



For Granted

► by **Eric Grant**, freelance writer

Are there barriers to your success?

The Great Platte River Road Archway Monument at Kearney, Neb., is a testament to America's westward expansion — and to the patience of modern-day tourists. Well-meaning planners of the \$60 million facility, which spans all four lanes of Interstate 80, built one of the country's best museums, but they also forgot to build an exit off the highway that would allow for easy access for the millions of tourists who drive under it every year.

Access to your business

Now, even the most gung ho of travelers must exit miles beyond the facility, then make their way back through a maze of cornfields and gravel pits before they can cough up the \$10 admission fee to see it for themselves.

The reason for its failure to attract visitors — and its subsequent financial losses — might seem obvious to those who built the museum in the first place: If people can't get to your product, they won't buy it. And when you throw up unnecessary barriers to your customers, they'll simply spend their hard-earned cash elsewhere.

The same is true of the bull business.

If you're serious about succeeding in it, you should constantly ask yourself what barriers stand in the way of your own success. Have you built a great program, but also made it difficult for people to do business with you? Have you refused to drag yourself into the 21st century, dismissing technologies like web sites, cell phones and e-mail? Are you slow in returning phone calls?

Bud Snidow worked for the American Hereford Association for nearly four decades before he retired in the early 1980s. He became one of the industry's preeminent livestock merchandisers, witnessing firsthand more changes in the seedstock business than just about anyone I've ever met. I asked him once what he thought the keys were to being a successful producer.

He thought about it for a few moments, eased back in his chair, and then responded: "Invariably, the people who survive in this business are people who know how to sell. If

they can't sell what they produce, they'll soon have cattle sprouting out their ears. They don't stay in business for very long."

In other words, Bud emphasized, the work of selling yourself and your product

never really ends, and it begins with you. If you're hard to reach, if you're not responsive, if you don't stand behind your product, then your customers will simply go elsewhere.

I have a good friend who's sold bulls successfully for decades. When he works at marketing — and by this, I mean calling and talking to his customers — he has a good sale. When he puts off his phone calls until the last minute, his sale almost

always tanks. It's a pretty simple formula for either success or failure.

The difference between the two equates to thousands and thousands of dollars, money he could use to buy new equipment, more land or pay down debt. When he has a bad

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sale, we always think about the people he should have called, and we wonder how much more money he could have made by doing so.

The truth is, it's too much to ask your customers to keep your breeding program front and center throughout the year. You have to do that work for them. Advertising alone won't do it. There are too many pressures in production agriculture these days, too many things to distract your customers from thinking about what you have to sell.

So your own initiative is the key to building a successful reality.

Ultimately, it's your responsibility to make those calls. It's your responsibility to make those customer visits. And, it's your responsibility to make sure access to you and your business is easy, efficient and professional.

In essence, it's the little things that add up. Like making sure the roads are clear, and ensuring it doesn't require a frontier expeditionary party to locate your own monument to seedstock production.

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Editor's Note: "For Granted" is a monthly column written for the Angus Journal by Colorado-based freelance writer Eric Grant. The column focuses on marketing beef, the beef industry and seedstock in particular — aspects of the business that are often taken for granted as day-to-day tasks take center stage.