

Full-Service Stop

Special Services works with producers to promote their herds.

by Brooke Byrd

Angus Production Inc.'s (API's) Special Services Department is devoted to providing customers a variety of printed pieces to help market their Angus herds and cattle. Created as a full-service entity within API, Special Services also offers exclusive mailing lists and direct downloads of data from the American Angus Association database. All these features are available to Special Services customers to help promote the Angus breed.

Special features

While the majority of Special Services customers use the department for sale book design and production, a myriad of other materials are available. Special Services Coordinator Sharon Mayes says that not many producers realize the department can also produce brochures, postcards, show programs, newsletters, state directories and stall cards. "We can take on almost anything within reason," Mayes says.

Many of these materials can be used as additional marketing opportunities for producers. Mayes suggests sending

postcards to prospective buyers before a sale as a reminder and as a way to update their own mailing lists. Posters can be useful tools with which to advertise at shows or auction barns.

The department can also take producers' ideas for both design and materials they want produced and match them to the physical end products. Tommy Donnell from Donnell Cattle Co., Graham, Texas, says he finds this feature very useful.

"I can give them my thoughts, and they'll fine-tune them," he says. "It's better than what I had originally proposed most of the time."

Mayes attributes the ability to build upon producers' ideas to meet and exceed design expectations to having artists on staff. "They can take words and pictures and make anything very professional," she says. For producers who come in with detailed ideas of sale book design or just a theme, Mayes says she turns the concepts over to the artists.

"Even with just an idea, we can build on it."

Members of the department will work

with producers on putting their ideas into action and adapt to their responses. Donnell says, "I can give them an idea, and they take it and run with it instead of me having to tell them exactly what I want."

The full-service department also provides efficiency and fast turnaround. While all the data for sale books must be given to the department at least seven weeks before the sale, that takes into account a week spent at the printer and the fact that the books are mailed out three weeks before the sale.

"That allows us two to three weeks to lay it out and let customers see a proof," Mayes says. "That also gives us time to answer any questions or adapt to any problems or needed changes."

Direct data

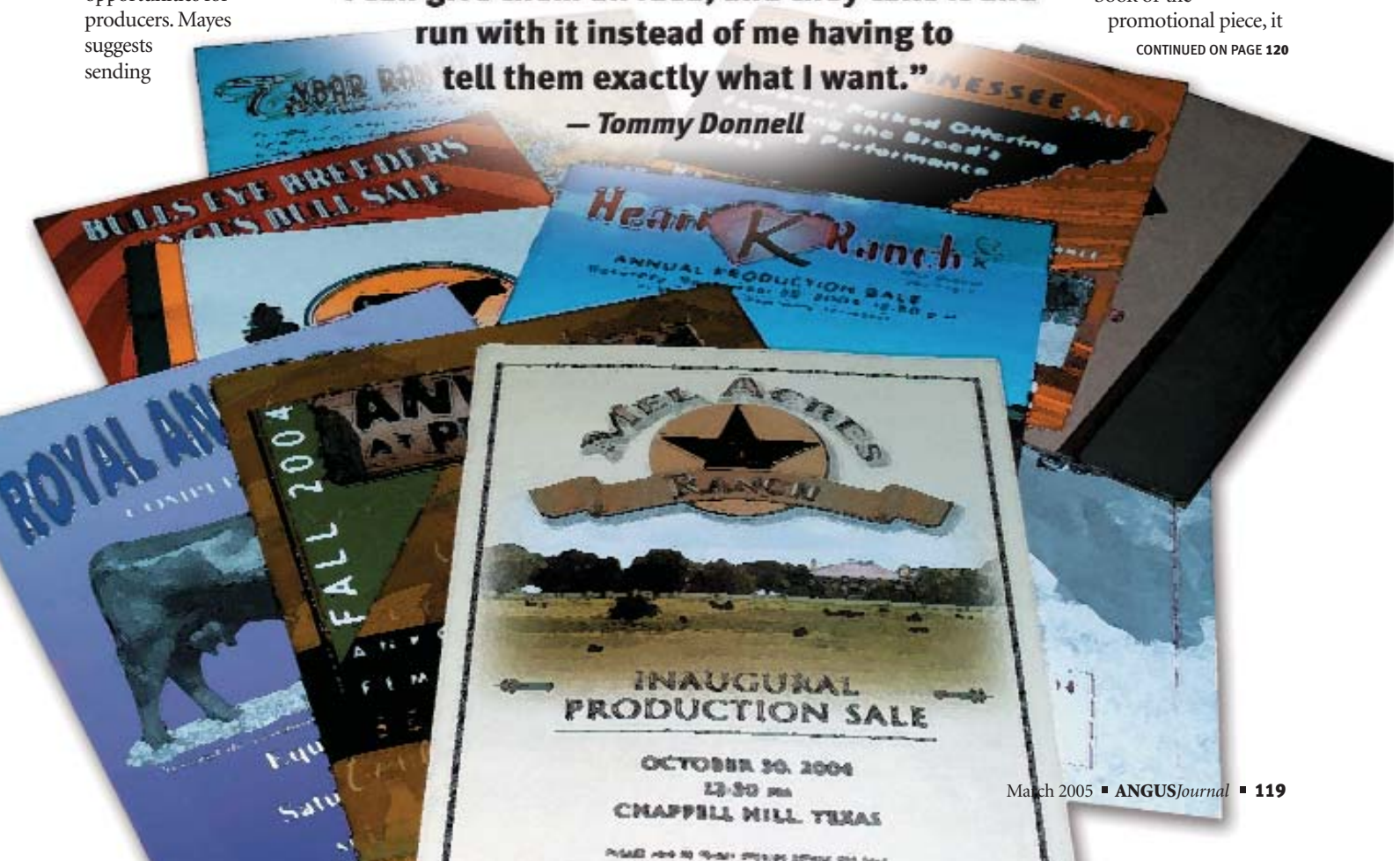
API General Manager Terry Cotton says one of the most important features to producers is the ability to directly download data from the American Angus Association performance programs database. "In the

process of doing the sale book or the promotional piece, it

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saves producers time and effort,” he says. “The accuracy level is without question, as opposed to if the data had to be entered by hand.”

The database includes pedigrees of all cattle registered with the Association, as well as expected progeny differences (EPDs), performance data and the new \$Value indexes. As new types of data are used to evaluate cattle, the department is able to keep up with the changes.

“All the customer has to do is give us a registration number and we can get all the information,” Mayes says. “If they or someone else does it, they have to type it all in by hand, which leaves more room for human error.”

Donnell considers this ability to download data crucial. “It’s imperative that we have it because we want to provide as much information to our prospective customers as possible,” he says.

“The assimilation of that data into a format that’s easily read and easily understood by customers is important, too,” he continues. To do this, Donnell worked with Special Services to design a special grid containing all the information about each EPD box in an easy-to-read format. “We told them what we wanted, they designed it for us, and it works great,” he says.

Mailing opportunities

Another vital feature of Special Services is

the chance to use the exclusive mailing lists. Cotton says, “They’re exclusive lists that have been guarded very carefully.”

The main mailing list includes all the members of the Association, but there is another list that includes commercial cattlemen. Neither list is ever sold to outside parties, and all work must be done through the Special Services Department in order to utilize the mailing lists. Having a protected list means that

producers aren’t deluged by so much junk mail that they begin to throw items away without even a glance. Targeted mailings through the list can bring direct attention to a producer’s cattle.

Mayes says that she can easily incorporate mailing lists producers may already have. And, if the list is sent in a Microsoft Excel file, she can pull out any listings that may be duplicated by either of the Association lists. This prevents numerous copies from reaching the same person and saves money and time.

Paulette Forman from Trinity Farms,

Ellensburg, Wash., says using the Special Services mailing lists helped her gain more customers and more exposure. “The first year we were able to add several people to our database,” she says, as a result of producer feedback. “The mailing list was very beneficial.”

Producers may not realize one very important thing about the mailing list, Mayes says. “It’s broken down into ZIP code area by state.” This allows producers to tailor their mailings to go exactly where they want.

“You don’t have to mail to a whole state,” Mayes says, explaining a producer could pick an area that includes corners of four states, like Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas and Iowa.

This feature allows a producer to specifically target the known and prospective customers in his or her market area without wasting resources. If a producer only sells to parts of a state, he or she can more effectively concentrate resources in the areas that matter.

Service indeed

Donnell and Forman say they thoroughly appreciate the service that the Special Services Department offers, particularly a willingness to help and an ability to adapt.

“Every time something’s come up that I have a question with, they’ve been able to take care of it for me,” Donnell, who has worked with the department on 10 sale books, notes. “They’re so accessible and so conscientious in wanting to get it right and do the job that they know we both want and need.”

Forman says she recognizes that the department wants its customers to be happy. “If I need any changes made, they’ve been very accommodating,” she says. “They’ve tried their best to make it come across the way that pleases me.”

On her third sale book now, Forman says she feels like a valued customer of the American Angus Association. “The highlight of anybody I do business with is how I’m treated,” she says. Special Services “goes above and beyond what I expect.”

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