



Merchandising

► by Keith Evans

Don't neglect the neighbors

There are many markets you must cultivate in order to sell registered cattle. The national market is important, but the local market is the most critical, and it is too often shorted. Consider potential bull or replacement-heifer customers who live nearby.

Commercial producers, particularly the smaller-scale ones, usually don't read breed magazines. If you don't market locally, some of them may not know you are in the seedstock business.

When I prepare for a marketing seminar, I always ask several cattle breeders to mark their customers' locations on a map. They put a dot on a map for every customer they've had over the previous two or three years. The results usually surprise them.

What these maps illustrate is that most customers live within 50 miles of where they buy cattle. In sparsely populated areas, the radius may expand to 100 miles, but at least 90% of most everyone's customers are local.

Buyers, particularly commercial cattlemen, seldom drive long distances to purchase bulls. There are exceptions, of course. Replacement-heifer customers or club-calf buyers often will travel farther to find what they want. Breeders should be well-known to every commercial cattle producer within a 50-mile radius of their place and to the larger producers within 100 miles.

Furthermore, it is nearly as important to be well-known to the influencers within this market area. Bankers, Extension livestock specialists, feed and farm supply dealers, FFA advisors, and 4-H leaders often are asked for advice about where to locate cattle that fit particular needs.

Be top-of-mind

You want to achieve local top-of-mind awareness. When any of the breeders or influencers within your trade area think of registered bulls or females, you want them to think of you first and favorably. To achieve this awareness requires an understanding of the resources available to you and a willingness to invest in them.

For example, beef-cattle projects are at the heart of many 4-H clubs and FFA chapters. Develop a plan to bring your business to the attention of every 4-H and FFA leader. That may not be as difficult as you expect.

Invite every 4-H or FFA member with an interest in beef cattle to a yearling-bull-weighting event at your place. Get a good speaker to discuss the importance of accurate weights and the value of performance records. To make it a day, get a local group to prepare a hearty but inexpensive lunch. If all goes well, it can become an annual event. Each event will bring young people and their parents back to your place as customers.

Along this same line, you need to be the resident cattle expert in your area. Be willing to answer questions from the media about the cattle business. I am not talking about becoming a media hog who tries to get named in the newspaper at every opportunity. But as you build your reputation, expect to be contacted by media. When you are, be willing to comment and to have something interesting and pertinent to say.

Share news

Keep the media informed about your business. The easy way to do this is by learning something about news reporting. Local newspapers, radio and TV stations are always looking for information about people in their area. They covet this news. Yet, it is the most difficult for them to obtain since they never have enough reporters. When you provide a good story lead, you help them and yourself.

Report the newsworthy things about your family and your business. News that almost

surely will be of interest includes your purchase of a new herd bull or when your child shows a winner at a local, regional or national cattle show. Don't overlook the times when you or a family member is elected as an officer or director of an organization or wins an award. When you have an open house or a field day or when you invite those 4-H and FFA members to your place, the media not only will run a story about it, they likely will send a photographer to cover the event.

Provide the news in one of two ways. Write a news release and mail it to the appropriate editor or news director, or just collect the necessary information and give them a call. Whether written or verbal, make sure the report answers these questions: *who* was or will be involved in *what* event or situation, *when* and *where* it will or did happen, *why* it is important, and *how* it came to be. Every time one of your stories is used, it will make you better known and bring in customers.

Advertise locally

Put up road signs in strategic places. Make them simple, attractive and easy to read. Then keep them in good repair. Before long, even the waitress in the local coffee shop will know your name, your business, where you are located and how to direct people to your place.

Don't rely too heavily on the generosity of local media. Spend a little money with them. Advertise when you have cattle for sale (and not just in the classifieds). Advertise in special editions that promote farm or cattle events or if you are sponsoring a field day or an open house. Advertising isn't expensive in most weekly newspapers and on local radio stations. Make a list of the ones in your market area, work up an advertising schedule, and include it in your budget.

Being well-known, well-respected and well-liked is the name of the game in marketing, in addition to having a high-quality product. People buy from people or businesses they like and trust. And they prefer those businesses to be as close to home and as convenient as possible.

So get out your map, draw a 50-mile-radius circle around your place, and develop a plan to achieve top-of-mind awareness with the locals. It will be time and money well spent.

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