



Taking A Great Photo

We have all heard the old saying that “a photo is worth a thousand words”. When it comes to marketing and selling cattle in today’s high tech world it could be said that a good photo is worth hundreds or even thousands of dollars. By that same principle it could be concluded that a bad photo could cost you hundreds of dollars. A quality photo of the you cattle you have for sale is a must. You only have one chance to make a good first impression on prospective buyers. As prospective buyers are flipping through sale catalogs, browsing websites and social media you only have a few seconds to make a good impression and hold their attention. In this article I am going to share a few tips with you that will hopefully help you take a great photo that will help you market your cattle. A great marketing photo is a photo that presents the best visual of your animal. It showcases their best and most important qualities for the prospective buyer to view as they consider your animal.

What goes into capturing that great marketing photo? It’s not as easy as just clicking the button on the camera. Two of the most important things you will need in order to capture that great photo are time and patients. You will most likely need to spend several hours in the pasture on multiple days and snap lots of photos in order for you to capture the best photo possible. We are going to go over a few things that you might find helpful and beneficial while you are working on taking great photos of your animals.



Do you need expensive or high end equipment? No, you can take good photos with most any mid quality camera. A basic zoom function is a must have. In today’s high tech world most cell phones are equipped with quality cameras. I use my phone camera a lot for taking photos but it is equipped with a very good camera. Be sure to check your resolution settings on your camera or phone. Your camera should be set on one of the higher resolution settings. Regardless of the equipment you are using you can learn to take quality photos. One of the keys to success is being very familiar with your equipment, knowing the advantages it offers as well as its limitations. Take lots of photos! Become very comfortable with your equipment. We live in a digital world where you can snap lots of photos and then instantly review them while still in the pasture. That perfect photo could be just a click away.

Timing is an important fact when it comes to taking good cattle photos. When it comes to timing you need to determine the best time of year, when your cattle look their best. That will differ based on the area you live. You want your cattle to be in good flesh and their hair coats slicked off from winter time. Once you have determined the best time of year to photograph your cattle it would be a good idea to photograph all your older animals. This way you will have ready to use photos for marketing. Most mature animals will only change slightly over the next year. With these good photos on file you won’t find yourself being in a rush to get a photo to send to a prospective buyer or meet a sale or advertising deadline.

Not only is the time of year important but so is the time of day. I would suggest that you learn the behavior of your cow herd. Cattle generally have two modes when in a normal pasture setting. They are either grazing or relaxing. If they are browsing and grazing they are probably not going to pay much attention to you. They are focused on eating. Sometimes its easier to quietly move amongst them as they are relaxing. You want to become part of the herd. This may take several attempts. Always stay calm when working within the herd. The herd needs to be use to or get use to having someone walking amongst them without making them uneasy or nervous.

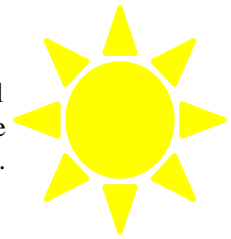


The time of day is also important as it relates to the lighting. Mornings and later afternoon can be a good times to take photos but you need to be very aware of shadows during these times. If the weather is cool enough then taking photos during the mid day hours works well. The sun is high in the sky and you have to worry less about shadows causing issues. Cattle also tend to be relaxing during this time of day. The photo on the left is good but would have been better without the shadow. But she is a challenging animal to get a good photo of, so I'll take it. Bright sunny days are not necessarily the best days for taking photos. Slightly cloudy or overcast days make for great photos without having to worry about too much light fading out your animals true color and shadows are less of an issue.

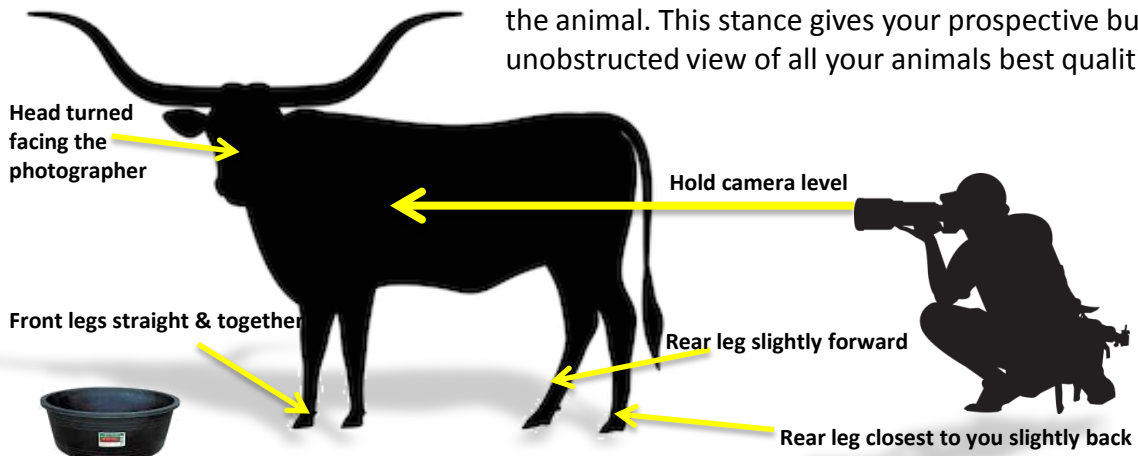
The Position of the Photographer and animal are important keys to a good Photo



Do not photograph your cattle while you are standing as it will not provide a true representation of your animals size or structure. You need to take your photos from a crouching or squatting position. You need to be on the side of the animal, a profile view. If you can get the animal standing with the rear leg closest to the camera slightly back and the rear leg on the other side slightly forward this is the ideal position. Hold your camera level and focus your camera on the area just behind the animals shoulder and in the ribs. Now get the animals attention so that they turn their head in your direction. Always try to be aware of the backgrounds in your photos. With days technology objects in the background can be removed but it's best to avoid poor backgrounds if possible. Make sure that the sun is to your back to help avoid shadows as well as having too much light in your photo which fades the color of your animal. Be mindful of your own shadow to make sure it is not getting in your photo area. Click off as many photos as you can. Some animals will pose perfectly for several seconds or minutes, others will only give you one chance, one shot to get that perfect photo.



Proper position of your animal is important in order to showcase their qualities. You want a profile/side view of the animal. This stance gives your prospective buyers an unobstructed view of all your animals best qualities.



Never Feed while taking Photos

Carry an "attention Getter"

What am I talking about? You will need something to use to get the animals attention. Making verbal noises such as whistling can work but not always. I like to carry a drink can with three or four small rocks in it. This makes a great rattling sound and it is not too bulky to work with or loud enough to spook the animal.



Positioning

Here is an example of the difference that the animals position can make on the end results. In the photo on the left the cows legs, front and back are not positioned correctly. Making her look short bodied and not showcasing her qualities. As where in the photo on the right they are positioned correctly which changes the look of the cow and more accurately shows the animal.



Know When To Fall Back & Regroup

As I stated earlier patience is a must have in some cases to get that great photo. There are days that you will find it is best to just walk away and come back later or even on another day. Its all part of the joys of working with livestock. You can't force cattle to cooperate with your photographing schedule. This lack of cooperate is why we see so many poor quality photos in catalogs, on websites and social media. Owners go to the pasture to snap a quick photo, after all how hard could it be to take a photo. Once in the pasture they find that they can't get the cattle to cooperate so they give up and just snap what they can to meet the sale deadline. They don't think about how that poor photo may be costing them on the sale price of their animal. Especially with so many online buyers participating in sales now days. Good quality photos are a must in today's competitive market place.



Know that there will be days that your subject matter is not going to cooperate.



Sometimes it's better to try again later or on another day. The results can be great.

Go Start Taking Photos

Russell Hooks has been raising , photographing & marketing Longhorn cattle for 42 plus years. If you would like to set up a photo session contact Russell at 409-381-0616

