

Welcome to the MARCH - APRIL 2004 edition of *Deer & Elk Farmers' Digest*, a monthly electronic newsletter for those interested in raising deer, elk, and reindeer. This *Digest* is published by the Deer & Elk Farmers' Information Network (www.Deerfarmer.com and www.Elkfarmer.com).

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**** FROM THE EDITOR ****

With the publication of "Clinical evaluation of a powder of quality elk velvet antler for the treatment of osteoarthritis in dogs" in the February 2004 issue of the *Canadian Veterinary Journal*, we now have a powerful tool to kick-start our sluggish velvet antler sales. As I point out in the lead article, selling velvet antler to veterinarians and owners of dogs with joint problems presents a great opportunity to develop a huge North American market for this farmed elk product.

It should not be too difficult to create significant new demands for velvet antler in the pet markets. I have laid out a marketing plan that I believe will achieve results within a year or so. The strategies include educating the veterinarians, and even having them distribute the product to their clients. The second strategy is to build upon the Internet resources we already have to make dog owners aware of the benefits of this natural, environmentally-friendly, renewable product. What we need now is some leadership and commitment from all segments of the industry to just do it!

Russell Sawchuk, Editor

1. How Dogs can save the Elk Farming Industry

The elk farming industry in North America was built on velvet antler. Elk velvet antler (EVA) has been used in Asia for over 2,000 years as a medicinal and health product. High demand and prices for velvet, especially from Korea, fueled the growth and expansion of the elk farming industry in the 1980s and 1990s in Canada and the United States.

Then came CWD! With the discovery of Chronic Wasting Disease in a few farmed elk in Saskatchewan and later in Colorado, Korea closed its borders to the importation of North American velvet antler. The export markets remain closed, with no immediate prospect of them reopening. The loss of the Korean market has had devastating effects on the industry.

During the good times, there were some feeble attempts by the industry to develop a domestic market for velvet antler products. However, not much was done on a co-ordinated, national basis. Some individual producers were successful in developing farm-gate sales and distribution through local health food stores.

Clearly, for the industry to thrive again, significant American markets for EVA must be developed. Interestingly enough, it appears that the dog health market may be the saviour for elk farmers.

An attractive product and market

There are many good reasons why selling elk velvet antler to dog owners is an attractive opportunity for our industry. These include:

- A large target audience with over 60 million dogs in the United States alone.
- A growing demand for products to treat an estimated 10 to 15 million dogs with joint problems and arthritis.

- A study by Alberta Agriculture market research staff found that the greatest need in the pet health market is for products to treat arthritis.
- People are more interested in using “natural” health products for themselves and for their pets.
- EVA works in about 70% to 85% of dogs with arthritis and joint problems.
- Velvet antler has other health benefits in addition to treating problems with arthritis, e.g., greater energy, faster healing.
- Independent, peer-reviewed scientific evidence that velvet antler is effective in alleviating the condition in arthritic dogs (see below).
- Market research showing where and how to best sell EVA to dog owners.
- Unlike many other competitive products, velvet antler appears to have very few negative side effects. Toxicity studies show no adverse effects even with very high dosages.
- Selling EVA products to the pet market has fewer regulatory requirements and issues compared to selling velvet antler to the human markets.
- Demand for pet health products is non-seasonal and relatively recession proof.
- The largest market is here at home; thus there are no trade or export issues.
- Elk velvet antler is an annually renewable resource.
- Elk farming is a highly-efficient and environmentally-friendly agricultural activity.

Velvet antler for dogs appears to be a perfect product for a very attractive market!

Market size

Here are some statistics that we compiled to help the industry assess the market potential of the pet nutraceutical and health sectors.

United States

- 35 million (out of 105 million) households own a dog
- 60.7 million dogs (US Pet Food Institute)
- 76 million cats

Europe

- 55 million households own a pet
- 41 million dogs
- 47 million cats

United Kingdom

- 4.8 million (out of 24.6 million) households own a dog
- 4.5 million households own a cat
- 6.1 million dogs
- 7.5 million cats

Japan

- 9.5 million dogs
- 7.1 million cats

Canada

- 7 million dogs (estimated).

We have included available statistics on cats as well. There is reason to believe that EVA will work with cats as well.

According to a survey by APPMA (American Pet Products Manufacturing Association), there are 65 million dogs and 77.7 million cats in US households. APPMA estimates that pet owners spent \$31 billion in 2003 to care for, feed, spoil and pamper the American pet population.

Other findings from the APPMA survey found:

- Dogs and cats are in at least one-out-of-three US households.
- One-third of small animal owners consider their pets as children or as family members.
- *Companionship, love, company and affection* along with *fun to have in a household* are the top benefits associated with pet ownership.
- The majority of US pet owners have purchased a gift for their companion animals within the last 12 months.

Potential demand and revenues

Knowing the number of dogs, what is the potential demand for velvet antler products among dog owners? For our calculations, we assume that the average arthritic dog will require 500 mg of velvet antler powder per day.

- If 500,000 dogs or 0.8% of all US dogs were on 500 mg of EVA per day, this would require 124 tons of green velvet antler annually. This is approximately the volume of velvet antler currently produced each year in Canada and the USA.
- If 1 million dogs or 1.6% of all US dogs used velvet antler, this would require 248 tons of velvet antler each year.
- If 5 million dogs or 8% of all US dogs used velvet antler, this would require 1,240 tons of velvet antler, or the entire world's current production!

This is why this opportunity is so momentous! A very small penetration of the dog market could consume all the velvet being produced in North America. Establishment of this one market would be a significant driving force to getting the industry back to profitability and growth.

The other advantage of establishing a domestic market is that most of the revenues

would stay in North America. Doing some quick calculations on the volumes described above, we found that:

- If 500,000 dogs were using velvet antler, this would result in \$7.4 million annually going to producers (based on \$30/lb) and \$91.2 million in yearly retail revenues (based on \$0.50 per dog per day).
- If 1 million dogs were using velvet antler, producers would received \$14.8 million and the yearly retail revenues would be \$182.4 million (using the same assumptions).
- If 5 million dogs were using velvet antler, revenues to producers would be \$74.4 million with retail sales being \$912.5 million.

Therefore, going the value-added route by selling capsules directly to dog owners and/or selling wholesale to pet stores or veterinarians would keep much of the money within the industry.

Research

Dr. Maxim Moreau and his colleagues at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Montreal recently published the results of their study on the effectiveness of velvet antler and dogs. A powder of elk velvet antler was evaluated on client-owned dogs with osteoarthritis (OA) in a clinical, double-blind, and placebo-controlled study. Thirteen dogs received a placebo for 30 days and then velvet antler for 60 days. Twenty-five other dogs received velvet antler for 60 days. Measures included gait analysis measured by a force plate, clinical signs assessed by an orthopedic surgeon, performances in daily life activities and vitality assessed by the owners, and complete blood analysis.

On placebo, the 13 dogs did not show significant improvement; however, their gait, their performance in daily life activities, and their vitality were significantly improved after

treatment with velvet antler. The 25 dogs on velvet antler showed similar improvements. No clinical changes were revealed on blood analysis.

The researchers concluded that administration of velvet antler was effective in alleviating the condition in arthritic dogs. (*Canadian Veterinary Journal*, Volume 45, February 2004, page 133. All correspondence and reprint requests should be made to Dr. Maxim Moreau at m.moreau@umontreal.ca).

The above study was initiated and funded by Qeva Velvet Products Corporation of Calgary, Alberta Canada. Qeva Corp., in conjunction with Steppingstones Partnership, Inc. (owner of Deerfarmer.com) also undertook a sixteen-month long market research project to determine the best strategies for the marketing and promotion of dog health products to North American consumers. Free samples of Qeva's elk velvet product were made available to dog owners through Steppingstones' *arthritis-in-dogs.com* website. In return for a free sample, dog owners agreed to complete a questionnaire before and after the treatment providing data about their dogs, the treatment results and their buying preferences.

In this study, there was an observed improvement in 70% of the dogs after taking velvet antler. The dog owners reported no change in 21% of the cases. Using pre-post score changes, the greatest improvements were seen in energy levels, endurance and reduction of pain. Even in the dogs where the owners did not notice any changes, pre-post scores were statistically higher in energy and endurance levels. In 72% of the cases, improvements were noticed within ten days.

The elk industry now has the scientific evidence it needs to convince veterinarians and dog owners that velvet antler is an effective product for treating arthritis and joint problems in dogs.

Marketing Plan

Below is a marketing plan for the elk farming industry to develop these North American dog health markets. I have prepared this Plan to help industry associations, distributors and producers sell elk velvet antler products to dog owners.

Prerequisites

Before a marketing plan is implemented, several things need to be in place:

1. *Suppliers and adequate supplies of velvet antler capsules.* No use getting distributors and consumers frustrated because they can't, or don't know where to, obtain EVA. To date, the industry has done a poor job in compiling this information and making it readily available. This must change if the proposed marketing campaign is to be successful.
2. *Quality assurance.* There is a risk of poor product getting into the marketplace because some producers are interested in cutting costs and maximizing profits. Just because the velvet is for dogs does not mean that lower or inferior grades should be used. The positive results found in the research were based on top quality product designed for human consumption.

Perhaps some type of national certification and branding program is required to assure buyers that they are getting the best North American elk velvet antler available.

3. *Co-ordination of marketing activities.* Given that NAEBA, the state associations and individual producers have limited resources, co-ordination of effort is highly desirable. Sharing responsibilities for media releases, convention and trade show booths, and the other promotional activities described below will produce better results.

4. *Shared promotional materials.* It does not make economic sense to have every association and producer design and print their own brochures and other promotional materials for marketing velvet antler to veterinarians and dog owners. High-quality materials that can be used by multiple players, for a multitude of purposes, are the way to go.

Geographical priorities

As a small industry, we do not have the resources to undertake extensive marketing right across North America. But according to our market research study, there are geographical regions that show better potential than others.

In our research and experience, some 94% of the demand and sales came from the United States and only 6% from Canada. Therefore, the focus certainly has to be on the American dog owner.

Within the United States, we found the greatest interest/potential in the southeast and mid-Atlantic states. The northeast and western states (except for California) showed the least interest.

According to our research, the following states showed the greatest potential for establishing markets for velvet antler for dogs:

- Florida
- California
- Texas
- Pennsylvania
- New York
- Ohio
- Michigan
- North Carolina
- Illinois
- Washington

Therefore, we recommend that marketing and promotion campaigns be first targeted at these

states, beginning with Florida, California and Texas.

Reaching dog owners

So how does the industry reach the dog owners in these states? We do not have the resources or money for a mass media marketing campaign. Again we turn to the results of our market research study.

When asked what their main source of information is about dog health products, our respondents said:

<u>Source</u>	<u>Percent</u>
My veterinarian	68
Internet	60
Other dog owners	30
Dog magazines	17
Pet stores	11
Retail stores	4
Dog clubs	2
Other	4

The vet is the most important source of information about dog health products. The second is the Internet. (This finding must be viewed by caution as all of our survey respondents used the Internet. This may not be true with the general population.)

This list also shows where advertising would be less effective, e.g., dog clubs, retail and pet stores and dog magazines.

Veterinarians

The veterinarian is a key health information gatekeeper for pet owners. Therefore, any effective strategy for marketing velvet antler must include making veterinarians aware of velvet antler and its potential benefits for dogs with osteoarthritis.

An additional benefit is that veterinarians are also looking for ways to increase their revenue sources. Many vets will be interested in selling elk velvet antler products to their clients.

[At my suggestion, an Ontario elk farmer took out an ad in the same issue of *Canadian Veterinary Journal* that the Moreau research article appeared. In a note to me, he said that he had received a great response and had sold cases of velvet antler to vets in every province in Canada as a result of the ad. This demonstrates that vets are willing to sell velvet antler to their clients once they have seen the scientific evidence of its benefits.]

According to the American Veterinary Medical Association there are over 81,000 practicing veterinarians in the United States, of whom some 69,000 are members of the AVMA. There are about 46,000 vets in private practice – 68% males and an average income of \$84,000 (before taxes). Some numbers for the specific high-priority states mentioned above include 1,500 vets in Pennsylvania, 1,700 in Michigan and 1,500 in Illinois.

A group of particular interest is the American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association (<http://ahvma.org>). AHVMA has a list of members by state/province on its website. Here are some strategies to make American veterinarians aware of the benefits of velvet antler and to get them interested in carrying and selling EVA products:

1. *Media releases* – a news release about the research findings should be prepared and sent, along with a copy of the article and a supplier list, to each veterinary medical association in the United States. (A list of these associations and their contact information is available at www.avma.org/statevma/default.asp. Another useful source of contacts is our Arthritis-in-dogs.com site at www.arthritis-in-dogs.com/html/links.htm).
2. *Advertising in veterinary professional journals* – as shown above, an ad in a veterinary journal can have very good results. Elk associations and/or individual producers should consider advertising in their state's veterinary association

newsletter or magazine. Contact the association and ask for an advertiser's kit. It will have all the information you need including rates, closing dates, numbers distributed and a readership profile.

3. *Conventions* – having a booth at a convention with hundreds of veterinarians is an effective way to market to these professionals. It is a good opportunity to meet the veterinarians in person, hand out brochures and free samples, and even sign them up to carry your product. NAEBA and/or state elk associations may want to attend on behalf of their producers to reduce costs. However, there is no reason why individual elk producers should not consider this approach as well. Here are a few conventions to consider:

- The American Veterinary Medical Association Convention for 2004 will be held in Philadelphia, PA on July 24 to 28, 2004. See their website – <http://www.avma.org> – for more information.
- The California Veterinary Medical Association Annual Conference is being held in San Francisco at the Renaissance Parc 55 Hotel on June 25-27, 2004. See <http://www.cvma.net> for details.
- The American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association will hold its annual convention in Kansas City, Missouri (Kansas City Marriott Downtown) on September 10-14, 2004. For more information see http://ahvama.org/annual_conference/main.html

4. *Direct mail* – for a fee, most state veterinary associations will include your brochure or flyer along with their mailing to their members. Another approach to reaching veterinarians is to rent mailing lists from commercial firms or the

associations. This is a more expensive approach but at least you know that your information will get to the vet, and will not be lost in hundreds of other messages. Holistic vets should be high on the priority list for any direct marketing. You can obtain a list of holistic veterinarians and their contact information from the AHVMA website at <http://ahvma.org>.

5. *Customer requests* – a good way to get the vet's attention and interest is to have his/her clients asking for velvet antler products for their dogs. In any direct-to-consumer marketing undertaken, it is important to remind people to ask their vet about velvet antler for their dog.

Finally, every elk producer should ensure that every veterinary he knows has information about the research findings concerning velvet antler and dogs with arthritis.

Internet

The Internet is an important tool that the elk industry must use in its campaign to promote velvet antler. The Internet can be used to:

- Provide research and other information about velvet antler and its effectiveness for arthritic dogs.
- Tell dog owners, veterinarians and interested distributors where to get elk velvet antler.
- Recruit distributors, retailers and veterinarians to sell velvet antler products.
- Sell EVA products directly to consumers via on-line stores.

The challenge with the Internet is that it has become so big (35 million websites at last count) that it is often difficult to be found. However, we already have a couple of related websites that rank high in the search engines. These are our *arthritis-in-dogs.com* and *velvet-antler.com* sites. Since search engines

first look at the content of the domain names, both these tend to do well in searches using these words.

Here are our recommendations about taking full advantage of the Internet to develop a velvet antler dog market:

1. Each state/provincial elk association MUST compile a comprehensive directory of its members who have velvet antler products for sale. Name and phone number is not enough. Full contact information is essential along with where they sell (locally, nationally or internationally) and how they sell (farm-gate sales, wholesale, through retailers, on-line). This information must be placed on a separate page of each association's website.
2. The *Arthritis-in-dogs.com* website needs to be updated with current information and used to direct people to places where they can purchase velvet antler products for their dogs.
3. The *Velvet-antler.com* website needs to be completed in a format similar to our *venison-meat.com* site. This includes

information on research, resources and a supplier directory.

4. All generic promotional materials such as brochures and media releases should include the addresses of appropriate websites.
5. Both on-line and off-line promotional activities should be undertaken to make the public and other potentially interested parties know about websites containing information about velvet antler.

A co-ordinated Internet strategy will ensure that North American dog owners become aware of the benefits of velvet antler, and will make it easy for them to purchase the product.

Conclusions

There are many other strategies that could be used as well. Unfortunately we have run out of room here. However, if we can successfully implement the few strategies discussed above, I am positive that the demand for velvet antler will increase significantly. This in turn will provide much needed cash to elk producers who have suffered many hardships in the last few years. It could also be a turning point for the industry to return to growth and prosperity!

2. Questions and Answers about Deer Farming

By David King, DSK Whitetail Deer Ranch, Oklahoma. See <http://www.dskranch.com>

I get questions about deer farming and starting a deer farm almost every day. Here are my answers to the most common questions.

Q: Why should I raise whitetail deer?

The whitetail is the most sought after big game animal in North America. As long as hunting remains a legal pastime there will be a demand for trophy animals. No other species of deer carries the special place in people's hearts like the whitetail deer.

Q: How do I get a license to start a deer farm?

Every state has different rules so you will have to check with your local DNR or wildlife department. Here in Oklahoma our state is very friendly to alternate agriculture endeavors like deer farming. In Oklahoma the license is issued by our wildlife department and costs \$49/year. Once you have your pen(s) built, and before buying any deer, your local game warden will come out to inspect and sign off on the license. But like I said, this varies so check with your state as to its requirements.

Q: How much does it cost to get a deer farm started?

I have been to farms that have invested over a million dollars in their operation and to others that have started with a few thousand. The startup cost depends on the goals of your operation. If you plan to be a full-time deer farmer in 3-5 years, the costs would be greater than for a hobbyist or a part-timer. Trying to come up with figures for every situation is difficult, but in my experience those who are making money in this business usually have invested around \$25,000-\$100,000 in their operations including fencing, facilities, and breeding stock. Don't be afraid to start small and grow slowly over time, as it will take

decades for current supply to catch up with demand.

Q: Should I start off with fawns or adult animals?

As in most businesses or farming operations, there is a big learning curve in raising whitetail deer. Whitetail deer are creatures of habit and like routine. Bringing in mature deer from several farms onto a new start up operation is like taking your kids out of their school and transferring them to a new school during the middle of the year. I believe that it is most effective to start with a group of bottle-started fawns and to finish out the bottle-feeding at your farm. In another analogy, most parents don't start off by raising teen-agers.

Q: Why bottle-feed?

Here on our farm, every doe fawn born is pulled to be bottle-fed within 1-3 days following birth. Not only are bottle-fed deer easier to handle, medicate and artificially breed, they are to us more enjoyable and are a calming effect on the entire herd. On bottle-feeding buck fawns, we will usually pull those who are of superior genetics, or in case of twin bucks, may pull one to put less strain on the doe. Bottle-fed bucks can be dangerous in the rut. This should be understood and care taken to address this issue. It is also unwise to sell bottle-fed bucks to the hunting market. On the other hand it makes for quite an impression to potential clients to be able to go up to a buck during the velvet stages and have him eating out of their hands.

Q: To whom do you sell your deer?

Most of my deer are sold to other breeders or those getting started in the business. There is also a growing market of hunting preserves and ranches that are in desperate need of quality harvest animals. Since it takes much

more time to grow out a big buck than to harvest it, this demand will not soon, if ever, be completely met.

Q: How do you advertise and sell your deer?

As in any business, marketing is the key to success. If no one knows what you are raising or selling, how can they contact you when interested? I find the Internet via my website (www.dskranch.com) to be the #1 sales tool that I have.

I also find it very beneficial to be involved in the industry by way of attending state and national association meetings and auctions such as the annual Top-30 breeder's sale. Other advertising such as display ads in the Animal Finder's Guide, the NADeFA magazine and the Texas Trophy Hunter magazine can be productive. Overall though, the Internet is a must in my opinion. Once you get known throughout the industry as having quality animals, you may find it hard to keep an inventory as has happened to me.

Q: Are there "how to" books available for raising whitetail deer?

I have not found any that are inclusive in all aspects of this industry. I have attended the "Beginning Deer Farming" seminar hosted by NADeFA as well as a class given by Dr. Harry Jacobson and found both to be of good help. Networking with other deer farmers at state and national meetings or on farm tours has also been beneficial. Part of my service, when deer are purchased from my farm, is to assist in any way I can to ensure your success. I have also made this service available in the form of a consulting service to those in need.

Q: What kind of diseases do deer get?

Whitetail deer for the most part are hardy animals with few health problems. Of course, to move animals across state lines they must be tested for TB/Bang and now have to be monitored for Chronic Wasting Disease. For the most part, these 3 diseases are not found to

be a problem with farmed deer. The main losses I have witnessed with whitetail deer come as a result of EHD, MCF or pneumonia. I have successfully treated pneumonia with drugs like Micotil or NuFlor. MCF or Malignant Catarrhal Fever usually is given to deer by sheep and goats in close proximity of the deer.

EHD or as it is commonly referred to "Blue Tongue" is spread to deer from small biting flies and usually occurs during the warmer months. EHD is mostly fatal to animals from the northern climates, in which this disease is not present, moved to the south. Having been exposed to EHD and surviving usually gives the affected animal immunity to this disease and a percentage of the immunity passed down to its offspring – thus given the term of "Southernly acclimated Northern Whitetails".

Q: How are deer handled and transported?

With a few modifications deer can be transported safely in most stock trailers. The key is to make the transport vehicle as dark as possible to keep the deer calm. As to handling deer to give the medications or for testing prior to transport, the best system I have found is from Delclayna called the "Deerhandler." More information on this system can be found at www.deerstore.com. This is one area I would not recommend going cheap as many a prized animal have been lost using inferior systems. Witnessing any system in operation with live animals prior to purchase is a must do.

Q: So why is darting so hard on whitetail deer?

Handling large numbers of whitetail deer via the darting or tranquilizing method is not only very costly, there are many avenues during the process to make errors and in turn costing animals. I have 3 different darting systems in my arsenal and find them important tools used wisely. Most problems with darting are as a result of poor shot placements, overheating of the animal (chasing it around the pen to dart it) or using the wrong dosage of drugs. Before

purchasing any tranquilizing device I would strongly encourage attending the Safe Capture International's class on Chemical Immobilization. This is also one area where consulting with a professional deer farmer is very helpful.

Q: What about visiting some deer farms in my area prior to starting?

This is a must do for anyone thinking of getting into the deer business. Most deer farmers welcome farm tours and not all deer farmers look at farm tours as sales presentations on their stock. Most serious farmers understand the need for new farmers entering the business and for those new farmers to be given information to become successful.

Q: What kind of genetics should I start with?

This industry is based on one thing – antler scores. You should considering purchasing the very best your budget will allow. Name

recognition of the sire and of the dam's sire is also very important when it comes time to go from buyer to seller. The top dollar goes to those genetics in which have proven inheritability to future generations. You want to look at your investment, as inventory having a resale value down the road so be very observant of market trends for genetic lines.

Q: What do you feed?

I feed a special sweet feed mix formulated by a friend of mine who spends a lot of time researching deer feed. Most farmers feed a pellet by Purina or Antler King and supplement with alfalfa hay.

Q: Is there an association to join?

I believe to be a successful deer farmer you must stay in tune with the industry. At the minimum you should be a member of any local or state association as well as the North American Deer Farmer's Association. You can get information on NADeFA by visiting www.nadefa.org.

3. Profiting from Discussion Forums

By Willie Crawford. Reprinted with permission.

I am a big fan of networking and discussing issues in online discussion boards – or forums. I've frequently been asked if this is a really profitable way to spend one's time. My answer is that, if done properly, it can be. In fact, it can be VERY profitable!

Done wrong, you can spend many hours chatting away unproductively when you could be building your business. Let's look at the difference.

One of the things that makes discussion forums so popular is that they reduce the coldness of the Internet. You get to connect directly with another PERSON and no longer feel locked away behind a cold computer screen. It's forming those bonds/those

connections that makes forums and discussion boards a medium with such powerful potential.

If your time online is intended primarily to build your business, then you need to make sure that you use it most productively. That means you need to balance building relationships with generating new business. Incidentally, forming new relationships IS how you generate new business. That means:

- You need to join the online discussions that showcase your expertise and generate leads.

- You need to join the online discussions that help to solve your business problems and allow you to help others.
- You need to join the online discussions that like-minded people participate in.

My specialties are “Internet marketing” karate, and also cooking. So I frequent discussion boards/forums that focus on these topics. Since the audience that I wrote this article for is “Internet marketing” let’s focus on that.

First of all, not all Internet marketing discussion forums are equal. Some get very few visitors, spend too much time dealing with non-productive issues, and generally won’t benefit YOU. Others get millions of page views a month, are very helpful communities, and have the potential to allow you to generate a lot of business and “connections.” Only you can decide which forums are right for you. However, I have posted a list of my favorites to an autoresponder. You can get this list by sending a blank email to: *willie3-56873@autocontactor.com*

I’ve been using online discussion forums since 1997, so let me share with you a few time-tested “secrets” to getting more out of them. Just a few quick tips that will make your posts more likely to be read and responded to:

- 1) As a rule, you want to post to forums that get a lot of traffic. Naturally that increases the odds of you making the right connections. The exception is that sites which aren’t moderated and are full of spam, are generally a total waste of time.
- 2) When posting to forums, you generally want to let people know who you are. If you are trying to build business relationships, you don’t want to hide behind a cute username. Instead, I advise using your own name and even posting your photo or logo where

allowed. You should be branding yourself and this is a great way to do it.

3) Posting your photo or a graphic generally has been proven to increase response to your posts. They make you seem more “real” to others who read your post and that allows them to connect more. You allow them to feel that they know you and they respond.

4) To increase the chances of your post being read, or responded to, it’s better to post to popular or “hot” topics. When other visitors see that very few people have responded to a topic, they tend to ignore that thread. Post to threads that you have something useful to contribute to, but popular threads are better than ignored threads.

5) When posting or responding to a topic, use keywords that people using the search engines would use to find that topic. Put those right in the subject line since the search engines do index many popular discussion boards.

6) Where allowed, use a signature file or include a link to your site/product. This pulls double duty by helping your search engine link popularity/rankings and by letting fellow users of the forum know how to find out more about you. Some seem to frown upon posting links to your site for some reason. Done tastefully, I see absolutely nothing wrong with it. Most of the users of the forums that I visit are in business after all to generate MORE business. You can’t do that by not telling people how to contact you.

7) Contribute to the community rather than just feeding off of it. By that, I mean, offer useful comments, suggestions, and feedback. Don’t just post only to promote your products. Don’t disguise the real purpose of your posts - most people can see right through that. If you contribute to the community and offer genuine value, others will notice this and be more open to make purchases from you. It is in accordance with the inviolate natural law of reciprocity!

8) Be civil and polite. Too many people attack others and their products without sufficient justification. Too many people are much ruder on the Internet than they would be in a face to face interaction. Rudeness and lack of civility are noticed on the discussion forums and those who behave this way drive away a lot of business without even realizing it. People who see this type of behavior just make mental ... often subconscious notes not to deal with people who behave inappropriately!

Those are just a few of my thoughts on how to use discussion forums profitably. I post regularly to over 20 discussion forums. I also help to moderate several. Being a part of these

online communities can be very helpful to the growth of your business when you adhere to just a few rules. Start applying these today and you may be very surprised at the results.

[Willie Crawford has been teaching others how to build an on-line business since late 1996. Frequently featured in radio, magazine and newspaper articles and interviews, Willie teaches the average guy what the top marketers are doing but seldom talking about. For example, Willie demonstrates the power of automated residual income through his system at: <http://ProfitAutomation.Com>. To test drive this system, email: williecrawford2004@yahoo.com]

4. Teamwork

If you are a member of your local, regional or national deer/elk association, sooner or later you will get involved in a committee or may even become a member of the board. Serving on these “teams” can either be a rewarding and productive experience, or a dysfunctional disaster!

Why the interest in teams? Why not simply assign projects or tasks to individuals? Teams have several advantages:

- Only a team can bring together all the knowledge and resources necessary to manage complex projects and issues.
- A well-developed team is capable of responding quickly and energetically to new developments and issues.
- Teams are capable of making better quality decisions than all but the most brilliant individuals.
- A team feeds a person’s need to have personal significance, and team processes encourage activity, achievement and high performance.

So what makes for successful teams? Here is what the research shows about the characteristics of effective teams:

1. *Clarity of purpose.* Team members are absolutely clear about their ultimate purpose or mission and are committed to its accomplishment.
2. *Open communication.* Team members express their ideas, opinions and feelings openly and authentically.
3. *Mutual trust.* Trust and openness go hand in hand. Openness is practically impossible to achieve without trust among the team members. Trust is a delicate aspect of relations, influenced more by action than by words.
4. *Mutual support.* This feature of an effective team is characterized by the absence of hostility or indifference among members, and by the presence of care, concern and active help toward one another.

5. *Management of differences.* Group creativity typically comes from an open exchange of different ideas, opinions and intuitions, and from an active process of integrating these differences into the desired outcomes.
6. *Selective use of the team.* Effective teams know when they should meet, and they know how they should use their time.
7. *Appropriate member skills.* The effective team has among its membership – not just the leader – the variety of skills that are needed for performance of the task and for maintenance of the team as a viable group.
8. *Confidence.* Group members, including the leader, believe that they as a group can accomplish the impossible. This kind of expectation stretches and challenges the group members and establishes the potential for growth and development.

in absolute agreement as to their purpose and expected outcomes. It is useful to write these down before the team starts its work.

2. If you have a choice, select individuals to the team to bring a diversity of expertise, and that are known to work well in groups. Know the strengths, weaknesses and successful projects of all members.
3. Spend some time on “team-building.” This can be done by the group itself, or by using an external facilitator. Take the time to regularly evaluate how well your group is working together, and what needs to be done to make it more effective.
4. Some individuals are “people people” and some are “project people.” Careful assignment of team members to tasks based on their strengths will result in better performance in the long run.
5. Finally, if you are having one or more people causing all the problems in team performance, remove them quickly. Otherwise, the team will become dysfunctional and turn off your good performers. This is especially important where team members are volunteers.

If you are a board chairperson or a committee leader, what can you do to improve the effectiveness of your team? Here are some suggestions:

1. If you are experiencing poor team performance/dynamics, identify which of the above characteristics are NOT being met. For example, if the team does not agree on its purpose, then some work needs to be done to ensure that everyone is

Teams are likely to be around for a long time yet. Properly constituted and managed, they can contribute much to the success of your deer or elk industry organization.

5. Events Calendar

Here is a list of upcoming events of interest to deer, elk, and reindeer farmers.

Saskatchewan Elk Breeders Association Annual Convention and General Meeting will be held at the Delta Bessborough Hotel, in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada on March 19 – 20, 2004. For more information, call 306-782-6500.

Alberta Elk Annual Convention will be held at the Executive Royal Inn in Leduc, Alberta, Canada on March 26 – 27, 2004. For more information, contact AEC at altaelk@telusplanet.net or phone 780-980-7582.

Saskatchewan White Tail and Mule Deer Producers Association 8th Annual Conference and Trade Show will be held at the Travelodge Hotel in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada on March 26 – 28, 2004. Dr. James Kroll will be the guest speaker. For more information, please see <http://www.saskdeer.com> or phone the SWAMDDPA office at 306-783-5257.

Second Annual Whitetails of Oklahoma Convention will be held on March 27, 2004 at the Steven's County Fair Grounds, Duncan Oklahoma, USA. Speakers will include Les Hutchins Reproduction Enterprises and Dr. Burke Healey of the Oklahoma USDA. For

more information, contact David McQuaig at 918-785-4521 or Craig Crystal at 918-366-4453.

Biennial Australian Deer Industry Conference will be held in Mt. Gambier, South Australia on April 16 – 18, 2004. Contact Chris Tuckwell at 61-8-8562-1928 (phone) or 61-8-8562-1728 (fax) or by e-mail at cdtuckwell@bigpond.com.

Pennsylvania Deer Farmers Association Spring Meeting and Fund Raising will be held at the Solanco Fairgrounds, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, USA on Saturday, May 8, 2004. For more information, visit <http://www.padfa.com> or phone 717-566-4555.

NAEBA Annual Convention and International Antler Competition will be held on July 29 to August 1, 2004 at the Jackpot Junction Casino Hotel, Morton, Minnesota, USA. For more information see <http://www.naeba.org> or contact Brian Wagner at 612-366-5078.

Minnesota Elk Breeders Association Annual Conference will be held January 15, 2005 at the Marriott, Rochester, Minnesota USA. For more information, please e-mail info@mneba.org.

6. Subscription Services

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7. Contact Information

We are always looking for articles and news about deer, elk, and reindeer farming to publish in this newsletter. E-mail, fax, or mail your ideas and articles to the Editor (see information below).

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