

TAA CONSIGNMENT SALES – THEY ARE FOR YOU

Part III – Marketing

Hopefully, by now, you have nominated your females for the Breeders Select Sale in Athens on September 24th and have selected the animals that you wish to nominate for the Stars of Texas and Best of the West Sales in January. You should be well into the stages of preparation of your animals as outlined in earlier articles. Now comes the bad news. All of the efforts that you have expended in selection and preparation will have been wasted if you fail to market your product to the buying public.

If you were to get up from reading this article and turn on the television, odds are great that the first thing you would see would be a commercial. There is a reason for this. Companies realize that seldom does that rare product come along that requires no marketing. For those of us in the Angus business, we must realize that each breeder who will consign to a TAA sale is competing for a limited number of buyer dollars. Marketing is a large component of the success or failure of your consignments. You get to choose how, or if, you will attempt to give yourself an “edge” over your competition.

I have heard all of the excuses not to market and, quite frankly, I am elated when I hear them. “I don’t have any marketing skills”, “I’m uncomfortable making cold calls”, “I don’t want to interrupt someone during their dinner”, “A post card is just another piece of junk mail” are all true statements for some and music to the ears of others. When I hear someone make one of the above or similar statements I mentally give myself a competitive advantage over that breeder. My old grandpa used to say “Can’t never could do anything.” Nowhere does this old philosophy apply more than in marketing.

If you have never thought about marketing, now is the time to start. Let’s start with the simplest type of contact. On your AAA Login web page (under Buyer Contact Info & History) there is a section that will give you the name, address, phone number, animal purchased from you and date of purchase. These are your past customers. Contact them, in whatever manner you feel comfortable, thank them for their past business and invite them to join you and a group of other consignors on the evening before the sale. You don’t even have to mention that you have animals in the offering. Just invite them to join you and other Angus breeders for a time of fun and fellowship. It will make you feel good when they show up and thank you for the personal invitation. If you have never sold a cow before, contact anyone you know and extend the invitation.

If you choose to make personal calls rather than using mailed pieces, be courteous. You will encounter two types of people on the other end of the conversation, those who wish to talk to you and those who do not. After introducing yourself, ask “is this a bad time for you” or some similar question. If the timing is bad, excuse yourself. If the time is appropriate, extend your invitation. Be prepared to answer the potential buyer’s

questions. For many of these people, nobody has ever taken the time to call and invite them to a sale. They may ask about location, motels, type of cattle being offered (cows, heifers, pairs, etc.), hauling, who knows? Many times they ask “do you have anything in the sale?” This is your opportunity. Know your product, how old it is, what it’s bred to and when it will calve and, most importantly, tell him why you think he should buy her. This goes back to our selection discussion. What reason are you going to give that potential buyer to purchase an animal that you didn’t want in your herd. If you are proud of your offering, you won’t have any problem extolling her virtues.

If you opt for mailed pieces or e-mail contacts make sure that you send them far enough in advance for the potential customer to make plans to attend the sale. In our busy world, people schedule weekend events in advance. Make sure to note in your contact piece that internet bidding is available if they are unable to attend. In addition, make sure your printed piece is well organized, emphasizing the details about the sale and specific information about your lots. The person receiving this advertisement will make a split second decision whether to discard or further explore your mailing. Professional assistance to help you make a good impression is recommended. Such help will provide value for the dollars spent.

Marketing works. Attached to this article (in the highlighted area) are some tips from Steve and Laura Knoll of 2 Bar Angus in Hereford, Texas. I get many questions about how 2 Bar has achieved the level of success that they currently enjoy. Steve will tell you that it has not always been like this. It has taken time, effort, product knowledge, customer service and marketing to reach the status in the marketplace that they have achieved. They are living examples of how sticking to your marketing plan will ultimately lead to success. Make use of the insight he is willing to share with you.

Most small breeders market their animals, to some extent, through consignment sales. The marketing for these sales is a collective enterprise. Don’t be the weak link in the chain. Let’s consider consignor A. This consignor has made a full blown marketing effort. He has run a full page, color ad in the Texas Angus News, followed by e-blasts and postcards that describe his consignments. In addition, he began several weeks prior to the sale making calls to his past customer list and anyone else who might have an interest in his offering. He is excited, on sale day, to see that that one of the individuals he has been soliciting has come to the sale. Two hours later, when the gavel falls, the customer that consignor A has worked so hard to cultivate buys the offering of consignor B. Is consignor A disappointed? Sure, but this is part of the collective process. Consignor A assumes that he has provided a service both to the customer (who got the cow that he really wanted and would have missed if he had not been invited to the sale) and to consignor B, who made the sale. But what about consignor B? If he made no effort to market his product prior to the sale he got something for nothing. Don’t be labeled consignor B. Do your part and help assure the success of every consignor.

A word to the buyer. All of the recommendations that have been made to the consignors in this series of articles accrue to the benefit of the buyer. You will be offered an outstanding representative of the seller's herd in optimum condition. In addition, the consignor's marketing effort should allow you to accumulate all of the information you will need to make an educated purchasing decision on sale day. If you need additional data, don't hesitate to ask. Finally, by participating as a buyer in a TAA consignment sale, you will have the opportunity to take your program to the next level with your purchase and help to insure that these venues will be available to you when the time comes to begin marketing from your own herd. When that time comes, we invite and encourage you to become a consignor in one of our sales.

We have all seen the bumper sticker "I wasn't born in Texas but I got here as soon as I could". Always carry this swagger when marketing your Angus cattle. The breeders who are in the seats at the next sale you consign to may not be heavily invested in our breed, but they are getting there as fast as they can. Don't be shy about telling potential customers about the cattle you have to offer. Take pride in your breed, your personal breeding program and your state and national associations. Together, we can keep Angus cattle at the top of the food chain.

Advice from a Fellow Consignor

Submitted by Steve and Laura Knoll, 2 Bar Angus

When you make the decision to sell one of your cows or bulls at a consignment sale, there are many things that will affect your outcome at the sale.

Demand is probably the biggest, but the big question is how to be on top at every sale. I am not sure anyone can do this without a little or a lot of luck. There are a few things that can help keep you from falling to the bottom of the sale. Even if you have something sired by the hottest bull, have the best EPDs, and your animal is structurally correct, you can still fall short of receiving top dollar for your animal.

Presentation is very important. Clean, fitted animals and clean, neat pens help. Sexing the fetus of pregnant females will also help. We all sell cows. The people and services separate us from each other. The cattle are only as good as the people who stand behind them. It is easy to stand behind your cattle when things go right, but when things don't, it is equally important to stand behind them. Go above and beyond to make customers happy.

Let's talk about condition of the animal. Most people will tell you they don't want to buy fat cattle, but not many will buy skinny or poor conditioned animals. Your animal should not be obese, but in good shape. I think a body condition score of 6 is optimal for a sale animal. When we are getting ready for a sale, the biggest thing is not to start too late.

Pictures are very important. A good or great picture can make anyone who looks at a sale catalog a potential customer, but a bad picture will turn off buyers and cost you bids. Even if you have a great looking animal, a bad picture of a good animal is not recommend to print. Trust your sale manager concerning pictures. Pictures are needed 45-60 days prior to sale date, so plan ahead. Have the animal ready and a photographer scheduled.

Big weight gain in a short amount of time can be harmful to the animals. We like to feed good hay to sale cattle to help them gain and avoid grain unless there is no other option. My favorite, if no high quality pasture is available, is wheat or triticale hay in the boot, but any hay that is at least 9% protein and 70% TDN (total digestible nutrients). Energy is also important. A nutritionist is very helpful in utilizing locally available feedstuffs and they can usually save you money. I am not saying to hire a nutritionist; there are several good ones available through the Extension Service.

The main thing is figure out what you goals are. Do you want to just raise and sell cattle or do you want to top every sale? If you are not sure what to do, call someone and get educated. This business if full of some of the best people in the world that are willing to help.

Source – Robbie Bean