



For Granted

► by **Eric Grant**, Angus Productions Inc. Creative Media manager

Tell your story

Since the launching of Creative Media, I have been interviewed several times asking about what we do, technology and cattle marketing. Here is a synopsis.

What is Creative Media?

We launched Creative Media a year ago as a service to North American agriculture. Our team provides writing, photography, video, graphic design, custom publishing and web site development for individual cattle producers, ag companies and organizations. We're essentially a marketing and public relations firm for farmers and ranchers. Our focus is to help producers elevate their presence in the marketplace. Our goal is to increase the value of their products and services. Our motto is, "Tell your story."

What's a common shortfall in the strategy of some seedstock producers?

There are four things. First, a lot of seedstock producers see their own operations as the center of the universe. They believe everything gravitates around their businesses, their hometown, ... But after you visit a few ranches, you begin to learn that there are millions of ideas on how best to produce cattle. Most of them have their own merits and reasons at their foundations. When you put boots on the ground, and actually get out and look at what your customers are doing, it opens your eyes. You see that there are different ways of doing things. You expose yourself to new ideas. You are better-positioned to capitalize on new opportunities.

Second, there's a common misconception in this business that says if you're marketing, you're really not working. Ranchers would rather be doing stuff with their hands, not with their heads, so it's an easy trap to fall into. But marketing is one of the toughest things a seedstock producer can do. It takes time. It takes patience. It takes execution. It requires learning how to handle rejection. But, when it's done right, it can put a lot more dollars in the bank than hanging a new gate.

Third, they make decisions based on personal preferences, not market realities. For instance, I hear from a lot of producers who say they have no interest in e-mail or the Internet, and therefore they don't have a web presence. That's a pretty shortsighted and self-centered way of looking at the world. You don't have to like or even use

the technologies available today, but that shouldn't prevent you from having a web presence, either.

Fourth, they don't understand the difference between marketing and just getting attention. Anyone can get attention. There's a lot of noise in the marketplace today. It's your job to cut through the traffic and communicate clearly above the din.

How can ranchers get their arms around new technologies for distributing their message?

If you're a seedstock producer, you don't need to be an expert in technology. But you do need to know someone who is. ... Your ability to make an impact in the 21st century still depends on your ability to use two tools that were available in the 20th century. The first is the telephone. If you're not calling your customers once in awhile, someone else is. The second is your vehicle. I realize it's tough to leave your farm or ranch, but it's critical that you take time to get out with your customers, on their places and on their terms.

That said, new technologies shouldn't scare anyone. In fact, this is a very exciting time to be in the seedstock business because there are so many new and innovative ways of reaching your customers. While you don't need to be an expert in any of these areas, you should know what opportunities they present. You need to choose technologies that work best for you and your situation. Maybe an "e-mail blast" isn't your thing, but maybe a video is. Maybe Internet advertising doesn't work well with your customer base, but maybe a direct-mail piece would.

The most important thing to realize is that whatever you choose, your marketing efforts should be an accurate reflection of yourself and your operation. You don't need to superimpose an artificial reality on yourself or your family to be successful. Customers are drawn to people who are sincere. What you need is to speak truthfully and respectfully to the marketplace, and the people who like what you have to say will come your way.

What's the best place to start?

Take a look at the raw materials you have at your disposal — namely, the quality of your photos and the quality of your words. The quality of your photos will make or break your marketing and advertising efforts. If you don't have good photos to work with, hire someone who's good with a camera, who knows your business and understands your audience.

When it comes to words, you need to hire someone who not only knows how to write, but also knows the cattle business. Sometimes, the best approach is simply to have a writer pull together a feature article about your business and breeding program. Once those words are assembled, you can move them in a lot of different directions — your web site, your brochure, a script for your video, whatever.

The key is getting the words down on paper and written in a way that truly describes what you do in a positive, productive light that will motivate people to do business with you. If you don't have access to a professional writer, conduct a Q&A with yourself. Ask yourself basic questions about yourself and your business, and answer them in an honest and productive way. Chances are, you'll surprise yourself with the quality and quantity of material that you'll be able to generate.

What about a web site?

You've absolutely got to have a web site in place. It anchors everything you do. It allows you to tell your story on your own terms, in your own way, in a constructive and positive fashion. It never sleeps. It works for you 24 hours per day. It's the cheapest source of labor you'll ever hire.

You don't have to like the Internet to have a web site. You don't even have to have access to the Internet. But remember that most of your customers use the Internet, and their numbers are increasing every day.

Furthermore, what makes a web site truly powerful is the information you can glean from visitor activity. By analyzing the visitor and user data, you can gain a pretty solid understanding of what elements within your advertising and marketing programs are working — and which ones aren't.

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Editor's Note: "For Granted" is a monthly column written for the Angus Journal by Angus Productions Inc. Creative Media Manager 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.