

# USING THE INTERNET TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

The emergence of global trade, increases in foreign investment and cross-border transactions have put many small businesses under pressure to find innovative ways to continue to market their products and services. This is especially difficult given that they often operate on tight marketing budgets. Purebred seedstock operations are no exception.

In the quest for cost efficient marketing alternatives, many seedstock operations continue to focus on conventional print advertising tools such as newspaper, livestock publications and breed magazines, paying little attention to the advantages that internet promotion can offer. This preoccupation with conventional marketing strategies is often driven by a misconception that these promotional tools are cheaper and or/more effective than internet promotion. Internet promotion, however, may prove to be the marketing tool that generates the highest return on investment in many situations.

For most seedstock producers, marketing or promoting their genetics or services via the internet can be a daunting task. However, with adequate preparation and planning seedstock programs can benefit significantly from internet promotion. All promotion options should be evaluated in building a marketing plan, and the best alternatives will not necessarily be the same for every seedstock enterprise.

## THE ADVANTAGES

### Internet Promotion is Real

The Internet has become the information superhighway for the buying public. Today, most people use the internet the way we all used to use the yellow-pages of our phone books. But, with a few clicks we can go beyond merely finding a product or business to actually researching products, companies, and any other conceivable topic. As fuel prices continue to rise, so will internet use. Commercial producers, purebred breeders, junior exhibitors all turn to the internet for finding the information they want, when they want it. If they are looking for what you have to offer, you want to make sure they can easily find you.

Internet use in marketing seedstock cattle has even advanced beyond mere promotion. Most breed associations and many other cattle websites offer seedstock cattle through internet classified advertising. And, merchandising seedstock directly over the internet through online auctions is becoming more popular every day.

### Internet Promotion is Real-Time

Websites act as a virtual sales team that never sleeps, allowing potential customers to access your operation around the clock from wherever they happen to be. Internet promotion gives a seedstock operation greater visibility at a relatively low cost. Accessing and transmitting information has never been faster or less expensive. Email makes communications with your customer instant and easy, whether the customer is across the county or across the globe., Email newsletters, blogs, pop-up and banner ads, as well as numerous other online marketing tools can be used to let customers know about new products or services in less time than it takes to drive a batch of printed brochures to the post office – after you've spent weeks getting them developed and printed.

### Internet Promotion is Timeless

Internet promotion also provides the advantage of being enduring. Whereas participation at a trade show or field day loses much of its impact when the event is over, and a print advertisement loses its value as soon as the next issue of the publication is released; internet promotion is often timeless. Except for information that is tied to a particular sale or event, much of your basic website content can remain valid for years, only requiring an occasional 'freshening'.

### Internet Promotion is Measurable

One of the most significant advantages of internet promotion is that its impact can be measured more accurately and more easily than many traditional advertising avenues. Online tools are available that provide real time statistics on unique visitors, repeat visitors, and click through rates (CTR) on advertisements for evaluate the effectiveness of a promotional campaign. This enables marketers to determine what works for their particular market and to make timely changes in their marketing strategies.

## THE DISADVANTAGES

As with any marketing approach, internet promotion is not without its risks and weaknesses.

### Success is Not Automatic

With hundreds of seedstock businesses offering similar genetics and services, competing for 'traffic' can be a challenge. You need potential customers to find you before they find someone else. Competing with more established operations can be frustrating and even costly. New operations often have to employ additional promotional tactics to drive traffic to their sites.

### **Economies of Scale Still Exist**

In spite of the cost savings associated with internet promotion, smaller producers still are at a disadvantage in terms of advertising cost per head as compared to larger producers. It is easy to get 'outshined' at the same cost per head. The good news is that this cost difference can be significantly less with internet promotion as compared to other types of promotion.

### **Customer Relationships Can be More Difficult to Establish**

Internet promotion does very little to help establish the personal relationships that are so critical for repeat sales in the seedstock business. Assuming that a website and email campaigns alone can generate the kind of customer needed to sustain a seedstock business would be a fatal mistake

The advantages of internet promotion for seedstock producers continue to expand and far outweigh the disadvantages. The number of potential customers that turn to the internet as their primary source of information will only continue to grow. With a little help from someone skilled at website development (there are individuals who specialize in websites for cattle operations) and a reputable hosting service any seedstock operation can increase their exposure and reach in the marketplace. If you're serious about your seedstock enterprise and getting the most value for your promotion dollar, internet promotion is too easy, too instant and too cost effective to overlook.