

doing a better job

MERCHANDISING

by Keith Evans, Director of Communications and Public Relations

How many of your good bull customers haven't been to your place in the last year or two years?

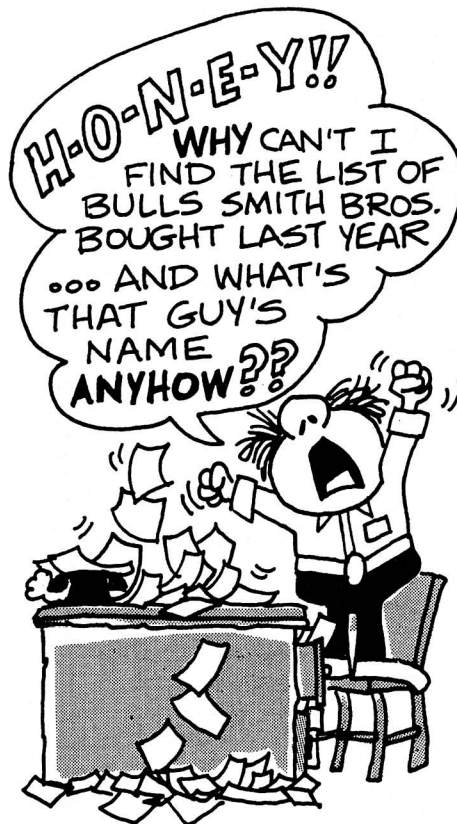
Who would be a good prospect to purchase those last three bulls you have left for sale that are costing you money every day they stay around to eat and knock down fences?

You have known John Brown for years, and now you need to call him. What's his telephone number? His wife's name? If she answers you'll feel foolish calling her "Mrs. Brown."

The answers to all these questions, and many more, can be found in your customer card file—if you have one. If you don't, these slow late-summer days might be an ideal time to put one together. Once compiled, it will be such a valuable sales tool, you'll wonder how you ever got along without it.

Every Angus breeder I know who has a customer file treasures it. For example . . . in many families, the person who sells cattle is not the one who does the paper work. So the seller may neglect some needed information. If someone leaves a note that three heifers sold to Bill Cook at Springfield, how do you fill out the transfer papers? Is Cook's membership in the American Angus Assn. recorded as Bill Cook, William Cook, William and Sally Cook, W.F. Cook and Son, or Cook Angus Inc.? And which Springfield is it? Details, but necessary. A proper customer file will tell you whether a buyer is a member of the Association or not and how their membership is listed, along with the complete mailing address. A quick check of the file provides the answers.

If available, a home computer might provide an ideal place to keep your customer file. It will provide easy access to the information and changes are easily made. But don't wait until you get a computer to start your file. Most people use either 3x5 or 5x7 file cards and keep them alphabetically in the appropriate size file box.



What should be included on each card? Information can be as simple as name, address and telephone number, or as extensive as you want to make it. Here is a list of the facts that many people include:

- 1—Name, address and telephone number of the person or firm.
- 2—Whether they are members or non-members of the American Angus Assn. and the official membership name in the Association.
- 3—First names of spouse and children and even what they look like.
- 4—Name of farm manager or herdsman if they are people with responsibility.
- 5—All purchases made, along with date of purchase, sex of animals and amounts paid per head.
- 6—Breeding on the bulls purchased, to help them avoid in-breeding.

7—Directions to the farm or ranch, particularly if you make deliveries.

8—Information on non-customers who should be customers.

This file is a necessity if you do any direct mail work. Direct mail can be as simple as mailing a card to everyone on the list when you have bulls finishing a yearling test, or when you have open or bred heifers for sale.

One Angus breeder with a customer card file plans to invite all his customers to the farm for lunch this fall when a local Angus association tour visits. He will be ready for the tour group anyway, so it will be little extra trouble to provide food for the good customers who will show up. The same breeder sends cards to his customers when he hosts a field day. It is an easy way to show off cattle and farm at their best, without having to do much extra work or planning.

By keeping track of when people buy, and what, you can flip through the file to find customers who haven't purchased recently. A telephone call may be all it takes to get them back to your place again. Or you may want to set up a program to telephone everyone on the list once a year.

With a record of what people pay for cattle, and what kind they prefer, you can identify customers who might be interested in animals you have for sale at any particular time. Of course the date of the last purchase indicates when they should be in the market again.

Many businesses either store their customer file in a fireproof vault or keep a duplicate in a bank vault and update it regularly. And competitors never see it. You may not want to go to such extent, but it shows just how much value businesses who make their living from sales place on customer records.

So, whether you are selling cattle or arranging for a bank loan, your customer file can make things a lot easier.

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