

REDEFINING MARKETING

Marketing is an opportunity to showcase what we spend our lifetimes building.

Commentary by Troy Marshall, American Angus Association

I was asked a great question the other day: If you could change the way we think about something, what would it be? Initially, my mind went to the easy answers — our silo/segmented mentality, the way we use data as a competitive advantage rather than to make the industry better, the way we price cattle, and the list goes on.

However, I really think if I could change one thing, it would be the way we look at marketing.

This industry tends to look at marketing as a necessary evil. We feel like we can wear every hat when it comes to the production side, but we are uneasy about marketing the product we spend our lifetimes building. Every segment of our business tends to pass marketing off to somebody

else — the auction market, the video auction, consultants or whomever.

The feeding; packing; and hotel, restaurant and institutional (HRI) segments of our industry are margin operators. That is what they focus on. They are essentially price-takers who function on efficiency.

Branded-beef product lines are a notable exception, but the industry

has largely abdicated the role of marketing. Few debate the return on investment for marketing, but the industry still spends a mere \$1 per head. In fact, the seedstock segment is the only one in our industry that allocates a budget line for marketing that would be similar to most businesses.

Avenue for change

Marketing isn't just about spending dollars or hiring experts. Marketing drives culture, it drives change, and it is truly the opposite of what most of us envision. It is not being a used-car salesman selling something you don't want or need. Rather it is an opportunity to showcase what we are proud of. It serves those people we truly care about — family, employees, the beef industry and consumers.

Seth Godin says it well: "Marketing is about anchoring your work deeply in the dreams, desires and communities of those you seek to serve."

For me, marketing allows you to differentiate yourself to be a driver in the marketplace rather than simply being a price-taker. I think as an industry we have missed that marketing is the avenue through which we can create change. Whether you want to change the demand for your product, the perception of your product with your buyers, or improve the industry, marketing is the engine that drives change. Marketing is, in its simplest form, helping people find what they are looking for.

If we want our industry to be healthier, to reduce our buyers' frustration, to provide more for our family, to improve our

community, or to capture more dollars, it is a safe bet that we have a marketing problem.

The process

It is a simple process. Determine to whom you want to market.

Understand the message you want to convey. Guarantee that your message will resonate with your intended audience. Finally, tell them something they want or need in a way they want to hear it. Marketing is



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about creating positive change.

Once you have followed these steps, the final step of your marketing strategy is making sure you are solving a problem. Then deliver on the promise.

If you are a cow-calf producer, your typical buyer has similar frustrations. They want to purchase genetics that will perform in the yard and on the rail, they want healthy calves, they want uniformity, they want to have market access and market flexibility, and they want to reduce the risk associated with the purchases they make. The list is far more extensive than that, but it is a pretty good starting point.

While the AngusLinkSM program helps to market your calves, it is primarily focused on helping to address those frustration points listed above. Give us a call and see if we can help you market the product that you are so proud of that reflects a lifetime of dedication and commitment. |

Editor's note: Troy Marshall is the director of commercial industry relations for the American Angus Association.