Web Marketing

Marketing workshop gives insight to print marketing.

*by **Kasey Brown**, associate editor*

There are varied reasons why cattlemen get into the cattle business, but there is only one way to stay in business — by selling cattle. Ranch House Designs staff, including Rachel Cutrer, president and creative director, and Ashley Grant, digital marketing director, offer tips on marketing online from the full-service graphic and web design agency's experience in marketing cattle.

Creating a website

Websites function all day, every day, and they are an efficient way to tell people about your ranch without them making a trip, Grant says. The goal of a website should be to get your ranch information to the reader in as few clicks as possible, so design and layout are important.

She lays out six steps to creating a website — organization, design, publish, continual updates, listings and evaluation.

Choosing a domain name is paramount. It must be memorable and easy to type, so avoid dashes or underscores, she advises. You must then decide how many pages you want — home, about us, sale cattle, photo gallery and contact us are examples — and the overall concept of what you want it to look like. If you use a professional designer, gather the information and photos to give them. Photos help give your designer a feel for your operation, she emphasizes.

"A good website should have a very bold and eye-catching look, where you can clearly see the company name and branding," Grant asserts. Again, if you use a professional designer, they should send you a visual proof to look at the colors, layout, etc. Don't be afraid to make changes; a website is an investment and you should be happy with it.

Website designs are evolving. The older style included a landing page, on which you would have to click to access any content. Newer designs have more content on the home page, which increases the search engine optimization (SEO), so search engines will find it more easily and your page should appear higher on search results. An even newer aspect of website design is to be "responsive," which means that the website will optimize its display on whichever size of screen you use, whether it is a desktop, laptop, tablet or smartphone.

Once you approve the final versions of the design, the website will publish online, and then she recommends performing a media blitz.

"Email your friends to let them know about your website, post about it on your Facebook page and include it on all of your printed materials," she says.

Once the website is live, the work isn't done. Content must be updated regularly to keep customers coming back to it. Grant recommends updating the website at least monthly, even if it is a simple update. If you run print advertisements, make sure to update the website before the print ad is published.

A website isn't useful if no one can find it. There are many directories that can list your website, some free and some paid. Breed associations and *www.cattlepages.com* are good free resources. Grant says to check Google Places and Yahoo Places to show up on map applications. You could also choose one or two paid

ILLUSTRATION BY CRAIG SIMMONS

directories, depending on your area, like www.cattlerange.com.

Evaluation is necessary after the website is up. Do you notice more emails after an update? From where are emails coming? Google analytics can generate website statistics about the traffic your website receives, like how many visitors and their geographic location, and how they found the website.

Aspects of a good website

Now that you've built it, how do you know if it's any good? Grant says a website needs value and satisfaction, including relevant information like updated expected progeny differences (EPDs), show results and calf photos or videos. She also suggests featuring tips and advice or things of interest to entertain your customers. Humor is memorable.

People are ultimately looking to buy when looking at websites, she says. Always have something on your sale page, even if it includes private-treaty listings or a general photo to highlight your future sale.

Tell your story on your website to make yourself approachable. This can include family pictures, a story about how you got started or your business philosophy. People tend to buy from people they know or trust.

A good website tells customers how to get to the ranch. She advises using numerous calls to action to get people to your ranch, like saying "Visitors welcome!" or including the physical address.

There are a few things to avoid putting on your website, she notes. Stay away from music playing on your website. Don't add additional "click here" links or splash pages (a "click here to enter the website" page). These are bothersome because customers want to get to the information as quickly as possible, and if their Internet is slow, they won't want to load extra pages.

Additionally, Grant suggests integrating social media on your website.

"Every business should have a website and a Facebook page," she says. The website is designed for permanent information that can be preserved. The Facebook page is designed for news, humor, ranch life and continued updates.

Managing social media

The average person spends three hours on social media a day, she notes, and traditional advertising is shifting. Print advertising is still a mainstay, but the trend is to boost marketing efforts on social-media outlets.

Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest are all other good outlets for livestock marketing, but Grant recommends Facebook as the most effective. "It is our recommendation to first build your Facebook platform, then expand to social media if desired."

As of 2013, Facebook had more than 1 billion active users. The average person spends about 16 hours a month on Facebook, and it is available on desktops, laptops, tablets and smartphones.

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Many benefits can come from livestock marketers having a Facebook page. You can provide instant updates on new sale pictures and ranch updates, and you can connect with your audience on a personal level, plus there is potential to reach a huge audience.

To get started, it is important to understand the difference between a personal profile and a business page. A personal profile is for an individual, and many businesses make the mistake of making their business a "person" on Facebook. For instance, when creating your page, if it asks you for a first name and last name (i.e., Designs as a last name, and Ranch House as a first name), then that is a personal profile. The reason to avoid this mistake is because personal profiles are limited to 5,000 followers and no page analytics are available, she warns.

A Facebook page is for businesses. They look similar to a personal profile, but they offer unique tools for connecting people to a mutual topic of interest — like cattle. Pages are managed by administrators who have personal profiles — there can be a single administrator or multiple. Pages also give you analytics to track your audience and the popularity of your posts.

To optimize your Facebook page, choose a name that identifies your business in addition to being informative. For example, she said the Facebook page for Cutrer's ranch is named V8 Ranch — Brahman and Shorthorn Cattle to show the kind of operation before people even click to the page. This helps your page come up higher in a search engine. You can also customize the URL address in your Account Settings so your page is easier to find. In addition to customizing the URL address, Grant says to include as much information as possible in the "About" section of the page.

Make your page look professional by using a high-quality cover photo and profile picture. You can use a scenery photo or a catchy graphic for your cover photo, though you can always change your cover photo to promote events. Your logo is a good choice for the profile picture.

"When people like your page, they're saying that they care about your business and want to know what's going on. Posting relevant content is the most important thing you can do to keep them interested," she stresses.

The recipe for quality posts has three main ideas: short, visual and optimized. Posts between 100 and 250 characters get about 60% more likes, comments and shares. Photo albums, pictures and videos get 180%, 120% and 100% more engagement, respectively. Page Insights help you learn what times people engage most with your content so you can post during those hours, she adds.

Sale promotion, themed days of the week and an inside look to your business have proven to be successful content on Facebook pages. Post at least one or two times per week so you stay top-of-mind and relevant.

To grow your audience, Grant suggests contacting your friends through email to let them know about your page. You can also like other relevant pages, which will give you some exposure to other fans of those pages. Contests are great ways to garner participation. For instance, you could say if you get 1,000 followers by the end of the month, you will give away X amount of T-shirts or any promotional items you choose.

You could also invest in a paid advertisement on Facebook. This puts your page in front of a target audience that you specify, and you can set a flexible budget. A Facebook ad gives you analytics to see the return on investment of your ad.

Most importantly, she concludes, don't stress or become overwhelmed when using Facebook to promote your business. "Much of successful Facebook marketing comes from trial and error, so have fun, experiment and find what works best for your business."

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