For Granted

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

Along came a spider

Uncle Emery liked to talk — a lot.

At family reunions, he'd lurk among the lilac bushes, watching for someone to look his way. The worst thing you could do was make eye contact. He'd pin his poor victims against the picnic table, then give an endless dissertation on this thing and that. He'd connect each of his long-winded stories with an "and" or a "but" and launch into another tale before his listener had a chance to dodge away. There was no escaping his grasp.

Keywords

My cousins and I used to play a high-stakes game of "chicken" in which we'd lure some bright-eyed, unsuspecting person into a conversation with him. Then we'd walk away, abandoning the poor wretch to listen to hours of Emery's endless musings.

It would literally suck the life out of them.

My dad commented, "I asked Emery once where he was born. At 8 [o' clock] the following morning, he was still talking, and I still didn't know."

How you reach the marketplace these days has a lot to do with your ability to avoid being an Internet Emery.

In other words, if someone wants to know where you were born, for instance, tell them; no one has time to stand there and listen to you talk.

That's particularly true when it comes to understanding search engines.

Search engines are the eavesdroppers of the Internet. They dispatch "spiders" to study the content and structure of your web site, the words you use to describe yourself and the photos you include to show your program.

It takes these pieces of information back to places like Google, Ask.com or Answers.com, where it's stored for future reference.

When Internet users type in keywords — such as "Angus bulls for sale" — it generates a list of web sites that match the search query.

Improve your ranking

The key is getting your web site to the top of these rankings because research consistently shows Internet users won't drill very deep into these lists to find you. On average, most users go one, maybe two pages deep, before they try another query.

If your web site is like a conversation with Emery with no meaningful keywords, no descriptive information about what you are and what your business represents —

you've lost a key opportunity to reach new customers and to let existing ones find you.

So here's a few lessons I've learned during the last couple of years:

First, when you look at your web site, pay particular attention to the content on your "landing page." Does the opening text contain keywords that accurately describe your farm or ranch, your family, and the products or services you have to sell?

Second, look at your photos, because spiders even grab the names and descriptions of your photos. If you've got the photos named something like "DSC 108," change the name to "Smith_Angus_Angus_Herdsire," or "Smith_Alliance_0127."

It's even good to avoid spaces when naming or describing photos, and use the underscore — "_" — to connect descriptive words.

Third, take a look at the graphics on your web site. If your logo is a graphic element — rather than a text element — chances are the spider can't read it. That doesn't mean you shouldn't use the graphic as part of your web site, just repeat your operation's name in text below it.

Finally, avoid clutter. Make your point quickly. People don't have time to stand around the picnic table and figure out just what the heck you're trying to say to them.

Stack your keywords in sentences and phrases, and repeat these words in key elements throughout your site — in places like pull quotes, opening paragraphs and even on your site's navigation bar.

Do these things, and you'll begin to see your rankings rise.

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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.*