

# Find What Works, Stick to It

*Alabama cattleman boosts bottom line with AngusLink.*

*by Morgan Marley Boecker, Certified Angus Beef LLC*

They say reputation is everything, but it's what pays Phil Slay's bills.

Despite not having a face-to-face conversation, the same cattle buyer has bought Slay's calves nearly every year since 1993. Slay accurately describes the calves, and they do well at the feedyard. Integrity and performance make a strong partnership.

In Five Points, Ala., Phil and his wife, Kim, manage a 150-cow commercial Angus herd and a small sheep flock.

He's a sixth-generation farmer and grew up on a cattle farm and apple orchard. She's a past chemistry teacher, but now works full-time on the farm with her husband and raises greenhouse tomatoes for the

community throughout the year. Together, they closely manage their bottom line.

## Doing more to earn more

Phil's calves are enrolled in AngusLink<sup>SM</sup> Age and Source and the Angus-sired Genetics process-verified-program (PVP) claims. He's adamant about buying Angus bulls, transferring the breed papers to his name to have as much potential performance data as possible. It's a practice that pays.

"We repeatedly earn the highest prices for our feeder calves sold in a board sale in Alabama," Phil says.

"People ask me, 'How did you do that?' And I tell them it's all due to AngusLink. That program has worked for me."

Recordkeeping isn't much of a hassle when he sees the boost on payday.

"I was getting 12 cents a pound above the average calves sold at the stockyard. It has made me money for years," he explains. "It is

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pretty simple to enroll, because I know which bulls breed which cows."

Phil has sought value-added marketing routes for his feeder calves for years. He helped start the Alabama Piedmont Cattle Marketing Association in the early '90s, worked closely with the state's Beef Cattle Improvement Association and was an early user of AngusSource<sup>®</sup>. Along the way he's helped Alabama and Georgia producers market their calves similarly.

He wants more cattlemen to try AngusLink, promoting the value of the breed in an area not historically known for Angus.

"Phil has really embraced good Angus genetics, documentation and the value that it brings back to his environment," says Ginette Gottswiller, American Angus Association director of verification services.



Phil and Kim Slay are conscious of their bottom line. Marketing their calves through AngusLink<sup>SM</sup> has worked well for them and guaranteeing them a profit on sale day.

Tommy Maples, owner of Maples Stock Farm in Elkmont, Ala., adds, “We need more guys like Phil in the cattle business. He encourages young producers and teaches the next generation ways to take up agriculture.”

## Angus ever since

Analyzing carcass data 15 years ago, Phil realized his Simmental bulls didn’t produce the quality beef he was seeking. Twenty of his calves graded Select, which fueled the transition to Angus bulls.

“Since then I haven’t bought any unregistered Angus bulls,” he says. “Now I like to work with Angus breeders that will work with me.”

Every dollar Phil spends needs to have a return. Phil even went so far as to buy secondhand bulls from a neighbor, but he wouldn’t compromise the right genetics or his ability to participate in revenue-generating programs.

Before he made the deal, he worked with Maples to ensure the genetics were right, and he could get the registration papers transferred.

“Most cattlemen would just take the bulls,” Maples says. “But he didn’t.”

Phil receives pen information from cattle after they leave his farm, and uses that information to make breeding decisions and improve the herd. That is the mark of someone not willing to settle for average, Gottswiller says.

The Slays evaluate phenotype and look for average birth weight, good milk, docility, and balanced maternal and carcass traits. Moderate-frame cows work best on their operation, and they aim to patiently find suitable bulls while staying within their operation budget.

Southeast calves are stereotypically



For almost 15 years, Phil Slay has embraced high-quality Angus genetics and the value it brings to his farm, even in an environment where it isn’t the common trend.

high-risk, so Phil pays close attention to herd health and follows strict vaccination protocol while preconditioning his calves.

“The last few years, the feeder who received our calves has asked for more,” Kim says. “He could find bigger calves somewhere, but we really focus on disposition and health.”

They’re the kind that walk off the truck at the feedyard after 18 hours on the road and go straight to water and the bunk, she says. The calves market themselves.

During calving season, Kim keeps new mamas at a safe distance while Phil tags the calves, but most days,

it’s a one-person enterprise. Phil checks the herd daily, feeding the weaned calves by hand so they’re preconditioned before the sale. Wild cows are not tolerated, and they select easy-going calves for the feeder.

In recent years, the buyer reports back 90% of the calves graded Choice or higher, Phil says, noting he’s always got yield grade in the back of his mind, too.

“It makes me really proud that our calves do well,” he adds. “I imagine the AngusLink folks are pretty happy that a simple guy like me can do that, too.” [A](#)



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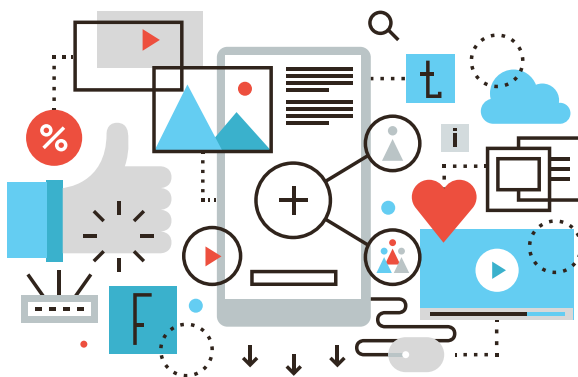
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# Seven Savvy Social Media Strategies

*Complement print marketing efforts with extra reach through social media.*

*by Kindra Gordon, field editor*



Facebook. YouTube. Instagram. While these digital media sites are known as a means for sharing social connections, they can help boost your business credentials as well. Specifically, social media can help extend print marketing efforts, by offering a more personalized or “behind the scenes” insight into the business. In total, social media marketing strategies may help further inform ag customers — as well as provide ag education to the general public.

## **Strategy 1 — Utilize video.**

Amanda Kelly, who has worked with hundreds of business owners as director of small business training with the Southeast Kentucky Economic Development Corporation, shares that YouTube is the No. 1 platform for reaching all age groups. A close second is Facebook Live.

She notes that people are often scared of using Facebook Live, but she says, “It gets the most engagement with customers.” Additionally, she shares that having the “location” turned on when posting can also boost views.

**Strategy 2 — Be less promotional and more informational.** Print and radio ads should focus on “selling” your product, while your social media focus is on “telling” about your product, Kelly suggests. For instance, she explains, you can’t sell over Facebook, but you can market,

and people can engage and ask questions. You can share animal care photos, recipes and shopping lists for a recipe, highlight photos of a meal you’ve prepared, as well as what you feed the animals. Ultimately, social media images should tell the story of your farm or business team.

**Strategy 3 — Use high-quality photos.** Kelly even advises hiring a photographer to take several great images that you might utilize and post throughout the year. These photos could also be used with print marketing campaigns as well.

**Strategy 4 — Consider format.** If using Facebook (or Instagram), make sure it is a business page and not a personal page. Why? Kelly explains personal pages are limited to 5,000 friends, while a business Facebook page allows unlimited followers and provides in-depth insight analytics to assess how many views posts receive as well as some age and gender demographics. You can also schedule content to be more efficient with your time. With that, Kelly notes that email newsletters can also be an effective marketing tool, and she points out, “You own your contacts.”


## **Strategy 5 — Consider timing.**

From social media research, Kelly reports that there are certain times that produce more engagement with viewers than others. In general, she says, the best post times tend to be 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., and 7 to 9 p.m. The worst time is 3 p.m. Additionally, Tuesdays and Thursdays tend to have the highest engagement, followed by the weekend.

## **Strategy 6 — Conduct a survey.**

The beauty of social media is that it allows for collecting input or feedback to help guide your business. Thus, Kelly advises it can be a great tool to conduct mini-surveys related to your business and gain insights from customers. She suggests asking just two or three questions and seeing what kind of input and ideas you receive. (Surveys can be developed for free in programs like Google or Survey Monkey with the link then shared on social media sites.)

## **Strategy 7 — Give gratitude.**

Express how thankful you are to customers by including photos or short features recognizing customers on your social media sites. Ultimately, gratitude is key to any long-lasting customer relationships, Kelly notes. 

*Editor’s note: Amanda Kelly is the lead developer and program manager for Be Boss Online — a digital marketing curriculum designed to improve online marketing of small business owners. Learn more at <https://bebossonline.com>.*

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