The Web Page

▶ *by **Angie Stump Denton,** director of Web marketing*

Associations, it's time to get online

Last June, state and regional Angus association leaders were in Saint Joseph, Mo., attending Boot Camp hosted by the American Angus Association. Discussion from the event ranged from how the American Angus Association can help state and regional associations better serve their members to budgets and association services.

Use the Web as a tool

Two specific issues discussed during the gathering were improving communication among members and enticing new members to join. Developing a Web site can help with both these challenges.

A Web site allows an association to reach current and potential members 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Current members can visit the site to find out about upcoming Association events, find contact information for other association members, and even renew their memberships.

Many states rely on a monthly or bimonthly newsletter to communicate with members; but, with the Web, you can communicate more frequently and not have to wait for printing and mailing. In most instances, if you make a decision to host an event today, within two days you can have information about the event on your site, if not sooner.

Nonmembers can learn more about your organization, its goals, activities and membership opportunities. Posting your state sale book to your site can attract new buyers, and listing information about your upcoming field day or tour can increase awareness and attendance of the event.

Just like with a newsletter or directory, associations can utilize advertising revenue to pay for the development, hosting and maintenance of a Web site. Some associations today are selling banner ads and links to offset the cost. Another revenue option would be a classified section, where members can post private-treaty offerings.

What to include?

Typical pages on most association Web sites include home pages, member listings, upcoming events and a contact us link. Many times, an association will choose to use a home page to post the photo of its current board of directors, as well as list all officers and directors with their contact information. Others put a paragraph about the organization and benefits of membership.

Most associations post their current membership lists, including e-mail addresses. Some lists include e-mail and Web addresses; others charge members to have Web site addresses listed.

The upcoming events page can list state and/or regional events as well as include a listing of members' sales.

Other pages can include tours, field days, futurities or other specific events. The Illinois Angus Association has a show and sale results page where member sale reports and state show results are posted. State association sites can include pages for juniors and auxiliary members. Some junior associations choose to have their own sites.

The Western Colorado Angus Association has a "For Members" page where it lists information for members like upcoming deadlines or specific member events.

A contact us or request form is also a good page to include in your site setup. Here, browsers can request more information. It also allows the association to capture information, including name, address and e-mail address. Once a browser fills out the form, the information submitted is e-mailed to the association contact.

These are just suggestions; Web sites can be tailored to fit the needs of each organization.

Keys to success

Three keys to success for an association Web site are to 1) make sure it is user-friendly, 2) keep it updated and 3) make it worthwhile to visit.

User friendliness is probably the No. 1 criteria for all Web sites. If you can't navigate a Web site and find the information you are looking for, you'll probably never go back. It needs to be fast-loading and easy-to-read. Don't use a lot of fonts or colored text to make it cool; in most cases, simple is better.

Once you've developed the site, your work is not over. It takes time to keep it updated. When working with your provider, see what services they offer to keep it updated. For example, Angus Productions Inc. (API) updates an association's event page the first of each month at no cost, adding new dates from the Angus Almanac and removing dates that have already happened.

Remember, if you want people to keep coming back to your site, keep it updated and post information people want to see. For example, if you don't have an event coming up for a couple months, but you just had your tour, add some pictures and highlights of the tour to your site. Members love to see their pictures, so use this opportunity to add a personal touch to the site.

Good luck as you take your organization online. If there is anything we at API can do to help you, let us know. We'd love to bid on your site; we're here to serve you.

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