

# Newsletter Know-how

Newsletters provide customer-friendly contact.

Story & photos by *Becky Mills*

**S**ure, you'd love to take every one of your current and potential customers through your pastures two or three times a year. Then you could visit with them about your artificial insemination (AI) program and show them your latest crop of potential herd sires. But more than likely, it isn't going to happen. Still, you can do the next best thing with a newsletter.

"We thought it was a good way to keep customers and people who are interested in our program in touch," Lydia Yon, Ridge Spring, S.C., Angus breeder, says.

Yon is an old hand at newsletters. She and her husband, Kevin, started producing them 14 years ago when they managed Congaree



► Dorothy McHugh, Tignall, Ga., keeps in touch with customers with a biannual newsletter.

Farms. For the last eight years, they've mailed spring and fall newsletters from their own Yon Family Farms.

If they have room, they also include newsy items with the bull reports from their on-farm bull tests.

Marion and Dorothy McHugh started their Tignall, Ga., Angus operation in October 1998 and started publishing a newsletter in 2000. "It is pretty much a marketing idea," Dorothy says. "It gets our name out there for product and name recognition. We also wanted to get our philosophy across to prospective customers."

McHugh also publishes spring and fall newsletters. "Our spring issue goes out in April or May, and we cover what's happening on the farm and try to joggle customers' minds and remind them we're here."

The October issue focuses on the McHugh's annual Rolling M Ranch sale in November. "We give news about specific animals and build interest in the sale," she explains.

She also keeps readers up to date with weather and production challenges and farm improvements. She likes to keep the newsletter fun by including a photograph of a mystery object and inviting readers to identify it.

"The whole point is to get people to read it and make it fun to read, too. But I also like to make them think," she comments.

At the Yons, Kevin usually includes a forage or cattle management article in their newsletter. "We try to use that to answer

questions people ask through the year," Lydia explains. "They might ask us at our bull sale, 'How do you get your winter grazing to look so good?' or, 'What do you put on the tags when you identify your calves?'"

Yon also keeps family in focus by including news of Sally, 13; Drake, 11; and Corbin, 10. She includes their junior Angus and 4-H projects, as well as school, sports and church activities.

Both breeders use their newsletters to spotlight customers. "It makes them feel good to be recognized," McHugh says. "We also use it to thank them."

"We try to highlight what our customers are doing, especially if their calves did really well in a feed-out program," Yon says. "They do a lot for us, so when they do well we want to brag on them."

## You can do it

Sound appealing? It's doable with help from your computer. McHugh uses Microsoft Word® to write, edit and lay out their three-page letter. "WordPerfect® would do, or any of the word-processing programs," she notes.

"For most of the text-type graphics, I simply use the WordArt feature and the graphics tools found in Microsoft Word," she says. "For simple photo editing, I use Microsoft Photo Editor. For the resolution I need, it is quite sufficient."

She also uses Microsoft Picture It! Photo Premium® and PhotoSuite™.

"I don't use anything terribly sophisticated or expensive. That is one of the advantages of black-and-white copy," McHugh says.

Yon has used Microsoft Office® Publisher for their four-page newsletter. "It is easy. It guides you through the whole thing." However, she just started using Print Shop® Deluxe.

For editing pictures, she relies on SnapShot Express.

For newsletter photography, McHugh uses either a 35mm or a digital camera. The Yons have been using a 35mm camera, but are switching to digital. "We are learning how to use a digital camera so we can do more in-house," Yon comments.

Putting the mailing list together is a key chore. "That is the tough part," McHugh says. "We have 1,500 people on the mailing

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► Photography is one of McHugh's favorite parts of publishing a newsletter.





► McHugh uses AIMS to manage the mailing list for the Rolling M Ranch newsletter.

list. We put anybody on it that we've ever had contact with regarding the cattle, anybody who buys an animal. We also add people who come to visit, anyone who shows an interest in the farm."

In addition, she asked for mailing lists from the state Angus associations in Georgia, Tennessee, South Carolina, North Carolina, Alabama and north Florida. "They are free. The organizations are very happy to mail you their mailing lists," she comments. "It is up to you to put them in your computer, but some are on disks."

### Getting it all together

McHugh originally put the names and information on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, but sent it to Angus Information Management Software (AIMS) Director Scott Johnson and his team at the American Angus Association. "They reformatted it to go in their Angus Information Management Software," she says. "I use the AIMS Customer Manager file. It is a blessing."

She also uses the Crystal Report Writer program to extract the mailing list from AIMS and print out labels, but Johnson says the AIMS Customer Manager program can handle that chore, and others.

"It can be customized quite a bit," Johnson says. "It can be used as a filter. Say you have 100 names on your mailing list but only want the newsletter to go to 30. It can do that."

The Yons have 1,800 names on their mailing list.

"We send it to our customers and people we do business with, as well as people who are a part of our program in different ways" Yon says.

She uses the QuickBooks accounting program to store and print the labels. "We sort them by different ZIP codes," she says.

Yon uses a local printer to print the newsletter for a cost of around \$400. But when it comes to applying the mailing labels and the actual mailing, she takes a do-it-yourself approach. "We make it a family affair. The kids stick the labels on and count them. It was kind of hairy when we started, but we have it down now."

She adds, "Three or four times a year, it forces us to look at our customers' names and where they live. It really helps us remember."

To save money on mailing, she has a bulk permit at the post office and mails the newsletters third class. An application for a bulk permit includes a one-time fee of \$150. There is also an annual renewal fee of \$150. The per-piece rate depends on a number of factors, including how many newsletters go to each five- or three-digit ZIP code.

"It takes awhile to learn how to sort

them," Yon says. "But it saves us money on heavier things like catalogs."

By using the bulk rate, Yon says the per-piece cost of their newsletter is less than 50¢, including the printing.

To figure out if a bulk rate is cost effective, visit with your local postmaster. Or, go to the United States Postal Service (USPS) Web site at [www.usps.com/businessmail101](http://www.usps.com/businessmail101). The site will guide you through the calculations to determine if a bulk rate will work for you.

McHugh mailed their first few newsletters first class, but says, "I have a very good publishing place in north Georgia. I send them the e-mail file, and they print and mail it for me. They use their bulk rate and can print and mail it cheaper than I can pay the postage. I used to do it all myself, and it would take hours."

She says their publisher printed and mailed their last newsletter to around 1,200 people for \$520.

### API can help

Angus Productions Inc. (API) will also handle the layout, printing and mailing for you. Sharon Mayes, coordinator of the Special Services Department, says, "The producer needs to provide the copy they want in the newsletter, and if they have an idea of how they want it laid out, they need to let us know that.

"If they want pictures of their cattle," Mayes adds, "they need to provide those, but we have pictures of most of the AI sires."

Mayes says API can mail to a list the producer provides and/or to a list generated from the American Angus Association database. "We have all kinds of variables we can pull from." Producers can choose whether they want the newsletter mailed first class or bulk.

Mayes says the cost varies quite a bit from newsletter to newsletter, but says she will provide an estimate.

Yon says she is thinking of skipping several of the steps by going to an e-mail newsletter in the future. "I think a lot of people would just as soon get it electronically at their convenience, rather than have it piled up on their desks."

Whatever the format, she says a newsletter is worth the time, effort and money — at least most of the time. "You have to make yourself do it when you're really stretched out on the farm. But it is a good form of advertising, and we do get a lot of positive comments about it."

McHugh agrees. "It keeps people informed, and we get a lot of positive feedback."

