

The business of social media

By Miranda Reiman

In Kindergarten, the report cards at my school simply listed S (satisfactory) or N (needs improvement). The only time I ever got an N was for talking too much.

So it's no surprise that all these years later, I quickly jumped on board with such Internet social media as Facebook and Twitter.

Farmers and ranchers tend to be on either side of the fence when it comes to this new form of electronic communication. There are the hold-outs, the staunch supporters, the occasional users and the clueless.

Some may wonder why this business-focused column is even covering the subject, while others already know that just because it's called "social" media doesn't mean it's all about who's friends with who. A growing function of social media is to deliver information, tips and news, and cattle producers might stand to benefit even more from this trend than their urban counterparts.

How often do you get away from the ranch for educational events? Outside of your family, how many people do you see on a daily basis? How many hours do you spend in a tractor cab?

The answers to all of the questions are the reasons that social media might make good business sense for you.

Most state cattlemen organizations, breed associations and livestock media—along with companies selling cattle products—have a web presence beyond their official web pages. You can select which groups you get updates from and you can get the latest information at any hour. It doesn't fill up your e-mail inbox; rather, it's there on-demand, when you want it.

Waiting for the banker to show up and have a few spare minutes?

Log onto Facebook and you might see how the Beef Checkoff is using your dollars or you could find out about a new, easy-to-use record keeping system developed by the Extension Service or a software company.

If you have a Smartphone (one enabled with an Internet connection), you can get all this material in the palm of your hand. While you're in line at the local elevator, Twitter can point you to market commentary or updates on how that environmental regulation is progressing through Congress. You can get management tips, find out about events coming to your local area and listen to what consumers are saying about your ultimate end product: beef.

In reference to that latter group, social media can be used to engage people who don't know what your livelihood is all about. You can also learn a bit from them, like their preferences and how you can please the final consumer. That ultimately means more dollars in your pocket.

Sure, it's not all business. You might also see pictures of your local legislator participating in a cattle show or find out what your association's staff members are up to on your behalf. But that's the beauty of it. This is a way to connect without ever having to leave your place. It's a way to stay in touch with what's going on in the bigger picture of the beef industry—and it's free.

Whether you consider yourself "social" or think that aspect deserves an N, the convenience of social media can work for you like S+. It's sure worth a second look.

Next time in *Black Ink*, we'll look at the idea of critical mass. Meanwhile, if you have questions for us, call toll-free at 877-241-0717 or e-mail mreiman@certifiedangusbeef.com.

Kansas State Fair Winners



GRAND CHAMPION BULL

McCabe PVF Providence 0020

Pitts Angus Farm, Hermitage, MO; Prairie View Farm, Gridley, IL; McCabe Genetics, Elk City, KS



SENIOR BULL CALF CHAMPION

Pitts Pioneer 0247

Pitts Angus Farm, Hermitage, MO