



For Granted

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

Common questions

I get these questions a lot from seedstock producers.

What is the difference between advertising and marketing?

Advertising tells your buyers what you have to sell.

Marketing tells your marketplace who you are and what your breeding program is all about. It also explains the benefits of doing business with you.

Marketing plows the ground. Advertising puts seeds in it. You can't have one without the other.

What's the common thread between seedstock producers who succeed in this business?

Throughout history, the very best seedstock producers have all been great communicators. Period.

They articulate ideas that people “buy” into. They make the connection between the science and the “art” of this business. They understand that the seedstock business is bigger than numbers, that there must be values behind them.

There are a million armchair scientists in the beef industry, but only a select few who understand what truly matters to rural Americans — the desire to stay on the land; the desire to continue a great tradition; and the belief that the next generation should continue.

Why do so many seedstock producers fail?

Money. They don't anticipate the actual costs of raising and marketing seedstock. This is a costly enterprise.

They also fail to develop a message that resonates with cattle producers.

And, they want to be like everyone else, produce cattle like everyone else and market everything the same way. They see differentiation as risky.

What are some of the biggest mistakes seedstock producers make?

They forget that selling is a year-round proposition. They don't realize that the sales effort begins when the bull is turned out

in the pasture, sometimes two years before those calves enter the auction ring.

They don't make phone calls to their customers or potential customers.

They don't follow up after the sale.

They think their operation — and their sale — is the center of the universe. They forget there's a great big world on the other side of their fencelines, that their sale date, educational event or field day isn't top-of-mind for anyone but themselves. Labor and time are the two biggest challenges facing cattle producers these days. People are tired, stretched thin. For that reason, you have to step outside your daily routine and work twice as hard at reminding people about what matters most to you. If you don't, no one else will.

Finally, they believe marketing and sales are not “honest work.” They criticize those who stay in the house and work the phones. This is really a bad tradition for American agriculture. It's a belief that if you're not working physically, then you're not working at all. It's tough work making calls. We need to appreciate that more.

Where's a good place to improve your marketing and advertising programs?

The improvement process must begin after the sales season cools off. You can't make long-term, logical marketing and advertising decisions 45 days before your sale.

You need a quiet, low-pressure environment to step back, take a breather and review what's working and what's not.

Second, pick up the phone, and talk with your customers. Ask them some questions: How did they find out about you? What do they like about your marketing and advertising program? What information needs are not being met by you? What do they think are your strengths and weaknesses? Find out what would motivate them to continue buying your cattle.

Next, talk to people who have called about your sale but failed to show up to buy. Find out why they bought bulls elsewhere.

Ask them how your operation can better service their business. Ask them what they look for in a seedstock provider and determine if you're on target or even willing to hit those targets.

Fourth, look ahead to the next 18 to 24 months and ask yourself these questions:

- How and when do you currently advertise? Are you satisfied with your advertising results?
- Do you have a web site? Is it working for you?
- Do you have a brochure or other printed materials?
- What is the quality of your photographs? Do they help or hinder your efforts?
- Is video something that your customers would like to see of your cattle and program?
- Do you have a logo? Does your logo have a strong presence, or is it time to trash it?
- Do all of these elements — advertising, web site, marketing materials — have a similar look and feel?
- Finally, determine how much money you have to spend. Remember, you don't have to break the bank to do any of this; you do have to execute in a more intelligent, strategically minded way.

E-MAIL: egrant@angusjournal.com

Editor's Note: “For Granted” is a monthly column written for the Angus Journal by Angus Production 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.