Wagyu article on Allison Buchanan

How to Get Great Marketing Results

Digital marketing can produce great ROI, but it takes work

By Burt Rutherford

Digital is the thing this year. And last year and next year and for years after that.

That's especially true if your marketing budget isn't robust enough to handle an expensive advertising campaign, Allison Buchanan told Wagyu breeders during the 2024 American Wagyu Association (AWA) annual convention.

She's with a full-service marketing agency called The Focus Group, in Lexington, Mississippi. The AWA has retained the agency to help roll out its American Wagyu program, which is designed to assure consumers that the beef under the label is exactly what the label says it is.

That's important, she told Wagyu breeders. "You have an amazing story to tell. Your history. You're having massive growth in popularity; it's the finest beef in the world, unrivaled flavor, all these things that you know are benefits that consumers want," she said.

"There's a huge upside for market penetration in the Authentic Wagyu program. It's giving more fuel to the ability to grow your brand." Authentic Wagyu is a USDA Process Verified Program that verifies and labels Wagyu beef as a brand and a promise that the beef in the package is what the label says it is. "You're perfectly positioned to go to the next level."

While getting there can be expensive, it doesn't have to be, she told Wagyu enthusiasts. That means using digital marketing to its full advantage.

She described work done a few years back for the American Shrimp Processors Association, which, like AWA, didn't have a huge war chest to develop and promote wild-caught American shrimp. "They wanted to tell the story of shrimp coming from the boat all the way to the table."

So her agency developed campaigns labeled Every Shrimp Has a Tale and Our Shrimp Has a Story. And

rolled it out with digital marketing. Over the eight years of the campaign, the association went from a few followers on Facebook to more than 280,000.

That's realistic for Wagyu as well. "It's putting out recipes, stories and other consumer-facing content in a way that you're not having to pay for eyeballs on television or in magazines or in places where you're having to pay for it. It's an indirect but very authentic way to get to your consumers."

The place to start is social media, like Facebook. But which platform is the best? "Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, X which is Twitter, and Pinterest, probably in that order, are the ones where we see success and where we put the money," she said. "That goes for both the association's marketing and for your individual consumer efforts."

However, she admonished, it's more than just individual consumers. "We did an analysis of our followers on Facebook (for the shrimp processors association) and about 20% of them were chefs. Those chefs have Facebook pages, too. And if they see something they like, they follow it."

It takes effort. "If you have a website and have a Facebook page, you have to look at it as something you have to feed. You have to feed this beast as often as you can to get the traction you need. And you have to provide things that are interesting and fun to watch," she said.

"All these things depend on content," she said. And Wagyu breeders see content every day on their operations that can be shared as stories, videos, recipes, customer testimonials. "Little bits of content go a long way."

That's being done now primarily by individual Wagyu breeders. Eventually, AWA may be able to share that content on a national platform, which is what the shrimp processors were able to do.

The Focus Group developed the labels for the Authentic Wagyu program. She told Wagyu breeders that sharing content and getting behind the Wagyu brand will help promote the brand. "If you're not participating, you're not benefitting from the collective marketing effort," she said. "So everybody has to work together and build your stories every day. You unify branding."

One of her favorite sayings is "Creativity is an economic multiplier." "If you're creative, you don't have to spend a lot of money because something will get traction, if you think strategically and creatively

about it."

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