

Check Tattoos, Transfer Cattle Promptly

There is no wrath like that of a parent whose child has been denied; it is far worse, experience shows, than that of a scorned lover. What's more it is a marketer's nightmare.

At an important junior Angus show this summer six animals were disqualified for lack of a readable tattoo, or none at all. More than half had been purchased specifically for the junior members to show. At least one animal showed no evidence of ever having been in contact with a tattoo instrument.

I am not sure what the legal responsibility is when a breeder sells an animal with no tattoo to tie it to the registration certificate. But it is a marketing disaster. First of all, most parents become irate when told that their child will not be able to show the animal. They are embarrassed to be caught in the uncomfortable situation. They know they should have checked the animal to ensure that it carried a readable tattoo and that the tattoo matched the one printed on the registration certificate.

Their first reaction is to criticize the person who checks the tattoos and discovers the problem, sometimes making a spectacle of themselves as they embarrass the individual appointed to uphold the show rules. Their next, and longer lasting, reaction is to become furious at the breeder who sold them the animal with improper identification. And they are not bashful about telling everyone who will listen just who the offending breeder is and how much his or her negligence has cost their child and themselves. Some no doubt even question the accuracy of the pedigree.

Just as serious a marketing blunder is failure to transfer the registration papers promptly to the new owner. At nearly every junior show which has an ownership deadline this problem rears its ugly head. One youngster this year had owned a heifer for months, but did not receive the registration paper, even after his parents had made frequent requests to the seller. The heifer did not get transferred in time to make the show deadline. The negative publicity generated by the frustrated buyers probably cost the seller more in lost sales than a very costly advertising program could overcome in two years.

These problems aren't limited to juniors. Within one seven-day period, some time back, three members called the Association asking for help to get registration papers transferred to them. The injured parties were livid because they were ready to register offspring from the females they had purchased months before, and could not.

In the end, the females were all transferred by the offending breeder, but at a higher cost. The minimum transfer fee is only \$5, but after 30 days from the date of sale it goes to \$7, and after 60 days have passed the fee is \$12 per head. The delay is costly

in out of pocket expenses as well as in lost future business.

Everyone is in a hurry. Consequently, when a breeder is loading out cattle that have just been sold it is tempting not to run them through a chute to check tattoos and compare them to the registration papers. Furthermore, once the cattle are in the hands of the new buyer there are reasons, which seem logical at the time, not to send in the transfers immediately. Then, days drag into weeks and sometimes weeks drag into months. Fortunately, delay and neglect aren't the rule for most Angus breeders, but few can claim to have never failed to check tattoos and send in transfers promptly.

Customer service, or lack of it, can make or break a business. The best customer service begins after the sale is made and the check is written. Research has shown that 90 percent of unhappy customers never complain to the seller—they just never return. By the same token, 90 percent of unhappy customers will complain to nine other people about their unhappiness, and the other 10 percent will complain to 20 others. These complaints, which most breeders never hear, will nevertheless silently remove thousands of dollars from breeders' pockets in the form of lost sales.



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