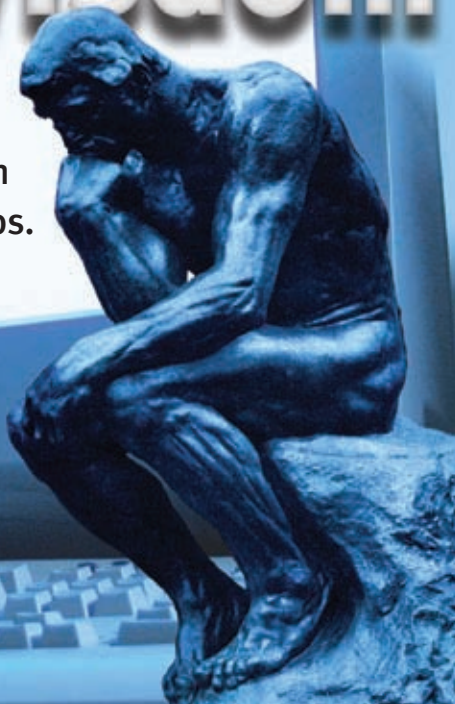# Web Wisdom

Fine-tune your online marketing opportunities with these web-savvy tips.

*by **Kindra Gordon***

In today's tech-savvy world, web sites can be an essential ingredient in marketing success. But what makes some web sites more effective than others? And, what other online opportunities might assist you in marketing your cattle?

Rich Masoner has kept a keen eye on web trends for the Angus industry for the past four years. As web services manager and sales coordinator for the Web Services Department of Angus Productions Inc. (API), Masoner talks with producers every day about the value — and opportunity — that online efforts can offer.

Masoner calls web sites a "24-hour-a-day" communication tool and says that by having a web site for your operation "you are always there, and people always know where to find you."

Moreover, Masoner says a web site offers breeders of all sizes the opportunity to post as much information and detail as they like. To that end, he says web sites can level the playing field for producers.

"Seedstock breeders with small to average herd sizes may not be able to afford a full-page print ad in the *Angus Journal* or *Angus Beef Bulletin* every month, but they can have a web site, which allows them to post as much information as anyone else," he explains.

As an example, Masoner says when you have an effective web site, you don't have to try to cram everything into a print ad.

Instead, you can use the print ad to attract interest and then drive people to your web site for additional details on the animals you're offering for sale.

"A web site can complement any size of a print ad because it should be driving people to your web site for more information," he adds. "Your web site should become the hub of all your advertising."

Additionally, Masoner notes that many people like to get information on their own — rather than having to make a phone call. "Without a web site, you'll miss out on those opportunities," Masoner says.

Web different than print

Thus, given the important role of web sites, how do you make yours an "effective" web site?

Masoner says the major element to note is that people view web sites differently than they view print content and ads. Specifically, print media tends to be graphics-focused, whereas web media tends to hinge on speed and information.

As an example, Masoner says, when building a web site people often want to have lots of photos on their site.

"Photos are good if they are handled correctly," Masoner says. For instance, if photos are on the home page and that makes the web site slow to load and open, they are not being used effectively. Masoner suggests putting photos farther back in the web site and giving people a choice to click on a link to look at them.

Another common mistake that Masoner sees in web design is graphic-heavy entry pages to web sites, such as sites where you often have to click on a full-page photo to enter the site.

In addition to being slow to load, search engines don't respond well to such sites either, Masoner says. He explains that the photo is the index or home page, and because they offer few key words, search engines are less likely to bring those sites up in searches.

Instead, Masoner says, it is better to aim for a home page with a lot of information so there are ample key words for search engines.

He says the bottom line is to aim for a balance between good content and good presentation. "You've got to remember that people online are after information — not slow-loading pretty pictures," he says.

Tell the world

Once you've got this great web site, how do you get the world to log on and see what you are all about?

Obviously, it's important to include your

►Angus e-Classifieds "are a cheap way to simply tell people to look at your web site or that you have animals for sale and direct them to your site," says Rich Masoner, API Web Services Department manager and sales coordinator.

web address on all of your print materials — from business cards and sale books to brochures and ads. But you can also utilize online advertising that links to your web site.

API offers several options:

Angus e-Classifieds are available on *www.angusjournal.com* and start at as little as $5 per month for an ad without photos. Masoner reports that during the sale season this past spring there were as many as 60-70 e-Classifieds posted. Page views in May 2009 of the e-Classifieds were 6,618 — "That's pretty good for one of the slower months," Masoner says.

He adds that one example of the e-Classified's effectiveness is that one advertiser has sold more than $30,000 in embryos during the last three years just by posting on the site.

"This is a cheap way to simply tell people to look at your web site or that you have animals for sale and direct them to your site," Masoner says.

As of June 1, the Angus e-Classified site is newly re-designed and allows advertisers to submit and pay for their own ad. The site automatically calculates the cost. Once API staff review and approve the ad, it goes live.

The Angus e-List is another online advertising opportunity that offers three options:

1. The News e-List is sent out once a day and offers news content along with spaces for banner ads at $45 each.

2. Banner blasts are sent out on Tuesdays and Thursdays, featuring only business-card-size ads; these are also $45 per ad.

3. Full-page ads featuring one advertiser by themselves can also be sent out via the e-List. These cost $185 if the ad is already built, or $250 if API creates the ad.

All of the ads offer direct click-through links to a producers' web site. The current circulation of the Angus e-List is 4,000, plus an additional 2,000 daily visits to the e-List archive page found at *www.anguselist.com*.

Masoner reports that the open rate for these e-List ads sent out by API ranges from 20%-26%, "Which is pretty good," Masoner says, compared to other online ad research.

He says the banner blasts do tend to have a slightly higher viewing rate (26%) compared to the full-page ads, which are more in the range of 20%-22%.

Thus, he encourages advertisers to consider using both the online business-card and the full-page ad sizes. "I believe they reach two audiences. Those who have faster Internet connections and spend more time on their computer likely view the full-page ads — this might be seedstock breeders or managers. Whereas producers with slower Internet connections — often commercial ranchers — likely view the business card banner blasts," Masoner says. "So it all depends on who you are trying to reach."

As a rule, he suggests using the banner blasts about two to three times, six to eight weeks prior to your production sale, then doing the full-page online e-List ad one to two weeks before the sale.

Keep it speedy

Looking ahead at online trends, Masoner believes it is important to consider the popularity of handheld web devices, especially among the younger generation, for e-mail and web surfing.

The small screens on these handhelds again drives home the importance of keeping large-scale graphics to a minimum, Masoner says. Html formats will form to the size of the screen of handhelds. A PDF will not.

"Web sites and online ads must grab people's attention, but they've got to be well-presented and quick to load. If people have to wait for something to open, they are going to be gone," Masoner concludes.

►All of the online advertising opportunities offer direct click-through links to producers' web sites.

►Angus e-List banner blasts feature business-card size ads and are one of three online advertising opportunities offered by API's Web Services Department.

Web design tips

From his web team's experiences, Angus Productions Inc.'s (API's) Rich Masoner shares the following tips for designing an effective web site.

► Recognize that research has shown people read a web site in an F pattern — which means the eye moves across the top and then down the left side of the screen. This is why it is often effective to have your buttons with more details positioned along the left side and/or top of the home page.

► Pay attention to proper spelling and grammar. Paragraphs should be brief, with one to four sentences. And, sentence length should also be brief, with an average of 10 words per sentence.

► Bullet points and lists tend to make web sites more reader-friendly, and also enhance search-engine optimization, according to Google.

► Posting items as html code rather than as a PDF tends to be faster to load and view.

► Make sure your text is relevant to the site. Masoner says this will also help search-engine optimization as the search engines key off the contextual relevance of text to the graphics.

► Keep the information on your site up to date. As an example, if you have a blog on your site, but you don't update it regularly, Masoner suggests removing it. To help draw attention to newly posted items, you might consider adding comments on your home page, guiding visitors to your updated pages. Masoner says an active site should be updated at least once every two weeks.

"If you want search-engine optimization, the site needs to be updated regularly," he says. But he acknowledges that updating a site less often is acceptable if it is fulfilling your needs. For instance, he says many beef producers update their web sites before and after their annual production sale. "If that is fulfilling their needs, that is fine," he says.

► Lastly, if you are building or redesigning a site, Masoner suggests posting the site as soon as the basic design is done. Then, every time you make additions as you finish building the site search engines will be keying off the fact that this is a very active site. That ultimately enhances your search engine optimization.