

The Fine Art of Becoming Visible

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*"Work is love made visible."
-Kahlil Gibran, "The Prophet"*

Have you ever awoken to discover that you are invisible? Think hard about this question for it is a difficulty that many alpaca breeders face, and with the incredible growth of our industry, one that is becoming more prevalent. How do you know whether or not you are invisible? Ask yourself the following questions:

1. If I took a poll of the alpaca industry, how many of the over 3000 members or 20,000 plus annual leads would recognize my name or the name of my ranch? How many that recognize my ranch know what kind/quality of herd I have?
2. If I took a poll of my local community, how many people would know that I am in the alpaca business? How many of those know what it is I sell?
3. If I took a poll of livestock breeders in my state, how many know that I raise alpacas? How many of those know what products alpacas produce?

You cannot have a successful business if no one knows you exist! While most every businessperson understands this, not everyone understands how to achieve visibility. When I mention visibility in the classes I teach, I often find that people think it is synonymous with advertising, and then they explain how their budget is too small to buy any ads. The good news is that visibility can be achieved in many ways, and paid advertising is only one of many tools. But before we look at all the ways to make your alpaca business the talk of the town, there is something else you must do first.

A key concept for promoting your business effectively is to make sure that all your messages say the same thing. We know from marketing statistics that it can take as many as 8 to 10 contacts with a potential customer before that person actually becomes aware of your efforts. If your message is consistent, it can help shortcut this process as each contact reinforces the others to build a critical mass. If your message varies - one time you are promoting your suris, the next time it is your ranch location, and a third message is about your alpaca store - clients may interpret these as being completely unrelated. No critical mass is achieved and the customer remains unaware of your attempts at promotion.

To create a cohesive visibility campaign, you will need to do a quick analysis of your business. Ask yourself:

- Who am I?
- What business am I in?
- What people do I serve?
- Who are my competitors?
- What makes me different from my competitors?
- What is the benefit for clients that do business with me?

Here is a sample answer: *John and Jane Hembra's World's Greatest Alpaca Ranch is a small alpaca ranch specializing in the highest quality suris for the discriminating breeder. Unlike our large competitor down the street, we hand pick our breeding stock from the best in the country and we are willing to sell our best to you. You get premier animals that you can take right into show winner's circle.*

Now that John and Jane have established the 'position' they hold in the industry, they are ready to peel off the cloak of invisibility using some or all of the following tools:

1. Advertising: standard print ads emphasizing the position or niche outlined above are placed in industry and outside publications where John and Jane have determined they will reach the most interested readers for the best price.
2. Direct Mail: flyers, postcards, newsletters or handwritten invitations to visit are mailed to the list of potential customers obtained from AOBA or other sources. Each mailing mentions the World's Greatest Alpaca Ranch niche.
3. Website: whether one page or many, the web site reiterates the position John and Jane hold in the industry and may offer supporting evidence such as a list of their show awards.
4. Special events: John and Jane will make a calendar of the events they will participate in this year. Since their chosen niche is "highest quality alpacas", some of these events will be alpaca shows. Other events include auctions, fiber festivals, open ranch days, wool markets, farm and livestock shows, farmer's markets, crafts shows or conferences.
5. Farm display: In addition to merely participating at events, John and Jane will need to develop a display that promotes their farm and farm products. Such displays range from banners to small tabletop displays to full sized professional display booths. The ranch will be featured in a way that promotes the Hembras' chosen niche.
6. Farm Brochure: John and Jane will work with a graphics designer to develop a brochure to hand out at events or to mail to potential customers. The brochure will describe their alpaca ranch in a way that is consistent with their chosen theme.
7. Industry and Local Business Involvement: John volunteers to be on the industry show committee while Jane participates in their local AOBA affiliate and joins the Chamber of Commerce. Through such participation they not only assist the industry locally and nationally, but they meet many breeders/potential customers who begin to recognize them.
8. Local media: Jane attends a seminar on writing press releases offered through the local Chamber of Commerce. She begins sending notices to local media whenever anything new and interesting is

happening at the ranch. Each notice mentions their ranch offers top quality suri alpacas, etc.

9. Other: Once you start looking, you will realize that there are many, many ways to make customers aware that your ranch exists.

Gaining visibility takes time and a good plan, and a lot of creative work. Once you get there, you will need to keep working in order to stay visible. The good news is that you will love the results! Your customers are looking forward to seeing you!