

PROACTIVE PROMOTION

Internet and print advertising are only pieces of the promotion puzzle. In reality, everything you do with your seedstock business (other than paying taxes) contributes to (or detracts from) promotion. Sire and replacement female selection determine the genetic makeup of your product. Feed formulation and feeding regimen determine what the product package will look like. Routine ranch maintenance determines the state of your 'show room'. Maintaining accurate performance records provides information for quality control measures. The list can go on and on, but the point is simple: when it comes to effectively promoting your product, everything counts.

There are, however, some activities that are more directly related to proactive promotion. Not every promotional tool is right for every operation, but here are some ideas that can generate positive results:

Exhibiting Cattle:

There are two basic ways of exhibiting cattle; through the show ring and through live cattle displays at industry events. Both can be effective ways of promoting your cattle as well as meeting potential customers, but both can be very expensive propositions. Cost effectiveness should always be the primary concern with all promotional vehicles.

-Exhibiting in the Show Ring: Competing in cattle shows allows you to come in contact with potential purebred customers and allows them an opportunity to evaluate your cattle without having to travel to your ranch. It also allows you to compare your cattle with those of other breeders. Remember, however, that it is a competition. If you enter cattle in the show, enter to win.

-Exhibiting Display Cattle: Exhibiting your cattle at local, state or national events reaps many of the same benefits as showing cattle. An advantage for some seedstock operations is that these types of industry events typically attract more commercial producers than do cattle shows. Commercial producers enjoy evaluating good cattle and are much more likely to spend time your trade show booth if you have cattle on display. Display cattle are not competing for a ribbon as in the show ring, but they are competing for market share. If you display cattle, display only your best.

Industry Events:

If you aren't a member of your local, state or national cattlemen's association, join today. Their meetings, conventions, seminars, and field days are usually one of the largest gatherings of commercial cattlemen in your area. You will be visible and available to prospects. When your association has a display at these types of events, volunteer to help man the booth and/or provide display cattle.

Ag Extension Resources:

Having a positive relationship with extension personnel is a very cost effective promotional tool. State and county extension personnel have a great deal of indirect influence on the decision making of smaller beef producers. They also are the link between the beef industry and youth. Keep abreast of youth extension projects, so you don't miss an opportunity to help your local youth group. FFA chapters, 4-H clubs and many colleges and universities have livestock judging teams. Extension personnel can help you make contacts to invite the teams out to judge your cattle or to sponsor a judging contest. Many of these young people are preparing themselves for a future in the livestock industry and/or have family in the business.

Field Days:

Hosting an educational field day at your ranch is an excellent way to help producers in your area become familiar with your operation and your cattle. Extension personnel can assist with the planning and promotion of the event, and feed, pharmaceutical, and other allied industry companies are usually eager to participate and share in the expenses.

Livestock Auction Markets:

Get to know the owner and/or operator of your local auction barn. The opportunities offered through different livestock auction markets vary considerably, and knowing what the different markets offer commercial producers can be a great advantage in marketing your genetics. Special sales bring commercial producers from significant distances, presenting the opportunity to pick up new customer leads and interact with current customers – if you are there. Posting your ranch flyers at livestock markets and leaving some business cards behind can also generate leads.

Consignment Sales:

Consignment sales can be a big plus to your marketing program if properly handled. Here are some hints for a more successful sale of your consignment cattle. First of all, consign good cattle. Your goal should be to have the high selling animal at every sale in which you consign cattle. Select your consignment cattle as soon as possible. This will give you a chance to be working with your cattle early and allow you to plan your advertising and promotion effectively, while staying within your budget. Make some personal phone calls to potential buyers. Don't be ashamed to ask someone to buy your consignments. Make sure all performance information is complete, accurate and readily available for any potential buyer.

Several months before sale time, your consignment should be given extra feed and care to make sure they look their best for the sale. You can not make your animals look too good. If you are not experienced with preparing animals for show or display, get some expert help.

On the day of the sale, stay close to your cattle and make sure your consignments are clearly identified as yours – with stall cards and an attractive ranch sign. Spend time with the potential buyers and make sure you can answer any questions they might have about your animal, including questions about the sire and dam.

After your consignments have sold, see if you can locate the buyers. Shake their hand and thank them. This could be the start of a long buying relationship. Consider offering the buyer a money back guarantee.

Ranch Signs:

Ranch signs are easy, effective and efficient for keeping your operation on the mind of potential customers in your area. Ranch signs are relatively inexpensive and are always on the job. In addition to your front gate, put up a sign on all well traveled roads that lead to your ranch. Ranch signs on your pickup or trailer can also be very effective. Keep all of your signage consistent and simple, and always include a valid phone number and/or web address.

Promotion means different things to different people, but promotion is part of every successful seedstock operation. The promotional plans and activities of different operations will vary considerably, a result of the inherent variation between operations themselves. Only you can determine which promotional tools will produce the best results for your operation.