

# Make Waves *on the* Web

*If you're planning to establish a presence on the World Wide Web, here are 10 tips to help attract users to your Web site and to keep them coming back.*

BY JENNIFER HOTCHKISS

**I**nformation at your fingertips. With a click of a button you can view embryos in Tennessee. A click later and you're watching a bull sale in Texas.

No, this isn't magic. It's simply why more and more Angus breeders are turning to the Internet.

The World Wide Web provides breeders with a chance to heighten interest in their cattle and to share the history of their ranch and breeding programs with the growing number of cattlemen around the world who are surfing the Web.

With more than 44 million people surfing the Internet, businesses around the globe are climbing on board the World Wide Web to reach and to hold the attention of their customers. A Doilotte Consulting report projects that by 2002, 70% of large companies will adopt the Web as a sales medium to reach more than 200 million Internet users worldwide.

Angus breeders, too, are discovering the advantages of the Internet.

With so many advertisers jumping on the Internet bandwagon, it can be difficult to make one site stand out from the next. Here are a few tips from Angus breeders, customers and avid Internet users to attract customers to your Web site and to separate your site from competitors:

## 1. Make your site user-friendly.

Although your site may feature the most advanced technology and the sharpest photographs, if it's not easy to navigate, visitors won't stay long, says Scott Johnson, director of the American Angus Association's Angus Information Management Software (AIMS) Department. Try to minimize the number of clicks required to access information. Each click represents lost users during each step in the navigation.

Use navigational tools to your advantage by providing image maps, buttons and hypertext links to guide visitors through the Web site, Johnson says. Color coding various sections of your site enables browsers to feel more comfortable that they are finding the correct information.

## 2. Design for quick download time.

Face it. Nobody wants to sit down to a computer and wait five minutes for a Web site to download. Research points out that one-third of all online shoppers will leave a site if the site takes longer than eight seconds to appear.

Many customers don't have the newest, fastest computers available. Intricate page designs don't help sell cattle if the customer can't access those pages.

Eric Schlutz, Da-Es-Ro Angus Farms, Letts, Iowa, says fancy sites with six to eight pictures per page are not practical for the typical customer.

"Most people don't have the patience to wait that long for a Web page to come up," he says. "For instance, my grandfather can't understand why it takes so long for some pages to download. He wants things to happen immediately. His generation didn't grow up with computers like today's generation."

## 3. Update the site.

The most challenging aspect of operating your own Web site is keeping it updated, Schlutz says. "Don't make your site so large that you can't keep it updated. Gathering information for a Web page takes just as much time as gathering information for a magazine advertisement."

He believes the key to operating a successful Web site is to set personal deadlines each month as to when the new copy should be posted.

Connie Uden, TC Ranch, Franklin, Neb., says it's amazing how many people will contact her each month to remind her to

update her monthly ranch diary.

"People will return to your site if they know you keep it updated," she says. "Our monthly diary has proved to us the importance of keeping on schedule with our updates. I think people look forward to reading the diary because they can relate to our struggles and daily problems. It also gives people the opportunity to better understand us and the area we live in through our personal accounts."

## 4. Use attractive design.

When considering the layout and design of your site, remember the simple rules of advertising. Use white space effectively, says *Angus Journal* graphic designer Debbie Alexander. Don't clutter up the pages with so much text that the Internet user becomes overwhelmed or bored.

"Design graphics in a Z-form," Alexander says. "When people look at your site, their eyes should follow a Z-pattern over the page. The Z-form helps keep the viewer inside your document."

Alexandar advises maintaining a consistent graphic theme across all links throughout your site. Remember to use only a few powerful graphics per Web page. Using too many graphics will hinder a browser's ability to access your site quickly.

## 5. Offer incentives for customers to return to your site.

An easy way to bring visitors back to your site time after time is to offer incentives. Some sites encourage repeat users by offering free paraphernalia such as books, hats, straws of semen, show halters and gift certificates.

The Da-Es-Ro Web site used to hold a monthly drawing for an opportunity to win \$25. Schlutz discovered that for every Angus customer he reached through this incentive, 30 more browsers who were not interested in agriculture were entering his drawing.

"You have to be careful when you give

away money through your Web site," Schlutz says. "If we were to hold a drawing again, we'd give away items that were applicable to the cattle industry."

#### 6. Provide related links.

Offer links that relate to your Web site, such as the American Angus Association, the *Angus Journal*, your state cattlemen's association, university research sites, etc. Providing links to other sites lures people back to your site and gives browsers more than one reason to look up your site again, says Jeff Davidson in a *Communications Briefings* newsletter.

#### 7. Furnish useful information.

"The bells and whistles don't matter if the subject matter on your Web site is dull," says National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) member Cortney Hill-Dukehart, Sykesville, Md. "I'm always looking for new information on the Internet. Many times I use information from Angus breeders' sites for school projects and our state junior association's newsletter."

Web sites allow you to share information about your herd's history with a large audience. It also enables people to view your cattle even if they can't travel to your farm.

"We have many new international customers because of our Web site," Uden says. "They can look up our site and read about our history before deciding if they want to contact us for further information."

It is important to include on your Web page information such as telephone and fax numbers, e-mail addresses and frequently asked questions about your operation, says Angie Stump Denton, Web marketing director for the *Angus Journal*. It's also a good idea to include descriptions of your herd's goals, your beliefs, information about your family and employees, recent breakthroughs in research that relate to your herd, and your breeding and management philosophies.

#### 8. Register with search engines.

According to a survey compiled by Georgia Tech University, 87% of Internet users discover new Web sites through search engines. Search engines use software programs that index Web sites by topics.

Structure your Web site in a way that search engines such as Yahoo! and Infoseek

find you. It does no good to be found by a search engine and have position number 10,347. No one will take the time to filter through 10,000 sites just to find yours.

Aim to be one of the top 20 listings in a search engine. You can contact each search engine you want to be listed on, which will take some extra time, or you can register with a company that will put your Web site on a certain grouping of top sites.

#### 9. Advertise your site.

Just because you create your own Web site, there are no guarantees it will be a success, Johnson says. With new Web sites springing up all over the Internet, it's

people who want more information about the Angus business," says Denton.

#### 10. Offer point-and-click e-mail.

"Our Web site is not just another form of advertising; it's a form of communication," Uden says.

One of the greatest rewards a producer can receive from having a Web site is to gain new relationships with potential customers. Providing a point-and-click e-mail button allows customers to get in touch with breeders faster and easier.

Instant e-mail responses eliminate wasted time for both you and your customer. They also guarantee more answers and requests from customers who want to communicate with you, but who don't want to take the time to phone or write a letter.

**Building customer loyalty** via the Internet takes patience, Schlutz says. "You build your business more by increasing awareness of your cattle through the Internet than by selling a bull one time," he adds. "Since we started our Web site in December 1996, we've had numerous people come by our stalls at shows and say they saw our site on the Web and wanted to check us out. That's what the Internet is all about — spreading the word about your cattle."

The Internet will not replace all other forms of advertisement and communication. Schlutz says the Angus industry will survive with or without the Internet because nothing will ever be a good substitute for a firm handshake and for one-on-one relationships with customers.

On the other hand, the Internet is emerging as a useful way to keep people informed while providing a 24-hour service to customers around the world.

During the next three years researchers forecast that electronic-commerce revenues will top \$1.1 trillion globally, up from \$15 billion in 1997. As more and more children grow up using the Internet, Angus breeders will need to find a way to capture future Angus breeders' attention.

"It's time for breeders to consider using the Internet as a marketing aid," says NJAA Board member John Melton. "Kids today are growing up on the 'Net. Instead of reading every night, the next generation is surfing the Web. Why not let them surf and find your ranch's site?"



important to advertise your site to reach the visitors you desire.

Mention your Web address on your farm or ranch brochures and business cards, Johnson advises. Be sure to include your Web address on all print advertisements, fax cover sheets and direct-mail promotions. Another place you can advertise your Web site is on answering-machine or voice-mail messages, as well as the signature area of your e-mail messages.

The *Angus Journal* Web site is another tool that can help advertise your site through its page of links and banner advertisements. "The greatest value of advertising on the *Angus Journal's* Web site is you can reach a targeted audience of

