

# Something Old, Something New

*Circle S Angus uses a mix of old-fashioned and new-fangled tools to seek out prospective buyers and communicate with current customers.*

BY JENNIFER HOTCHKISS

**A**s a new millennium approaches full of opportunities to communicate via the information superhighway, one young Angus breeder still believes in the old-fashioned form of communication — talking one-on-one with customers. Gordon Stucky of Circle S Angus Ranch believes simple verbal

communication creates the most business for his 175-head cow-calf operation near Kingman, Kan.

Through effective customer relations, Gordon and his wife, Christine, have developed a reputation for dependability and integrity.

"I want customers to know I'm concerned about the future

and profitability of their herds," Gordon says. "We have our ideas; but if they don't correspond with the customers, we won't sell cattle."

The main goal of the Circle S program is matching the product with the customer to achieve customer satisfaction and repeat business.

Located in one of the most

concentrated cattle areas in the Midwest, Gordon says he prides himself in being able to do the majority of his business with people within a 30-mile radius of his ranch.

Gordon relies on herd visits to learn more about his customers and their cattle. After selling cattle, he tries to visit buyers to see how the Circle S cattle are working for the new owners.

"I'm not only concerned about how our cattle are doing," Gordon says. "I also want to see where my customers are and where they want to be in a few years so I can help them reach their goals."

New customer Steve Conrady of Spivey, Kan., appreciates the time and attention Gordon gives him. "He told me that he would have a better idea of what to sell me if he came to see my cattle," Conrady says. "He gave me his philosophies and thoughts on cow size, ease of fleshing and economics of production."

Galen Fink of Manhattan, Kan., whom Gordon considers a mentor, says herd visits allow Gordon to communicate one-on-one with customers. "He doesn't sit at home and wait for business to come to him," Fink says. "He goes after his customers and helps them along the way."

## ■ Seeking customers

While Gordon relies on phone calls and herd visits to keep open communication with current customers, he uses magazine, newspaper and radio advertisements to seek new customers and to inform current ones.

"It's hard to come up with new, creative ideas for our ads," Gordon says. "But the reward is knowing you've hit a home run with your ad by getting immediate feedback from customers and friends."

Christine believes eye-catching color, graphics, good pictures and strong data to support the cattle are essential to great magazine advertisements. She prefers ads



JENNIFER HOTCHKISS PHOTOS

Gordon and Christine Stucky bought their first registered Angus heifer in 1976. They operate a closed herd and have only purchased three cows in the last 15 years. "We've developed the cow families ourselves," Gordon says. "This allows us to have a better idea of what the cattle are going to do for our herd, as well as our customers'."

on right-hand pages. The Circle S logo, which is also their brand, is used in every print ad to increase visibility and awareness.

For two weeks before their sale, Circle S runs a one-minute spot every day on three Kansas radio stations. They request that their ads follow farm news or farm talk shows. "It's surprising how many people say they heard our ad on the radio," Gordon says. "You do everything you can to help remind people to come to your sale."

#### ■ Younger customers

Gordon and Christine have noticed their customer base is becoming younger and more business-oriented. This has motivated Circle S to utilize the Internet as a communication tool. They always include their e-mail address on their advertisements and stationery. In fact, most of the requests for bull sale books arrived via e-mail this year.

Three years ago Gordon decided to make his sale books more useful for his customers. After evaluating each animal for four traits (calving ease, replacement females, performance and carcass traits), he indicates with an "X" in which traits each animal excels.

Some of their commercial customers don't use or understand expected progeny differences (EPDs), Christine says. "We want to make it a simpler process for them to buy cattle," she says. "If they need a growth bull, all they have to do is look at the performance trait to see if we recommend that bull for performance."

Long-time customer Dave Stroberg of Hutchinson, Kan., says the Circle S sale books are the communication tool he uses the most because they're easy to interpret and they provide him with information he needs to make decisions.

When the Stucky family is not busy with their own sales, they are often driving or flying to other sales. "It gives us a great opportunity to meet new



Gordon believes a road sign is important to lead customers to the ranch. The sign also serves as a visual communication tool because it carries the ranch logo, which is also its brand, and advertises their Angus cattle.



Continual evaluations allow Circle S Angus Ranch to produce cattle that customers demand. "I try to present my cattle as honestly as I can from top to bottom," Gordon says. "These evaluations are my best effort to convey my cattle's strengths and weaknesses to potential buyers."

people and make more contacts within the industry," Gordon says.

Gordon spends a lot of time looking at sale books and publications. "He's extremely diligent in his pursuit to become a better producer," Christine says. "He analyzes more than the cattle in the photographs. He looks at how other breeders market their cattle and tries to figure out why they chose to present their information in a certain manner."



The Circle S brand is another tool that the Stuckys use to sell their cattle. Gordon says that the brand, which is also their logo on print ads, helps to improve awareness of their cattle. "People often tell me that they recognized one of our bulls here or there," he says. "The brand has become a useful way to advertise our genetics, even when the bull is not at our ranch."

Education is one of the most important things breeders can provide customers, Gordon adds. "Some of my customers feel inadequate and uneducated about where they see their future heading," he says. "We want to help our customers figure that out."



## Making data more useful for the customer

In order to simplify the bull selection process at Circle S Angus Ranch, owner Gordon Stucky creates an information box below each bull's performance data. After completing a thorough evaluation of the bull's phenotype, Stucky looks at a combination of other factors, including the bull's expected progeny differences (EPDs), performance data and ultrasound data. He then compares these evaluations to the past history of the cow family before deciding if he would recommend this bull for the following traits: calving ease, replacement females, performance and carcass traits. If he believes the bull represents the best of his herd in that category and will help customers reach their goals for that trait, he simply places an "X" by that description.

In the example, Stucky recommends the Lot 18 bull for a ranch looking to improve replacement females without sacrificing performance.

This bull's sire is a well-proven maternal bull known for

siring heifers with good udder quality. This, combined with the fact that the cow family has a history of excellent udder quality, fleshing ability and reproduction traits, allows Stucky to recommend this bull for his ability to sire replacement females for a herd. Stucky says this trait is not easily measured by EPDs alone.

Stucky suggests this bull will improve performance because both his weaning weight and yearling weight values are greater than breed average. He also looks at the bull's 205- and 365-day weights. These actual weights must be at a herd ratio of 100 or better before Stucky will call an animal a performance sire.

On the other hand, the calving-ease trait is not marked with an "X" because a bull has to have an extremely low birth weight EPD, as well as actual birth weight, before Stucky will recommend that bull for calving ease. He expects a calving-ease sire to be fit for use on the smallest heifers.

Carcass EPDs must be greater than the breed average in marbling, ribeye area and back fat. Even if they have superior carcass EPDs, Stucky says the bull must scan above average in each of those areas before he is recommended to improve carcass traits.

Stucky admits he doesn't have all of the answers when it comes to selecting a bull. However, he does the best he can to recommend bulls for herd improvement that are not only better than the breed average but are the best of his own genetics and evaluations.



Lot 18

<b>18</b>	<b>CIRCLE S EMULATION 7079</b>				
CALVED: 9737	TATTOO: 905				
SIRE: PEARL PATTEN PUT 127625	DAM: KATON N BAR 520 112947 (PARENTAL DQ)				
CIRCLE S PIONEER 202 112925	UDM PIONEER 71 CIRCLE S PIONEER 656				
PROGENY: 21 ANNUITY B-FELASS (PETS) CIRCULATION 21 PIONEER N BAR 860	PROGENY: 118 UDAM UDAM PIONEER 207 448 NEW TRIND PIONEER 8 OF CRY 124				
WT C	WT C				
+1.0	+35				
+23	+69				
+12	+30				
+23	+23				
ET	ET				
767	767				
1144	1144				
ET	ET				
4-104	4-104				
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