

# Trek with Technology

*Today's cattle producer needs to incorporate technology into their operation to succeed, rather than shying away from it.*

*by Megan Silveira, assistant editor*

There is no doubt the modern world is tech-savvy. From smartphones to an ever-growing dependence on social media, the average individual has several forms of technology they have incorporated into everyday life.

Why should the modern cattle producer be any different? Instead of being intimidating, all of technology's many forms can be an asset to any cattleman.

"Technology is vital, especially in this day and age," says James Coffey, owner of Branch View Angus in Hustonville, Ky. "In the cattle industry, we're just a low-margin business, and it's vital we have things like technology to help us manage our businesses."

## Honing in the home front

For Coffey, this extra management comes in the form of equipment. In Kentucky, Coffey runs anywhere from 600-700 head of cattle year-round, including bred cows, open heifers, bulls and steers. With such a large number of cattle to manage, Coffey says he looks to technology to help increase efficiency and productivity on his operation.

For Branch View Angus, technology is more than just smartphones or laptops. Coffey says he looks to incorporate technology into equipment that can help push his business to the next level.

In 2018 Coffey made his first technological investment when he built a monoslope barn. This type

of facility slopes one way to help increase airflow. Being based in central Kentucky, Coffey says he has the added challenge of high amounts of rain each year.

"We see almost 50 inches (in.) of rain a year, so mud is a big problem in the wintertime," he says. "We've seen a huge benefit."

Coffey says the barns were built with the intention of keeping cattle dry and out of the mud during the winter months, but their benefit has been tenfold. From an increase of three pounds (lb.) of gain per day in his bulls to overall better health in his calf crop, he says these barns have made a world of difference.

With the success of the barns, Coffey found himself seeking



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out even more technological advancements to incorporate.

“As the operation has grown, managing all those different cattle groups and keeping data collection is hard,” he says. Coffey transferred his herd over to Electronic Identification (EID) last November to help manage his livestock.

Coffey compares the system to putting bar codes on cattle, which allows producers to eliminate the need for pen and paper. By also investing in new scales and animal performance software, these “bar codes” elevate data collection even further, as Coffey says weights are automatically collected and recorded when the animal is on the scale. The system allows for chuteside data collection, and even goes so far as to create a core set of data for the entire herd and creates summaries for groups of cattle, he adds.

“If cattle are not performing optimally, you can quickly fall behind,” Coffey says. “And if you’re not paying attention to details, you can quickly use your entire profit.”

With easier data collection, he says the EID system has been well worth the investment. While he admits there was a small learning curve, he does not think there were any disadvantages to this technological investment for his operation.

His biggest takeaway from incorporating technology into his home operation is the importance of finding what fits.

“Find the best practices of other operations and adapt those to your own,” he advises. “Technology can be a sizable investment, so use whatever you can and whatever is affordable.”

### Connecting with customers

While Coffey utilizes technology in the form of equipment, Christina Ward of Ward Cattle Company in Orland, Calif., has a slightly different approach. She sees technology as a new and exciting method to communicate with other breeders in the country and potential clients.

“I think there’s not enough information out there presented in ways that people want to consume it,” Ward says. “There’s tons of good research and data, but we live in a world where people want the information quickly in a condensed version.”

This very idea of simplified and consumer-friendly content is what drove Ward to start the Stock Show Stories blog in 2018. Combining her own experiences from her time in the show ring with tips and tricks from her husband, Frank, Ward taught

herself the “blogging process” and now has a following of close to 3,000 visitors each month.

Ward says she and her husband consider themselves lucky to have had mentors when they were younger and getting started in the cattle industry, so the blog was a way for them to help junior cattlemen who are not so fortunate.

“People want access to advice but sometimes don’t know how to get it. I think sometimes people are intimidated to ask for help, so this was a way to give people access to answers to questions they were afraid to ask,” she adds.

Ward says she had no prior knowledge of the blogging world and had to teach herself how to use online programs like WordPress to start Stock Show Stories. With the help of Google and YouTube, Ward says she employed the “try and try again” technique until she had a framework for her blog she was proud to share with the industry.

The blog is a combination of memories and stories from Ward’s time in the industry paired with advice or suggestions from herself and her husband. By altering her posts to match issues in the industry or suggestions from her followers,

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Ward says she works to keep content relevant, entertaining and, most importantly, educational.

“When content is interesting, people will keep consuming it,” she says. “Traditional forms of media aren’t always the most attainable for people, and there are key audience members looking for technology like this.”

While the blog was certainly a large time investment, Ward says she believes it was well worth it. She considers self-taught skills to be extremely valuable, and

says the blog has been rewarding for her and her family.

Ward admits the financial return on investment from technology like social media or a blog is difficult to calculate, but there is a large emotional return for the Ward Cattle Company. She says writing has always made her happy, and she loves the chance to share her family’s insight or experiences with other cattle

producers in any way she can.

She says the blog allows for her family to connect with potential customers and serves as one small

ingredient in the overall marketing package. Ward believes people like to form relationships in the cattle industry, and her blog is another way for those potential clients to learn more about Ward Cattle Company.

Ward says as seedstock breeders, she and her husband want their customers to be competitive. By consistently striving to breed high-quality cattle and providing free tips on exhibiting the cattle through the blog, Ward says she is doing all she can to help their clients succeed. **AJ**

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