

# modernlivestock merchandising



## Blogging for Ranchers

by Rachel Cutrer

There once was a time when progressive livestock producers could simply use a website to satisfy their online marketing needs. Today, modern livestock marketers need much more than just a website; they need a web presence. This is where tools like social media and blogging come into the picture. The two primary advantages to using blogs and social media are cost and user-friendliness. Social media outlets and blogs are generally very inexpensive, if not completely free. Users often find they are able to connect with fellow agriculturalists from around the world, creating a virtual network of friends.

### **Blogs: The New Buzzword**

Blogs are currently one of the most popular tools for information sharing and promotion being utilized by agricultural advocates today. What is a blog? In its simplest form, a blog is similar to a diary or journal, except it is web based. Writers - called bloggers - use a blog to use writing and video to share their ideas, thoughts, and opinions for the world to see.

Since blogs are web based, there is no special equipment required other than a computer and an internet connection. With just a few clicks of a mouse, a modern livestock producer can be blogging in a matter of minutes.

There are two popular web based programs that most bloggers use: Blogger® ([www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com)) and Wordpress® ([www.wordpress.com](http://www.wordpress.com)). While both are extremely powerful, easy to use tools, it appears that most agriculturalists tend to favor the Blogger® platform. To get started, simply visit [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com) and follow the steps to create an account. Livestock producers will need to choose a name for their blog, which will become their blog address. For example, my blog address is [www.ranchhousedesigns.blogspot.com](http://www.ranchhousedesigns.blogspot.com). (Blogger is the URL for Blogger®).

Next, modern livestock producers will want to customize their blog design. The Blogger® software offers several free design templates that can be installed and customized to fit your ranch's colors and style. To complete the most professional looking blog, we recommend hiring a professional to design a customized blog graphic that will appear at the top of each page on the blog.

Just as a website must be updated to remain fresh, the best blogs out there are the ones that are updated daily or even multiple times per day. Though it might seem daunting at

first, give it a try and start posting. What do you write about? The good thing about blogs is that one can post just about anything. Blogs are typically viewed as a much more casual medium compared to websites or printed articles.

The most interesting and most popular blogs contain posts about daily life on the farm, opinions, photos, and thoughts on life in general. Many ranch wives have taken over blogging duties on the ranch, and find blogging a great tool for sharing recipes and humor, as well as a way of chronicling the rewards of day to day life in agriculture.

Livestock producers can post things on a blog they would probably never post on a website, like photographs or video taken from a cell phone, and quotes or text messages from customers or friends. Blogging also provides a forum for producers to share opinions and thoughts on relevant topics to the industry. For those livestock producers on-the-go, blogs can even be updated via cell phone.

Once your blog is set up, it is important to link all of your social media profiles together to get the most exposure, and also to save time when updating. Blogger provides an easy tool that links your Facebook® and Twitter® pages into your blog. By doing this, your blog will be automatically updated whenever you make a post on Facebook, and vice versa.

### **Recommended Blogs**

To get a feel for blogging, check out some of these popular cattle industry blogs. Don't be afraid to join in on the discussion by commenting and sharing.

- Beef Blog, Amanda Radke: [http://blog.beefmagazine.com/beef\\_daily/](http://blog.beefmagazine.com/beef_daily/)
- The Pioneer Woman, <http://thepioneerwoman.com>
- NCBA Young Producers <http://ypcblog.beefusa.org>

While a blog won't replace the need for a website, it does provide a marketer with many advantages. And, in many cases, it turns into a fun way of sharing your story with others in the industry. © 2011



*Rachel Cutrer, M.S., is president of Ranch House Designs, Inc., a leading national graphic design and communications firm.*

# DIABLO TRUST HONORED WITH BEEF 2011 TRAILBLAZER AWARD

BY BURT RUTHERFORD, BEEF SENIOR EDITOR

The early '90s were a tenuous time to be a public lands rancher. The rallying cry of "Cattle Free by '93" rang loud, and sometimes violently, within the environmental-activist crowd. Even state and federal land management agencies seemed to think it was a good idea.

It was against this tumultuous backdrop that two Northern Arizona ranches looked back at their historic past and forward to an uncertain future.

"We were running into quite a bit of conflict with other public land users," remembers Bob Prosser, who along with his wife, Judy, run the Bar T Bar ranch headquartered in Winslow, AZ. That conflict had both the Bar T Bar and the neighboring Flying M, owned by Jack Metzger, wife Mandy and his sister Kit, worried whether they had a long-term future on the land.

So, the two families took a decidedly non-traditional approach to the situation. In 1993, the year the environmental activists had targeted for their demise, they called a community gathering in Flagstaff. There, they proposed an unlikely alliance they dubbed the Diablo Trust, named after Diablo Canyon, which forms a boundary between the two ranches.

The idea was to develop a collaborative process that included the wide and disparate views and agendas from ranchers, state and federal agencies, wildlife enthusiasts, academia and environmentalists.

It's likely that other ranchers in the West thought it was more of an unholy alliance than an unlikely one. The thought of inviting the very people who wanted cattle off public lands to be part of a collaborative management process designed to keep the ranches in business was a concept beyond comprehension.

But to the Prossers and the Metzgers, it made sense. Continued conflict wasn't getting them anywhere. In fact, it was moving them backward, draining time and energy away from being good stewards of the resource, and exacting an emotional toll that ultimately threatened their very existence.

"We had never really connected with the public," Kit Metzger says, "but we were hearing all this talk about what everybody else wanted to see out here. So we thought we need to invite all the people who come out here on the ground or have something to do with managing the ground, and see if we can come up with some common goals."

## RANCH FOR SALE

### MORRISON BROTHERS WINDMILL RANCH



- 6 miles south of Flagstaff, both sides of Interstate Highway 17, and running intermittently south for an additional 16 miles
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## What is the Diablo Trust?

And so, against the backdrop of “Cattle Free by ’93,” the Diablo Trust was born.

It’s not a “trust” in the fiduciary sense of a land trust or a conservation easement. Rather, the “trust” comes from the heritage of the West’s ranching tradition where a word was a commitment and a handshake sealed the deal. The Prossers and the Metzgers knew that for sustainability, a trusting relationship that holds the collaborative group together was essential.

What it is, then, is a forum and a venue where ranchers, environmentalists, federal and state land managers, scientists, recreationalists and others work together to achieve a variety of shared goals. Ultimately, however, their goal is to create an environment of trust and interdependence that will allow the two ranches to carry over to the next generation.

Said succinctly, its mission is: “Learning from the land and sharing our knowledge so there will always be a West.” That’s not a nostalgic statement, the group says on its website. “On the contrary, it reflects our forward-looking commitment to working ranches as long-term, economically viable enterprises, while maintaining unfragmented landscapes and restoring native ecosystems.”

The Diablo Trust works toward that goal by involving 26 collaborating groups that represent various public land users, and the state and federal agencies that manage those lands, ag groups and universities. The land area of the two ranches is roughly 426,000 acres of intermingled private and public land. Approximately a third of that 665-square-mile area is private land, with the rest owned by either the Forest Service or the Arizona State Land Department, on which the ranches have

grazing permits.

The Diablo Trust has a full- and part-time paid staff. Monthly meetings are open to anyone who wants to participate. A 10-person board of directors oversees its activities, which are spread out between several working groups that conduct projects in wildlife management, watershed improvement, land and forage management, and monitoring and data collection, among others. Its funding comes from donations, grants and the two ranches.

But its heart and soul is the land, and its promise is the example it sets – that collaboration is better than conflict and working together accomplishes much more than working apart.

“There are 4-5 billion acres of land on this planet with similar topography, geology and climate to the American West,” says Jack Metzger. “If these American ecosystems aren’t used as a global laboratory, then where on this planet – with what money and parallel sources of academia, land agency expertise and educated people living on the land – will this be done? And when will we start?”

## Does it work?

While all that looks good in concept, getting people with widely divergent resource-management views to agree on much of anything is a daunting challenge. But the Diablo Trust seems to have found sufficient middle ground, with what its staffer Derrick Widmark calls the “radical center,” to accomplish some remarkable things.

“It has its moments... any kind of collaborative organization that relies on consensus building is difficult because it takes so long to make a decision,” says Judy Prosser, Diablo Trust president. “But, when you do come to a consensus, it’s a strong one and it’s supported by a wide array of people.”

An example is one of the first projects the group undertook, a project that endures even today. “The big push when we got started was to deal with the dwindling antelope population, the growing elk population and a limited amount of spring feed for all during drought years,” Bob says.

Given the emotional rhetoric of the time, the conventional wisdom held that cattle were causing the antelope herd to crash. But the Bar T Bar and the Flying M have always taken a very scientific, objective approach to ranching, and they felt such an approach was crucial within the Diablo Trust as well.

So, to answer the question of what was causing dwindling antelope numbers and resource damage, the Diablo Trust, with the support of the agencies and sportsmen,

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initiated an extensive utilization monitoring effort that drilled down to which herbivore ate what, how much, and at what time of year.

Out of that came a dataset that shed objective light on the situation, showing that cattle weren't the issue; it was the elk.

Based on that data, the groups launched a collaborative effort to reduce the elk population due to its impact on the resource, particularly in the winter and spring. They didn't stop there. They also launched an aggressive vegetative management and water-distribution effort, as well as modifying many miles of fence to allow better access for the antelope between pastures.

With help from the Diablo Trust and funding from the agencies, they've removed junipers from around 40,000 acres of private, state and federal lands since the mid '90s. To determine the success of the project, radio collars were used to track the antelope.

"Prior to that, there had been very few antelope pass through those areas. After that, the telemetry on those antelope changed significantly and they started moving back in," Bob says.

That was the first piece of hard data indicating that a century of encroachment by junipers was part of the antelope problem. By removing the trees, the habitat was regenerated and restored, very much to the liking of both the resident and migratory antelope. "With this data in hand, the Game and Fish became probably the biggest driver of the entire effort," Bob says.

That monitoring and management effort continues today. "It's the single largest utilization database in the state," Bob says. "In fact, right now they're talking about increasing the elk herd and that's certainly substantiated by the data we're collecting."

Since then, the Diablo Trust has enjoyed additional success, including the development of a full environmental impact statement (EIS), backed by the Diablo Trust collaborators, that was presented to the Forest Service when the 10-year grazing permits for the two ranches came due.

"Doing an EIS was very innovative," Judy says. "To my knowledge, it had never been done before. Six years of work and 650 pages. Needless to say, it has substance to it! We refer back to it all the time when we go out to do a project or talk to people about whatever issue comes up."

It was also instrumental in keeping the two ranches viable. "We were able to maintain our permits, which could have had a big cut," Kit says. "Then, we would really have had only one choice, and that would have been to start selling off (private land)."

However, because the private land is intermingled with public land, that would break up the open space that many public land users cherish. "So we had a lot of people help on that issue, a lot of support to maintain it

as a working ranch and keep it open space, keep the wildlife values," she says. "They could see the writing on the wall because Arizona has been subdivided so much."

The Diablo Trust's latest effort is called CROP, for Coordinated Resource Operational Plan. "The agencies have a real revolving door of people," Kit says. "Just about the time you get them on board and they understand what you're doing, they move up the ladder," Judy adds. "And you start all over again with a new person."

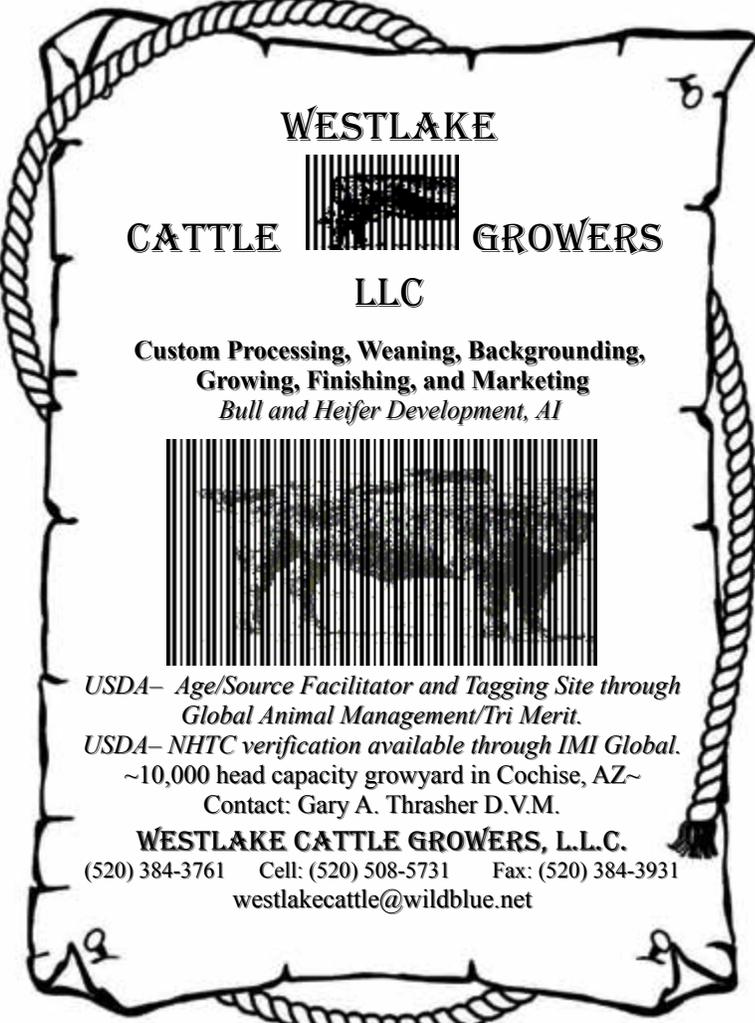
So the Diablo Trust produced a document that contains maps and a history of the projects they've been working on over the years. When new staff comes on board, they're handed a copy of the document to get them up to speed with the trust's past, present and future.

In the meantime, the Diablo Trust will continue to be an industry trailblazer as it works collaboratively to keep the "new" West, with its various and often conflicting philosophies, a place where ranches can still call home.

For more information on Diablo Trust, go to [diablotrust.org](http://diablotrust.org).

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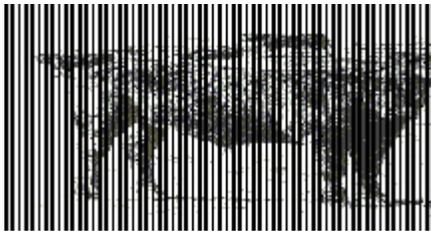


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