

MARKETING TIPS FOR RAM BREEDERS



WHAT IS MARKETING ABOUT?

Marketing is all about making customers aware of your products and services, attracting new customers to a product or service, and keeping existing customers interested in your product or service. In the simplest of terms, it is about communicating what you are doing and why it is beneficial. Objective measurements, such as Australian Sheep Breeding Values (ASBVs) and genomic data, can play a big part in explaining the differences between your rams and those of your competitors and in which areas your stock has a competitive advantage.

By breeding and selling rams that are backed by ASBVs, your rams have figures that back up your visual selection criteria, and to give you a competitive edge over other ram breeders who are not using objective measurement.

DEVELOPING A MARKETING PLAN

Your main aim should be to gain maximum exposure for a minimum spend.

To achieve this you should firstly identify the ways in which you can achieve the goals you have set for your business. Think of the opportunities you have to remind clients and potential clients that your rams are being objectively measured and have figures to back the traditional visual methods of selection that clients will still want to use.

There are a number of individual components that can make up a marketing plan:

- Advertising – both media and non-media (flyers, newsletters, catalogue sales)
- Media engagement (press releases, sale reports, editorials on trials and field days)
- Digital media – website, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube
- Industry activities and involvement, including agricultural shows and field days
- Testimonials from current clients
- Events such as on-farm field days and sales

QUESTIONS TO ASK:



- How does your audience get its information?
- What newspapers do they read, and radio stations do they listen to?
- What are the known industry networks (associations, grower groups)?
- Can pictures/graphs illustrate your messages?
- Is more information available online?
- How can you ensure that the media report your activities accurately? Do they require a press release?
- Do they require photos?
- Are you prepared for the difficult questions from the media? (Write down three questions you would hope NOT to be asked by the media, then work out how to answer/avoid/address them.)

KNOW YOUR MARKET

In considering your marketing strategy, it is important to be able to identify the needs of your clients and what it is you are selling them. Your approach will differ depending on whether you are supplying elite rams, rams for commercial flock improvement or semen doses. Each type of sale has a different value proposition and will require different information being provided as well as a different level of resources used in marketing.

Your value proposition is what you are able to offer your clients, taking into account what they need and providing the solution they are looking for. It must also present as the best proposition out of all the alternatives that are on offer. Remember that often the needs of your clients will change; for example, they might look to change their own breeding objectives, so you need to continually reassess your own business operation and really know what it is your clients are looking for now and into the future.



If a commercial client wants to compare their current bloodline with the genetic attributes of other studs, they can search the Sheep Genetics website: www.sheepgenetics.org.au

HOW GENETIC INFORMATION CAN HELP

Set your stud apart by detailing your involvement in objective measurement programs such as MERINOSELECT or LAMBPLAN, or research programs like the Sheep CRC Information Nucleus Flock or the Pilot Project. It is important that your clients and potential clients understand what it means to achieve ASBVs and how to interpret them. These can be complicated subjects, so keep it simple and focussed on the client and their needs.

ASBVs are designed to be used by ram breeders and commercial producers to compare the genetic potential of rams and ewes for a range of commercially important traits, across flocks, and independent of the environment and location. Breeding values are expressed as the difference between an individual animal's merit and the average merit of the base year, which is set at zero. ASBVs can be calculated from measured or visually scored traits using agreed standard procedures. Animals with the most favourable ASBVs for various traits will be identified in trait leader and elite animal summaries.

Are your animals trait leaders? Show where your best animals rank for key traits (e.g. growth rate, wool quantity and quality, carcase traits, fertility, lamb survival, worm resistance, and temperament) and be sure to include the accuracy levels.

Are your rams considered 'elite'? These rams have ASBVs that place them in the top 10% of animals compared to the current drop year. Information needs to include the number of flocks in which they are evaluated, the number of progeny and detailed information on the lambs, sire, mother and maternal grandsire. Clients may want to compare the performance of the ram against its parents to check for consistency.

Do your rams have genomic information? These values can highlight performance for hard-to-measure traits like tenderness and intramuscular fat, as well as horn/poll.

Explain to clients that different traits have different levels of heritability. A trait's heritability impacts on genetic progress, so when selecting for highly heritable traits, genetic progress in a breeding program is likely to be realised sooner.

Explain to clients that the data which supports ASBVs is credible and must meet accuracy, quality assurance and across flock linkage requirements of the MERINOSELECT and LAMBPLAN programs.

KEY MESSAGES ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS

Think about the information you might use as a constant theme to your marketing material - these themes are the key messages you want to get across, for example:

- Your stud is leading the way in genetic selection and evaluation through participation in MERINOSELECT (ASBVs).
- The stud's rams are subject to genetic evaluation and have achieved record prices at recent sales and are in high demand.
- The stud's continued genetic improvement has delivered heavier fleece weights, lower micron, superior wool quality; or improved growth and carcase traits.
- Your stud aims to assist with clients' own breeding objectives by providing seedstock that is objectively measured and can improve the clients' own operation's productivity and importantly, profitability.
- Your stud has participated in the Sheep CRC's genomic research programs, and some of your rams now have DNA test results and genomic-assisted research breeding values.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Timing is vital when you are considering your marketing plan. Think about a whole of calendar year approach to how you are going to market your business. Plan ahead when placing an advertisement in your local paper or state rural weekly so that readers have enough time to schedule your sale into their itineraries.

- Block out the lead time to key events so you can be prepared and allocate time to their organisation and final promotion so they don't sneak up on you.
- Think about how a commercial producer who is looking to buy rams might plot in their own business activities, eg. when they are most likely to make decisions about their breeding programs, look to buying rams.
- If your target market is Australia wide, think about any geographical influences for each state and season variations, including joining times.
- Think about livestock features in your state rural weekly newspaper and also contacting your current clients direct (by phone or email) about your plans for the year and to let them know your sale date.
- Keep your livestock agent up to date with your breeding objectives. Make sure they're fully aware of your objective evaluation measures, and how this fits in with more traditional visual forms of evaluation.



Keeping in contact with your current clients is the best way to keep your business in the forefront of their minds as well as ensuring they are repeat customers

TIPS FOR PROMOTING YOUR BUSINESS WITHOUT SPENDING \$\$

Word of Mouth – ask your satisfied customers to let others know what you have to offer and why they are using your rams. **Third Party and Client endorsements** – Use your satisfied customers to comment on your business and what buying your rams has meant to their own operation. You can use these testimonials in your brochures, newsletters and on your website. Including figures indicating improved productivity that hit a potential client's hip pocket can be extremely effective.

Email – Email can be used as a marketing tool to let clients and potential clients know what you are doing. If you are a member of a breed society, let other members know what you are doing by sending a simple, informative email about your business. Don't forget to include your brand and full contact details in your email signature.

Posters – These are particularly effective for events such as shows, field days and sales. Use your logo, and include positive, attention grabbing points about your business.

Brochures and newsletters – These can be simply and easily designed and used to let your clients and potential clients know all about your business, your latest news and achievements, sale dates and other events.

Existing newsletters – If you belong to a breed society, don't forget to let them know about your business and what you're up to.

Websites – Put details of your business and any events on your website, your breed society's website, and don't forget to talk to your livestock agent about using their website and networks to promote your business.

Breeder Groups – If your business operates within a 'breeder group' ensure you work together on your marketing as well. Ideally, you will have similar aims for your businesses and similar breeding objectives.

Local Newspapers – Talk to the reporters at your local paper and let them know when you're having sales, on-farm field days, when you have success at local shows, and what you are doing in your business that would be of interest to readers, eg. use of new technologies and new results.

Radio – Don't forget to talk to your local ABC reporter about any events that relate to your business.

Advertising – There is always a cost associated with advertising, so consider if there is an alternative way of promoting your business. If taking out an advertisement, make sure your branding is consistent, the information is concise, and your contact details are included.

Media releases – Issuing media releases is a great way of communicating news about your business and gaining free publicity. This publicity lets your clients and potential clients know what your business is offering and gives greater credibility to your operation, especially if a story about your business is placed in the news section of a paper.



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SHEEP CRC



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SHEEP GENETICS



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