

# MERCHANDISING

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## Your Biggest Competitor Just Could Be You!

Some Angus breeders worry about their competition, and often with good reason. The beef seedstock business is very competitive. Not everyone likes Angus, let alone your Angus.

Those who have been around the Angus business for a couple of decades can remember when outside competition cut deeply into their business. And even today with the Angus business strong and growing there seems to be a beefseedstock producer around almost every turn in the road.

But marketing experts tell us that there is less to fear from outside competition than from competition inside our own business. The competition that can cut into sales and profits is more often than not inefficiency, bad service or downright discourtesy rather than the business down the road.

The problem of accessibility cuts into sales of some Angus breeders. Call many an Angus breeder during the middle of the morning or afternoon and you are not likely to locate a soul. If the caller is a potential customer who wants to talk about buying cattle, and gets no answer, then he or she will likely telephone the next breeder on the list. The result could be a lost sale without the breeder ever knowing about it.

Obviously many small businesses can't afford to have someone mind the telephone around the clock so to never miss a call. But answering machines are cheap and effective. Rather than get no answer, what if a potential customer, on the second ring, got an answering machine that responded with something like, "Thank you for calling. You have reached the home of Jones Performance Angus. Sorry we can't be here to take your call. We have a few bred cows for sale today, and our bulls come off test the 15th of next month. We would like to show them to you. If you leave your name and telephone number we'll call you back this evening or when you prefer."

It's a small thing, but it's sure to make the caller feel appreciated. What's more, the caller will have some information

about the operation, and the promise that the owner will get back within the next few hours. It may be enough to satisfy the urge to do something now. This could be enough to give the breeder first crack at the caller's business anyway.

Failure to follow up on a sale can be even more costly than not answering the

you live and to respect you as a good business person, as it is for your banker, or the local Extension livestock specialist.

Not only should the person who answers the telephone make a good first impression, the appearance of the breeder's farm or ranch should do the same. By its appearance and convenience, the place



telephone. If a recent buyer has a problem the seller needs to know about it right away. Sellers should never assume that they will be a first to hear about a problem with one of their cattle. More than likely it will be a neighbor or the whole neighborhood who knows first of a customer's dissatisfaction. That's why it's important to check with purchasers a week or two after animals arrive at their place. First, a business person can never thank customers too many times for their business. Plus, the early call provides an opportunity to short circuit little problems before they become big ones.

Remember too, that there is very little an Angus breeder does or says in public that doesn't affect business. Almost every action can affect the reputation of a producer and marketer of registered Angus seedstock. It may be as important for the waitress in the coffee shop to know where

should invite, even encourage people to stop. When they do, it should also build confidence in potential customers that they have arrived at a sound, well managed business.

A headquarters need not be fancy or expensive looking, but it should be neat, well arranged and business-like, with the office well marked.

It goes without saying that an Angus breeder shouldn't be his or her own worst enemy. There are enough real competitors out trying to sell bulls in your market area. So make sure that the competition is "out there" where you can see it and deal with it, not lurking behind an inefficiency or some problem that has been overlooked within your own operation.

*Keith Evans*