



Angus Stakes

► by *Shauna Rose Hermel*, editor

Relationship buying

Back in the day, nearly every gas station across the country would check the air in your tires, wash your windshield and maybe even check your oil for you as they filled your tank and accepted payment pumpside. If you were filling locally, you might even schedule a repair or catch up on some of the news in the county.

The tides change

Convenience, speed and the best price took priority as gas prices started increasing and our lives became more complex. The automatic pump that took a credit card at all hours did ease getting to Goodland, Kan., for Christmas, especially travelling in the wee hours.

Today, I crave the personal customer service I grew up with, but can businesses afford to provide it?

The average minimum wage in Missouri is \$7.65 per hour. Providing that service 10 hours a day, seven days a week would cost the station an extra \$535.50 a week — \$27,846 a year. If I were willing to pay an extra 20¢ per gallon, it would take 139,230 gallons of gas to cover that outright expense. That's 10,710 13-gallon fill-ups — roughly 206 fill-ups a week, 29½ per day or three fill-ups per hour. For pickups like mine, it would equate to fewer than two fill-ups per hour.

I think it would be a safe bet to say lots of

parents would pay the extra 20¢ a gallon to make sure the oil got checked, the tires were properly inflated and the wipers worked on their collegian's vehicle.

Yes, I know it's an oversimplified example and doesn't include costs associated with liability, benefits, etc. Neither does it count the benefits of extra sales for munchies, volume discounts on wholesale gas prices, the loyalty to the brand of those hired to provide the service, etc.

Does 20¢ a gallon sound out to lunch? Consider I was paying \$3.89 per gallon a few months ago. Last night the kiosks were reading \$1.99. I would have been happier paying \$4.09 if it seemed the money were going to more than a big oil company. Are your bull customers buying from more than a seedstock company?

Bull sales

Customer service can be an expense, but it is the component of a sale that makes it personal and that cements repeat business.

While far from scientific, in our ongoing online survey of commercial cattlemen, 61% indicated a preference for buying bulls attending an auction and 54% indicated they prefer buying bulls private treaty. While they could indicate multiple answers, the next closest preference was buying at auction by Internet — 13%. Consider that 40.5% of our 119 respondents so far are younger than 35 and 40.5% are 51 or older.

When asked what do you value most in your seedstock supplier, the genetics ranked No. 1, followed by service after the sale, guarantees provided and friendship. It seems I'm not alone in being a relationship buyer.

Many of our research articles in this issue focus on consumer preference. Bottom line, consumers are willing to pay more for quality beef, but they crave knowing the story behind the beef. They want to know they are helping someone locally and that they are buying a product from people who care.

Our success as seedstock producers and providers of a premium center-of-the-plate protein rests in building those relationships that go beyond the product purchased.

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Angus Journal

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