

Black Ink Get With The Times

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It's the 1970s. An air-dried Polaroid shows your leisure suit and platform shoes, just before you hop into your pickup and check the CB for friends talking skip. At home, you play a new video game called Pong but don't know anything about computers. Radio Shack's ad on the sports page says you need one.

In the '80s and early '90s, clunky "bag phones" let you communicate across the airwaves from your vehicle, or anywhere it can reach an analog signal.

Fast forward to the new millennium, where chatting about all of those "innovations" from the past can prompt laughter among family and friends. Almost everyone remembers something distinct: their first TV, mom's fashion eye glasses, an eight-track player in a deluxe tractor cab or walking soybeans before the days of biotechnology.

Looking back, it's funny – and simultaneously astounding – to see the progress made since the first inventions and ideas were introduced.

The passage of time allows us to gain different perspective on everything from fashion to technology. Showing up at church or a business meeting in bell-bottom slacks and a groovy hair style back in 1971, people might bestow on you the title of trendsetter. Doing the same thing today would raise a few eyebrows, along with whispers of being archaic or perhaps too frugal to invest in wardrobe updates.

Looking at your business through that same lens might help determine if you're "with the times" or not. Sometimes passé practices work for so long that you've never made an effort to search out more modern, timesaving alternatives. Or maybe you got so focused on one area of your farm or ranch that you didn't even notice you were slipping from your once progressive standing to old-fashioned.

If you have thin stocker cattle that you just finished "roughing through the winter," the

market is wondering why. With today's cattle genetics geared for high performance through every phase, trying to starve a later profit out of them now is at least 20 years behind the times.

Talking to your producer friends, you could be saying, "Remember when we'd pick bulls on looks alone? Those days before expected progeny differences (EPDs) sure created some challenges."

If that sounds more like a conversation for the future, maybe this is your year to catch up and discover those tools.

You've seen or at least read about historical industry trends from the short, fat cattle to the giant, leggy ones. Those extremes seem ridiculous now, but would you recognize a similar craze before you aimed your herd toward a goal you regret in hindsight? And are you sure you haven't done that already?

Research has sorted fad from facts, showing that beef demand is built on taste; that's flavor, tenderness and juiciness. From the cholesterol crisis to the Atkins diet, the ever-evolving roller-coaster ride shows it's important to shoot for consistency. The modern method of hitting high marks with consumers is to include marbling in your selection criteria, and then manage the cattle with that potential in mind.

A few decades earlier it would have been hard to predict the prevalence of video sales or even source- and age-verified programs. Twenty-first century marketing is full of options as varied as our choices for cell phones and digital cameras.

You may call yourself modern, progressive or forward-thinking, but be truthful. If your cell phone isn't small enough to carry in your pocket or your camera's "instant feedback" doesn't involve a screen, you're probably not on the front lines of the digital age. That may have little relevance in your cattle business, but the same rule applies: be honest with yourself. Today might be the perfect day to get with the times and enjoy the success that a contemporary update provides. Δ

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