

# Merchandising

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## Selling on the Internet

For some eye-catching promotion, call up Angus breeder home pages on the Internet. You will see color pictures, some flashing on and off. In others, information scrolls across the page like a Times Square sign. There is color galore and type in all sizes and styles. Creativity at times runs rampant.

As creative as it is, all this worries me a little. My reaction is somewhat like that of the late, great advertiser Bill Bembach, who could have been discussing some of today's Angus web sites when he said a number of years ago, "Today everybody is talking about creativity, and frankly that's got me worried. I fear that we (will) keep the good taste and lose the sell. I fear all the sins we may commit in the name of creativity."

A few months back I helped judge Angus breeder home pages entered in an *Angus Journal* contest. Many of them were things of beauty, with all the bells and whistles that a talented programmer could provide. But there was not enough "sell." There was a lot of flash, but too little that immediately grabbed your attention by offering benefits to make the reader want to delve further into the information that the breeder had put together.

That's a shame, because the World Wide Web can be a great selling tool — many have already proved this. It offers virtually unlimited space for advertisers to provide potential buyers with detailed benefits and information. Unlike media advertising, there is plenty of space to include photos of animals, pedigrees, performance, breeding philosophy, animals that are available for sale, directions to the farm or ranch, even photos of the owner or manager that the potential customer will be dealing with. On a home page, length is not costly.

It's tempting for the home page designer to believe flashing pictures, moving letters, color and "creativity" is all it takes to interest and hold readers and get them involved with your message. But don't count on it. Internet browsers have a lot of home pages at their disposal. In some ways, the Internet is more competitive than a magazine because it's easy to jump from one site to another. If the first page of a site does not grab the person's interest, he or she can click on to another that hopefully will be more fun, interesting or informative. It makes no difference how much information the advertiser includes, if the net surfer doesn't get past the first page.

The principles of good advertising apply to a home page just as they do to print or broadcast advertising. Just like a good print ad, your web page should get attention, arouse interest and create desire

on the very first page. A headline that promises a benefit should be combined with a photo that brings the browser to a halt and makes him stop thinking about what else is available on the Web. You can use moving letters, flashing headlines, color and sound to do the job but above all else it must sell, right from the start.

Once you have accomplished these three tasks, then your home page must work hard at building conviction. You want your visitor to feel that you are honest and trustworthy, and that you know the cattle business, particularly the Angus seedstock business. Here is where you provide detailed information on your cattle, your breeding program, and even yourself, your family members and your employees. Explain your guarantee and the other services you offer, like free delivery, 30 days free insurance and free junior Angus membership to young buyers.

After you've pulled the person in and presented a convincing sales message, the final job is to encourage action, hopefully action that will result in a sale. You may want them to request a catalog and come to your sale, or to make an appointment to stop by your place, or at least give you a call or contact you by E-mail for additional information. Whatever it is tell them

what you would like them to do and make it easy for them to do it.

If the person reading your message is not interested in buying now, give them a reason to come back to your home page in the future. Tell when you will publish your weaning and/or yearling weight information, when your sale catalog will be available or when a group of bred heifers will be listed. One home page we saw in the *Journal* contest featured a monthly contest of its own with a prize as a teaser to bring people back.

Don't forget that new people are buying computers and modems every day. So if you have a home page, keep the address in front of the public in your advertising, on your business card, letterheads and on everything else you print or publish.

As you plan to take advantage of this relatively new marketing tool, remember Bill Bembach's admonition. Use all the programming creativity you can muster, but don't let "creativity" lead you into committing the deadly advertising sin of leaving out the "sell."



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