join forces with other market agencies across the country and grow to the extent we have,” he says. But WVM has been well-received by the ranching community.

“I think they’re very pleased with what we do and how we do things,” Brad relays.

“They know that we have their best interest at heart. We can’t promise we’re always going to get the highest price, but we’re going to do everything in our power to get them the best price on that particular day.”

As for the future, WVM is in “expansion mode.” Brad explains, “We’re looking for additional representatives, we want to

increase our head counts and our frequency of sales.” But the customer will always be most important.

“We try to do a good job for the people — that’s what we’re here for,” Ellington says. “To give them the market they deserve, as both buyers and sellers.”



Editor’s Note: For more coverage of the 2009 Cattle Industry Annual Convention and NCBA Trade Show, visit www.4cattlemen.com.