

Dismembered

I'm not a clubby kind of guy. I don't belong to Rotary, Kiwanis, PTA, KKK, John Birch Society or Book of the Month Club. I take pride in the fact that I've been disinvited to join many groups. That's all right with me because I hate meetings.

The only drawback to my antisocial behavior was that for many years I worried that my obituary was going to be skimpy. For example: "Lee Pitts was assassinated by an angry reader and left no survivors and did not belong to any clubs, hold any offices or do anything noteworthy while he was alive." You'll agree, that's a pretty sad commentary.

But now, thanks to modern marketing, I'll have plenty of clubs to list in my obituary. "Lee Pitts, aged 105, passed away peacefully while asleep. He was an active member in good standing with the Costco Club, United Mileage Plus and the Safeway Club, hardware store club and many others too numerous to mention. They all mourn his passing and will miss him." Much better sounding, don't you agree?

There are many advantages to these types of clubs. There are no meetings, you're not asked to serve on a committee, be an officer, wear a funny hat or go to a costly convention. The biggest drawback, however, is that you have to carry around all the little plastic cards that prove you are a member. I have so many of these cards in my wallet that when I sit down I'm at a 30 degree angle.

I've never understood the concept behind buying clubs like Costco. I respect the company for selling great meat and having the nerve to ask their customers to fork over \$40 a year for the privilege of giving Costco shovelfuls of money.

Think about that for a moment. If someone had suggested, "I've got an idea. Why not charge folks to shop in our stores!" Wouldn't they have been branded a nut case? What other group, besides the U.S. Congress, gets away with charging people to do business with them?

Evidently consumers love the idea they have to pay club dues in order to buy vast quantities of shop rags and toilet paper because when they open the doors at Costco you'd better not dawdle or you'll be run over like hippies at a rock concert. It must be that membership makes people feel like they are VIP's when they have to show a card to enter a store. Whatever the rationale, I think there are ways that we in agriculture can capitalize on the public's willingness to pay to do business with us.

At your next branding, try charging the neighbors for the honor of helping you work your calves. Instead of feeding them a well deserved barbecue dinner after the work is done, charge them for it. Make them join your club, pay an annual fee, and if you're really brave, charge them extra for being a member of the ground crew.

I'm also thinking that auction markets could charge for the weekly show they put on. Instead of wining, dining and begging buyers and sellers for their participation, auction market operators should charge them all to join their sale barn club. Anyone entering the building must show their card. Buyers could also be charged for special VIP seating, perhaps with their name on the back of their favorite chair.

If you think it's far fetched to charge people to watch an auction you probably have not been to the Red Bluff Horse Sale where thousands pay \$10 each just to watch. Or the Barrett Jackson car auctions where you must pay to get in. All this proves that auctions have hidden entertainment value. I know one fella who subscribed to DirecTV just so he could watch cattle auctions on his television. He's addicted to them. And he's a hair dresser!

Instead of giving away costly catalogs for bull sales, breeders should charge prospective buyers \$30 to \$100 for them like they do at swanky art auctions.

If you are going to try these ideas let me know. I want to be there when an auction market operator tells an old crusty cow buyer that henceforth he has to join a club and pay \$40 a year for the privilege of buying canner cows at his auction. If you survive that suggestion you might also consider charging the buyers for parking.

It's the Pitts

Written by Lee Pitts
