

Can't Go? Ask for a Video

by Terrie Clark

What would be the next best thing to having potential customers come visit your place to look at cattle? How about taking your place to your customers?

Said to have everything but the smell, videotape may be the next best thing to being there. Whether you're promoting your program or selling individual animals, videos can put you, your place and your animals in the living rooms of your potential customers. You can explain your philosophy, describe your program and sell your product.

Although not new or revolutionary, videotape technology has not been widely tapped as a marketing tool by the purebred cattle industry. However, with VCRs in nearly 70 percent of United States households, videos offer definite potential as a means to reach your specific market audience.

James Leachman of Leachman Cattle Co., Billings, Mont., was one of the first to recognize and use video as a promotional tool. He says he's convinced that cattlemen are, like all males of the (human) species, visually stimulated.

In the early 1980s Leachman produced a 30-minute video called "Hell Bent for Leather." The purpose of the tape was to publicize the Leachman Cattle Co. philosophy and program.

Leachman mailed out several copies of the tape and showed it at his sale party that year. Initially he likened the whole project to buying an expensive dessert — "once you've eaten it, it's gone."

His appreciation for the project changed the following spring however, when as an afterthought to his sale advertising he included a blurb that copies of the tape were available by request. (Leachman sends out the tapes at no charge as long as they are returned.) To meet the requests, he says,

copies of the tape were made, 20 a day for several days. It's a demand that has recurred every spring since 1982.

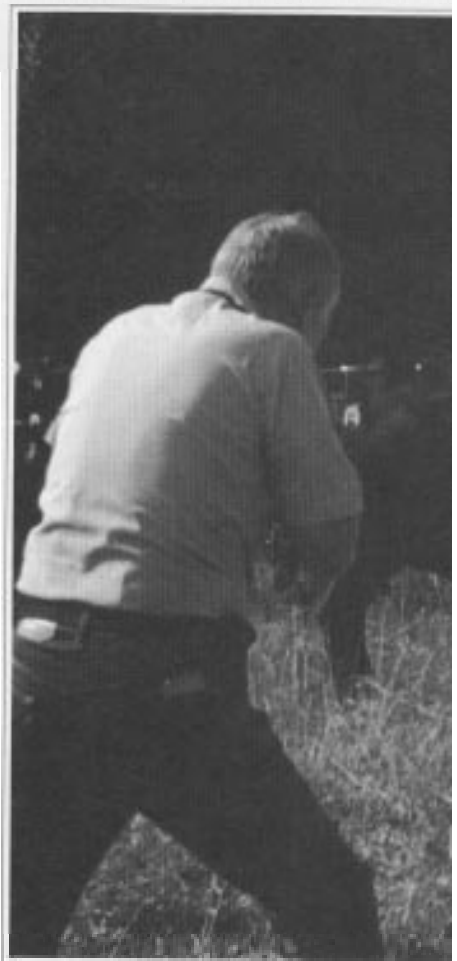
"Hell Bent for Leather" has been seen throughout the United States in schools, at FFA, 4-H and cattle association meetings and in foreign countries as well. Leachman tells of meeting individuals as he travels who have received copies of the tape. They are apologetic about not having returned it because there's an upcoming meeting or get-together where they want to show it.

Since "Hell Bent for Leather," Leachman has produced a second video that also promotes the Leachman Cattle Co. program and philosophy,

Dave Nichols of Nichols Farms, Bridgewater, Iowa, decided to try video marketing two years ago. He has made two in a series of three. The first video introduces Nichols Farms, explaining who they are and where they came from. Used selectively, it is sent to individuals who have requested additional information about Nichols Farms and is shown to first-time farm visitors. It is not intended, nor is it used, to stimulate an initial interest in Nichols Farms; a quick-read printed piece is used for that.

Nichols has made about 600 copies of the video. Like Leachman, he sends out the tapes at no charge with the stipulation that they are returned. To date, he has experienced a 60 to 70 percent return rate.

The second Nichols Farms video was a pilot project in holding a video sale. He had 30 yearling bulls that he wanted to sell, and in which several people had expressed an interest in buying. When the time came to sell the bulls, Nichols made a video that included footage of each bull. As the viewer watches, each bull's performance information is given across the bottom of the screen, much



like severe weather alert information is given on your television. At the same time the viewer listens to narration about the bull's pedigree and other pertinent information.

Having kept a list of the people interested in the bulls, Nichols sent copies of the tape to each of them by an overnight service. They all arrived at approximately the same time. The buyers were instructed that to purchase

a bull, they were to telephone Nichols as soon as they viewed a bull they wanted to buy.

The first bull sold was a one-half interest for \$10,000. In the first half day after the buyers received the video, \$30,000 to \$40,000 worth of bulls were sold. Twenty of the 30 bulls sold with that video; some of the buyers that didn't view the video right away were

Both Leachman and Nichols used professional production companies to produce their videos. This is one point on which many users of video disagree.

Nichols believes a video is just like a photograph. A poor photograph is worse than no photograph. He says a video will never leave Nichols Farms that hasn't been professionally taped and edited. "Some of the home videos we get in here

unless you catch it just right. That's not true with a video."

With the home equipment

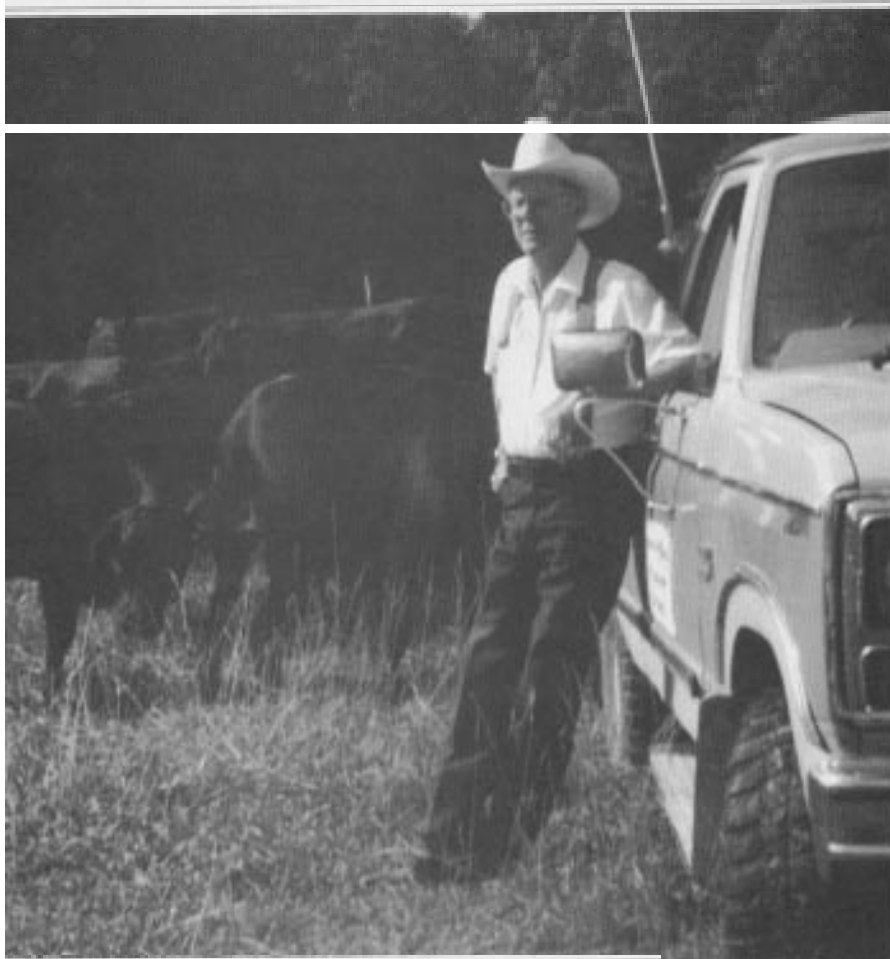
available to consumers today, Leachman believes producers can do a reasonably good job. A home video could be very effective for a small operation without incurring the expense of a professional production company.

Mike Sweet of Agri-Base Inc., the communication/marketing subsidiary of Livestock Marketing Association, Kansas City, Mo., produced the two Nichols Farms videos. Agri-Base Inc., has produced promotional videos for the Livestock Marketing Association, the American Polled Hereford Association, and industry issue-oriented, educational videos.

Sweet sees video as a marketing tool that can be used to promote a program and image as well as to sell individual or groups of animals. "Video allows a producer to transport his entire facility — his farm and his cattle — all the way across the country or to a foreign country. He can say this is who I am, this is what I do, this is our program, this is what our place looks like, this is the kind of equipment we feed our cattle with and here are the cattle. The only alternative to that is for the interested person to travel to the producers place."

Another positive aspect of video is that you are preconditioning your customer before they ever come to your place, Sweet says. By video you have been able to convey your philosophy, your management program and the people behind what you do, plus show them your product. You don't have to communicate that information when they visit — they already know it. When a potential customer arrives at your place they're ready to look at cattle, maybe specific individuals they saw on the tape.

Sweet agrees with Nichols about professionally-made videos. "Everyone in the United States is very accustomed and attuned to 'slick' programming and production. It's there on NBC, ABC, CBS nightly news, Dan Rather, Tom Brokaw; it's slick. Then there's cable TV. You can get music video, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Regardless of what age you are, or the interest you have, there is slick



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disappointed when they called that evening or the following day because the bulls they were interested in were already sold.

The third Nichols Farms video, the last of the three-part series which has not yet been made, will focus on what Nichols Farms produces. It will discuss how they take weaning and yearling weights and what they mean.

sure don't do anything for the guy's cattle," he says.

Leachman disagrees. "My guess," he says, "is that a bad video is not as bad as a bad still photo. A good still photograph may be very sterile. Ninety percent of the advertising and show photos in the *Angus Journal* are exactly the same pose. A video does away with that. A still photo of an animal moving looks funny,

electronic programming coming to you on the TV set. Livestock producers are part of that world as well. They watch television, they know what is good and what is not so good."

But video quality for livestock producers doesn't lie entirely in professional taping and editing. Another dimension to consider is the livestock expertise of the person doing the taping. Just as in photography, the person operating the camera needs to know when the cattle look their best; they have to have the ability to present the animal when it's in its best pose.

Although you may be able to find a professional video production company to make a video for you, they may or may not be knowledgeable of livestock. Conversely, producers know what their cattle should look like, but may have to spend some time learning to operate a video camera.

Select Sires and American Breeders Service (ABS) have been using videos of their bulls for the last four to five years and have observed the use of video by the producers they serve as well. The two breeder services use video much like a catalog. A new video is made each year. Their current bulls are shown and their statistical data presented, followed by footage of actual progeny from calving up to daughters in production.

Paul Kunkel, Select Sires, sees a great potential to use video as a supplement to a sale catalog for large dispersion sales, and to promote a program and build image or to attract new investors.

"For larger sales, a video could supplement the sale catalog and would serve to increase participation, even if it didn't increase attendance," he says. Having viewed the sale offering on videotape, customers could make their buying decisions and telephone their bids at sale time, saving them the time and expense of traveling to the sale.

"I definitely think most every big purebred ranch will have their own video, promoting their programs, their philosophies, facilities and herd," he says. And although Kunkel believes the producer could tape his own footage, he would recommend hiring a professional to edit the raw footage. Only 10 percent of the raw footage taken by Select Sires ends up in their final video; the current ABS video was edited from 110 hours of raw footage down to the final 60 minutes.

Keith Vander Velde, ABS, receives quite a few home videos from producers who want him to consider one of their bulls. "I'm very receptive to them," he says. "You get to see the animal better, you get to see him move. It's like being

there without the airline travel and the motel room.”

Given a bull's pedigree, performance information and a reasonably good video, Vander Velde can make many decisions from his office. A video, he says, "... gets my interest. If the pedigree is right and the performance is right and the video is right, then the trip out there is to negotiate the deal, not to decide.”

What is his reaction to an unskillfully taped video? "Most of us aren't evaluating the calibre of the video, we're evaluating the individual animal," he replies. He admits, however, "If the video is really, really jerky and never really allows you to see the animal the way you'd like to your interest does wane a little.”

For producers who are making home videos as a sales tool, Vander Velde stresses that you are creating a first impression with the video so you need to make it the best you can. That doesn't mean hire a professional production crew, but it does mean playing it on your VCR at home and if it's not the best you can do, redo it.

Vander Velde also sees producers using video as a supplement to sale catalogs and to target the top end of their upcoming sale offering to those specific customers who would be most interested. One of the features inherent to video is that it does allow you to more specifically target your market audience. Only those individuals you select or who have expressed an interest will receive it. A video also can be made to reach a broader base of customers. The same video can be used to reach seedstock customers for more than one breed as well as commercial customers.

The function of video has not been to replace existing tools in a marketing program, but rather to add to them. Producers using video most effectively today have a well-planned, multi-media marketing program in place. To date, name recognition has been a prerequisite for a successful video.

Video has successfully carved out a niche in the commercial cattle industry with nationwide video auctions. With video's uses just being revealed, it has begun to find its way into the purebred livestock industry.

