

■ Selling Against Alpaca Fire Sales

I am sure you have all received the same emails and flyers that I have—the ones about alpacas being sold at very low sales prices. Call them what you wish—fire sales, herd dispersals, retirement sell-outs, and similar terms—they nearly always mean alpaca prices strategically set to sell animals for a purpose other than price-to-value. So how do you sell your carefully bred and nurtured alpacas against these low prices?

Though the reasons for breeders leaving the business vary, the bottom line is that in this economy you have a new competitive force with which you must deal—herd reductions and dispersals at below market value appealing to the same prospects to whom you might be able to sell your animals at a higher price. So how do you compete?

Use these ideas to help you develop a strategy to sell against fire sales:

- **Help prospects make a good buying decision.** When you have a prospect looking at your animals and also at fire sale animals, be diligent about positioning yourself as the knowledgeable, helpful resource they can trust now and for the long-term. Without criticizing their other choices, you can help them know the value you offer beyond price that can make a big difference in their long-term success in the industry. Value is getting more than you expected when you least expected it. What do you offer that gives buyers great value beyond price? Know what that is and be able to articulate it in terms that tell your prospects what they can expect to get from you.
- **Evaluate your own pricing.** Though you do want to sell for a good return on your investment, it is necessary in today's economy to consider which of your animals could sell more quickly if re-priced to current market value. If pricing is a challenge for you, consider hiring the services of an industry professional to give you an unbiased perspective. When you combine realistic pricing with irresistible terms and evidence of long-term support, you will help influence buying decisions in your favor.
- **Help prospects look beyond price.** Though price will definitely influence some to buy, there are many who really are looking beyond dollars. Ask the question, "What besides price is important to you?" It could be bloodlines, support, education, assistance with health and farm operations issues, breeding opportunities, your experience and expertise, location, reliability, risk management, etc. Listen carefully to your prospect's response, and present the benefits of getting what they need by buying from you.

- **Recognize SWSWSWNT.** This sales acronym stands for "Some Will, Some Won't, So What, Next Time." Regardless of what is happening in the marketplace, there will always be some prospects who come to your farm and seem to appreciate all the information you give them, but are still are hesitant to buy from you. IF you are diligent about asking good final closing questions, and then initiating follow up that is timely and of value to these prospects, you will increase your likelihood of retaining them as potential customers. However, even with that, some of them simply are not—and never will be—your buyers. Let them go, and concentrate on finding and converting those who are.
- **Determine and promote your BCAs.** What are your Basic Competitive Advantages? Ask yourself the question, "Why should they buy from me?" Make a list of exactly what differentiates you, your alpacas, and your customer support from these competitors. It might be that you have a stable business model you will pass along to them, that they get quality now and quality in the future, that you really do provide exceptional ongoing mentoring and support long after the sale. Whatever your BCA's are, be sure you include them in your prospect conversations, on your promotional materials, and in current customer testimonials.
- **Prove your positioning.** What do you do to prove your positioning as the knowledgeable, helpful resource your prospects and customers can trust? You cannot just say it, and hope they believe you. Demonstrate it in your follow up, your help with customer farm set-up and business plan development, your show and event assistance, your blog or newsletter, your involvement in industry events and associations, and the customer support manual you develop and provide to customers. When prospects know they can trust you to be there when they need you, the value of buying your higher priced animals takes on a broader meaning than sales price.
- **Demonstrate fiber business development success.** What can you show prospects to help them visualize how they can develop and monetize the fiber end of their alpaca business? By leading the way with your own store, retail outlet relationships, farmers' market venues, and other methods of showing income-producing potential beyond breeding stock, you can become a magnet for those who want to become long-term, profitable alpaca farmers. Breeders who are selling out cannot do this.



■ **Think outside the barn.** In today's marketplace, you cannot depend upon prospects coming to you, especially when they have been considering the deal they can get at an alpaca fire sale. Think about ways you can go to them. Some breeders from the Pacific Northwest recently told me how they met some potential buyers and, instead of first having them come to their farm, they went to the property owned by the prospects. There the breeders made fencing and other recommendations, and then had the prospects visit their ranch, where they showed them a pen of six alpacas they determined would be good for this breeder and their set-up. The prospects bought the entire pen of animals at full price.

■ **Get layered exposure.** The more different ways your prospects hear about you and your unique marketing message, the better they remember you and begin to trust your credibility in terms of quality stock and customer support. In addition to the traditional marketing you have been doing, make sure you have built a website that is truly an inquiry-generating tool and not merely an online farm brochure. Take full advantage of the powerful public opinion influencing tools that select social media can be, without the high cost of traditional advertising. Generate good publicity and recycle it in print and online to expand the positive third party endorsement it gives you. Most breeders having fire sales cannot justify the investment in layered marketing communications.

■ **Practice SMART marketing.** There is a long list of smart marketing actions you can take that will

increase your inquiries from qualified prospects without depleting your marketing budget. Start with the little things, such as your voice mail, email signature, or vehicle signage. Check past issues of *Alpacas Magazine* or online newsletters for articles about additional proven marketing techniques. Fire sale breeders will not be as detailed and diligent. If time will not allow you to implement your entire alpaca business marketing action plan, consider hiring reputable assistance with marketing and sales. Your good reputation and your ability to attract buyers despite the competition will be just reward for your efforts.

Although alpaca herd sell-outs sometimes seem to be spreading like forest fires on a drought-stricken landscape, they are not taking all your potential buyers. There are prospects out there, ready to be educated about buying quality stock, developing a sustainable alpaca business, and enjoying the lifestyle. Your job is to help them find you and to give them compelling reasons to buy from you. With good marketing, well-executed sales skills, and attentive follow up, you can be the fire hose. Low price sales, be doused!

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