

What Makes the Difference?

by Keith Evans

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The Angus business is good these days, but better for some than others. Despite the fact that we are in the liquidation phase of the cattle cycle, some breeders are getting record prices. Yet others have decided to cut back on the number of head they register for what they perceive as reduced demand.

The inevitable question is "Why?" Why do some Angus breeders prosper so obviously, while others seem to just get by?

Part of it is the business person's ability as a breeder. There are cattle producers who have a better understanding of genetics and are better able to produce superior Angus seedstock than others. Not all Angus bulls are equal, and thus are not worth the same. But that's not a problem we can solve here. I have extremely limited knowledge of genetics and little skill in cattle breeding.

Genetics, however, are only part of the formula for success in the registered Angus seedstock business. Look at auto dealers.

Every dealer with the same brand sells exactly the same product, yet they are not equally successful. Why?

For one thing, each dealership has its own image and reputation. Some are known to have slightly higher prices, but are honest and provide outstanding service. Others sell for the lowest dollar, but provide little service unless one is willing to pay through the nose. At another, walking on the lot may be like diving into a tank of hungry sharks, exciting but risky.

Whether you like it or not, you have an image as a breeder and marketer of registered Angus seedstock. Customer reaction may range from, "You can't go wrong buying cattle from Joe, he has good genetics and he'll treat you right;" down to "I don't think Joe keeps up with what's going on in the cattle business;" further down to, "I wouldn't trust him as far as you can throw him."

When you look at it this way it becomes obvious that your image

is every bit as important as the cattle you breed. Maybe more so, because you can change bad genetics quicker than you can change a bad image.

On the other hand, you may have virtually no distinctive image. Many of your customers may not perceive of your business as much different from the Angus breeder over in the next county. Either way, the image you convey through your advertising as well as all your other promotional activities determines the number of people who come to your place looking for Angus bulls and females. It also affects the price you can get for your cattle.

Since a lot of people breed and market Angus cattle, your business, Joe's Angus Farm or whatever, is your brand and you need to protect and promote it just as actively as Coca-Cola protects its trademarked brand.

In everything you do, consider the impression you will make on potential customers, and whether it's the message you want to deliver. For example, look at this month's featured road sign. Consider what impact it might have on potential customers who drive by, compared with some of the Angus farm signs you have seen, or compared to your own.

The first step to improving or, if necessary, changing your image, is to take a critical look at your business. Pinpoint the areas that need improvement, the things that may need to be eliminated, and the things that you should be doing, but are not.

Bobbie Gee, the author of "How to Create A Winning Image," says that business people should consider four areas of focus when it comes to image:



■ **Tangible image**, he says, is what affects a customer's five senses when arriving at your place. Take a critical look at your farm or ranch business headquarters. Are they attractive, inviting and business-like?

■ **Intangible image**, Gee says, is how the tangible image of your business makes a customer feel. Is your business designed to instill confidence in potential customers, to make them feel like they are in good hands? Do you, or the person the customer deals with, look and sound presentable? Are you friendly, business-like and professional?

■ **Internal image**, according to Gee, is the atmosphere within your business. This may or may not apply to your Angus business. However, some farms or ranches, or even some families, give the Impression that not everyone is happy working together. This image doesn't build customer confidence.

■ **External image**, Gee says, is the sum of the first three plus the impression you give to the public through advertising, publicity and public relations, and community and industry service. Is your advertising well planned, with a defined purpose? How involved are you in the community and in Angus and other cattle organizations, and does your activity reflect positively upon your business?

My guess is that a great many members of the American Angus Association are accomplished cattle breeders. As a result there is far less difference in the product they sell than many people believe. The big difference in the success of these breeders is how they are perceived by the buying public, and how successful they have been in establishing top-of-mind awareness in potential customers.



ANGUS SIGN OF THE MONTH



This beautiful sign marks the home of Marapaso Angus near Lewisburg, W. Va. It was sent in by Ann Fort, one of the farm owners. "We designed the sign with the help of a local artist, and put it up a little over a year ago," Ann wrote. "We did a little landscaping around the base of the sign and fixed up the fence. Our thought was that if our farm looks well kept and attractive from the road, hopefully people will think that our Angus cattle will be just as well kept and attractive."

If you have an attractive Angus sign, send in a good picture to Keith Evans, American Angus Association, and it will be considered for publication.