



# Branding Iron

by **Eric Grant**, president & general manager

## When is a website more than a website?

*Most people tend to think of their website as a platform to communicate, promote and inform, but a website can also be a source for information about how well your investment in advertising and promotion is working.*

### Analyze the data

Data gleaned by websites can be used to generate charts and graphs that can show spikes in activity for specific ads, sales or other events, as well as show trends in user behavior over long periods of time. For instance, is interest in what you have to sell expanding or contracting when you compare it to previous years?

Angus breeders with websites can access this information through Google Analytics, a service provided by Google that generates data about a website's traffic, traffic sources and user behavior.

The trouble with Google Analytics is that there's no ability for Angus breeders to compare the performance of their website to the overall performance of others.

It's a little bit like stating your average weaning weight for your bull calves is 600 pounds. Without the genetic evaluation of the American Angus Association, there's no way to convert this data into usable and actionable information.

Angus Media is in the process of developing an analytics database that will soon allow Angus breeders to evaluate the performance of their websites and to make informed decisions on what's working and what's not when it comes to advertising and promotions.

The research into this effort began last fall with an in-depth analysis of VIP websites, websites developed for Angus breeders by Angus Media. Currently, there are about 250 VIP sites. Of those, about 150 have usage data from Google Analytics dating back to 2011 or 2012.

These 150 VIP websites generated about 800,000 "sessions" in 2014. A session, which is a key measurement of website usage, is defined loosely as an activity that describes each time a user enters a website during a specified period of time. Put another way, if your uncle Bert visits your house eight times in 2015, that would be equal to one "user" who had eight "sessions."

Each of these VIP sessions averaged about 3 minutes in length.

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It's one thing to measure total website activity; it's a completely different thing to weight this information relative to your cow herd inventory. In other words, a larger breeder may attract, in total, more users and more sessions, but how does this activity compare to others who may have smaller numbers of cattle but generate more website activity per head?

When we weighted the analytics with registrations, some interesting insights begin to emerge:

- ▶ For every animal the VIP customers registered in 2014, their websites attracted about 21 sessions equal to about an hour of user activity.
- ▶ Large-scale breeders (defined as breeders with 100-plus registrations) generated 19 sessions per registration.
- ▶ Small-scale breeders (100 head or less), on the other hand, generated 55 sessions per registration.

This would suggest a few things. First, smaller breeders in general may have gravitated toward digital platforms to promote their programs more aggressively than larger breeders.

Second, smaller breeders may be more likely to have off-farm jobs or businesses,

which increases their Internet usage and focus on Internet marketing.

Third, many larger producers are located in the western United States, where cattle inventories are relatively bigger, but the numbers of producers (and potential website usage) is relatively smaller.

Our analysis also found a few other interesting nuggets:

- ▶ Angus website usage has increased by more than 50% since 2010.
- ▶ Although activity is up significantly, the use of desktop computers for surfing the net has declined from about 97% to about 60%.
- ▶ Mobile devices and tablets now account for 35%-40% of total activity on Angus websites (up from 2% in 2010) — and there's no end in sight to the growth.
- ▶ The magnitude of new technology is huge. On [www.angus.org](http://www.angus.org) alone, smartphones and tablets accounted for nearly 1.1 million user sessions in 2014.

### What does this mean?

In the coming months, Angus breeders should take time to evaluate their website to determine if they're keeping pace with technology. You'll be hearing a lot more about "responsive web design" in the months ahead, which means your website adjusts to fit and performs well on desktops, tablets or smartphones.

The best place to start would be to call your regional manager to discuss how your Angus Media-developed site is performing, and to determine where you need to go.

If you don't yet have a website, plan to build one in 2015. Not only will it serve you well as a central platform for promoting your program, but also as a source for critical information to determine if your investment in advertising and marketing is actually working.

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**Editor's Note:** Look for "Branding Iron" to become a regular column in the Angus Journal featuring tips for marketing Angus cattle.