



Smart Marketing

Angus Productions Inc. ushers in new marketing tools worth attention.

by *Crystal Albers, director of communications*



PHOTOS BY JOSH COMINELLIS

► “There are more communications and marketing capabilities within the walls of API than within any other organization-owned company in agriculture,” says Eric Grant, president of the company that’s home to Angus Media.

You can do everything right. You can use the latest technology and pick the finest genetics for your herd program, but in the end, the outcome of that hard work ultimately weighs on how well you market your cattle.

In Saint Joseph, Mo., there’s a move that could reframe how cattlemen do that.

Eric Grant, general manager and president of Angus Productions Inc. (API), says the same principles used to propagate the best Angus genetics can be the same used to market them. It’s all about data.

“Angus breeders are historically known for using data to select the animals that will perform best in their herds, and it’s data that’s going to drive the next generation of cattle marketing,” says Grant, who took the helm of the American Angus Association’s communications and marketing entity last spring. “It’s smart to promote your program through various means like print or online ads or television, for example, but you also need to measure if it’s accomplishing the right results.”

API is developing the capabilities for such an endeavor, providing tools that

will allow breeders to see if and how their advertising is working, then adjust accordingly.

Technology-enabled decision making, so to speak, makes smart marketing.

“We’re collecting audience-engagement information for use on individual bases. Information never previously analyzed, and information we think will greatly expand the success of our customers and our mission,” he says.

That mission is hard to miss. It’s prominently displayed in the entryway of the boxy brick building adjoining Association headquarters. The shiny black letters state API strives to be “... an indispensable partner to the beef industry, providing leading-edge information and marketing strategies ...”

It’s the “indispensable” part that Grant and his team are working toward.

“Anyone engaged in advertising or marketing knows the frustrations of investing hard-earned dollars into something like an ad or a website and not knowing if it’s reaching people, or if that sale book generated the interest it deserved. We’re set to answer those questions.”

A to Z

Back in 1979, when the American Angus Association purchased the then *Aberdeen-Angus Journal* from Webster City, Iowa, printers, there were a couple of ways to market your cattle — word of mouth and print advertising. The magazine and its regional sales force excelled at the latter, generating valuable interest for Angus breeders.

As technology evolved during the course of the next 30-plus years, so too did the publishing entity. Previously unavailable services came on board to meet the growing needs of API clients: sale books, promotional pieces, website development, online advertising, the *Angus Beef Bulletin*, a daily electronic news service, a digital version of the *Angus Journal*, and, now, social media and extensive television and radio components.

“There are more communications and marketing capabilities within the walls of API than within any other organization-owned company in agriculture,” Grant says. “We have the ability to provide breeders with the complete spectrum of marketing needs through Angus Media (API), from a postcard to a national television ad.”

Deciding which option, or combination of options, is best for each individual is the key to making these platforms work most effectively, he says.

It's why the company is tapping into all forms of electronic user data to develop benchmarks for how well a ranch might be reaching customers. During the course of the last several months, API has accumulated statistics on breeder websites and online sale books for categories like sessions, page views and duration, and other demographic information.

“Now, if you have a website or sale book through API, you can see how many people looked at a certain page of your sale book, for example, on what type of device, where they're from and how long they looked at that page,” Grant says. “So you get a clear picture for who you're reaching and, importantly, who you're not.”

While standardized analytics programs are available for any website, he says API offers an important advantage as one of the largest marketers in the cattle business. Customers will be able to compare the performance of their website or online sale book with that of the other hundreds



Get started

Angus Productions Inc. (API) houses an extensive selection of communications and marketing options through its various Angus Media properties. From print advertising to online sales and from television to radio, customers can reach a reliable list of potential buyers whenever and wherever they choose.

Angus Beef Bulletin
Angus Journal
Angus Journal Daily e-blast
Website design, hosting
AngusAuctions.com
The Angus Report
I Am Angus
Angus Talk
Sale books
Show books

Postcards
Brochures
Direct-mail pieces
Inserts
Special projects
Newsletters
Photos
Ranch videos
Custom marketing

Contact your regional manager (see page 324) or API advertising and web marketing coordinators Doneta Brown and Karri Mildenerger at 816-383-5200 or dbrown@angusjournal.com or kmildenerger@angusjournal.com, respectively.

of producers within the company's clientele — to truly gauge the success of their online presence, then enhance it.

“That's a really powerful position,” Grant says. “Much like in a contemporary group, for example, this data becomes more valuable in a comparative setting where you know what the industry standards are from a marketing perspective.”

A tailored approach

As more information accumulates in the growing database, Grant notes the Association's team of regional managers and API personnel will be better equipped to help breeders eventually analyze year-to-year trends.

Pinpointing the most effective marketing options for individual

breeders is the second phase of the “smart marketing” strategy.

“That's why this information is so valuable,” says Becky Weishaar, director of API's Creative Media. “This allows us to sit down with a breeder and see how his or her customers are responding to the information they're putting out there. With this, we can evaluate their content and look at what's working.”

Weishaar, who has spent a career specializing in ag marketing, oversees the branding efforts of Angus Media and says the information also has relevance offline.

“What content are your customers most interested in? If they're having a spring bull sale, are their print ads driving the potential buyer to the website, which leads them to the sale book, which

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hopefully results in them coming to the sale or going to *AngusAuctions.com*?” Weishaar asks. “These are questions that this newly available data can help answer.”

A clearer marketing picture can lead to a year-round strategy to stay in touch with current and potential customers. The theory: The more you know about your customers, the more you can give them what they’re looking for when they’re looking for it.

“After the sale, breeders should be thinking about how to keep their buyers engaged and reach those who didn’t buy at the sale,” she says. “This could open up new and more effective ways of how people market their genetics.”

Data could point to an online auction to supplement a production sale, for example, or if the timing and the demand are right, the potential for well-timed embryo auctions throughout the year. Weishaar says it’s not a one-size-fits-all business. Each operation has its own set of needs.

“Good data, good timing and a frequent and customized selling plan can help meet those needs and spread out potential risk,” she says.

Print advertising remains a mainstay. Cattlemen still like to sit down at the kitchen table with paper, Weishaar says, and that’s not likely to go away. Rather, print can be strengthened in tandem with digital platforms.

“You can’t discount the importance of a good print ad because it’s so important to layer your message in a variety of marketing channels, from social media

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► A clearer marketing picture can lead to a year-round strategy to stay in touch with current and potential customers, emphasizes Becky Weishaar, director of API's Creative Media.



► Above: “More people are using a variety of pieces to get the word out on their breeding programs,” says Sharon Mayes, director of API Special Services, which produces everything from postcards to printed sale books exceeding 200 pages.



► Left: Angus Media customers also recognize a time-tested and significant benefit when advertising their herds — a direct line to the American Angus Association database.

to television advertising,” she says. “If anything, a more multi-faceted approach lessens the pressure of a print ad campaign to contain every detail.”

Instead, producers could opt for more design-friendly and memorable print advertisement that promotes the website with more specifics, Weishaar suggests. Social media could support a sale book. A print ad could easily convert to a television platform. The options at the media company are plentiful — and, Grant says, just the beginning.

The engine

Ethan Tierney knows websites. The 30-something New York native spent much of his life on the other side of a keyboard. He also knows that all-too-familiar, glazed-over look he often receives when speaking tech-eze.

“People sometimes get lost when you start speaking in terms of web stats,” says the director of API’s Web Services, “but the more familiar they can become with their site and how it’s performing, the more value they’ll derive from it.”

Traditionalists could eye the web conversation as gobbledygook, but, Tierney contends, online usage will continue to evolve.

“Nearly everyone uses smart technology these days. Anyone reading this likely has an iPhone or tablet within arm’s reach,” he says. “Why not make your program as easily accessible as possible?”

The API Web and Association Information Systems teams continuously work to enhance accessibility. A new feature for online sale books unveiled last fall brought usable genetic and sales information into a user-friendly format.

“Online sale books are now fully searchable for specific EPD ranges or

animals. You can click on a specific lot and pull up the animal’s most current EPDs, and now the sale book ties in the sale report, which extends the life of the sale book,” Tierney says.

Sale books originate across the hallway with Sharon Mayes. She’s been overseeing the company’s Special Services efforts for 25-plus years, watching the historical changes in how breeders market their herds.

“More people are using a variety of pieces to get the word out on their breeding programs,” says Mayes, whose department offers everything from postcards to printed sale books exceeding 200 pages.

She says breeders have developed a keen understanding of the traditional marketing tools API offers and are now beginning to reap the benefits of having newly expanded capabilities online. If the user data shows a breeder’s genetics resonate with buyers in the Dakotas, for example, Mayes’ crew can direct-mail custom-printed marketing pieces to anyone across the country or to buyers within miles of their operation.

Mayes says Angus Media customers also recognize a time-tested and significant benefit when advertising their herds — a direct line to the American Angus Association database.

“With EPDs now released every week, it’s more important than ever to

API customers will be able to compare the performance of their website or online sale book with that of the other hundreds of producers within the company’s clientele to truly gauge the success of their online presence, then enhance it.

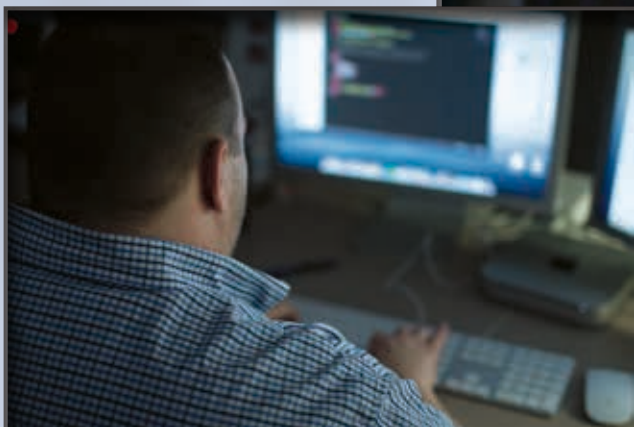
— Eric Grant

do business with a firm you know will generate accurate results,” she says. “We can ensure your ads display the latest data.”

Grant says it’s an exciting blending of traditional and new capabilities that will allow API to assist breeders in the years ahead.

“We’re discovering some interesting trends that will allow us to better partner with cattlemen in advancing their genetics programs,” he adds. “Uncovering this information then using it to benefit your operation as we move into the future is just smart.”

Smart and indispensable.



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