

Living the Promise

The end of another farming financial year gives me a chance to assess what my clients have achieved this year. My review is dominated by ordinary people who have achieved extraordinary things. The common thread in their success stories is a commitment to adopting best practice in their business. These are people who have defined their objectives and then gone out to achieve them.

So what's next?

Business planning has been particularly rewarding part of my role. This year I have seen even more evidence that a more a formal approach to branding and marketing the farm business has delivered results. I'm convinced that once the vision is clear and momentum developed, it's logical to look at managing external relationships to accelerate results.

Some see branding as solely related to products or services. In a rural context I see it as wider than that. It's about the image of the business and how it is seen by financiers, potential business partners, staff and the wider community.

Walking the Talk

Both business planning and branding are about making promises. The strength of a business plan is that it commits to writing the goals and strategies for the operation in a way that impacts on an audience wider than just the business owners. The public nature of this goal setting exercise is part of its' power. That's why business plans work best when they are shared with professionals, mentors, family and staff.

Branding is about building perceptions which will lead to opportunity. The public face of the business is about a promise of what it will be like to deal with, work for or invest in your operation. To be effective it requires all stakeholders to "act as if" it is going to deliver.

It is highly unlikely any person or organisation will make public commitments and then behave in a way that is counterproductive to that purpose. This is why business plans and branding have so much power. If they are well researched and linked to the values of the stakeholders both tend to impel the owners to their target.

Where is the opportunity?

The advancing age of landowners and substantial capital required for investment in property makes it highly likely that the day-to-day management of farms will be delegated through leases, joint ventures or other shared management roles.

Those who wish to capture those sorts of opportunities will need to have a head start against what will be a competitive field. My recent involvement in leasing farms for clients has proven there is considerable competition for these. Those who succeed do so because they have created a reputation, image or brand that makes their proposal attractive.

To be effective the branding focus must filter to every level of the business. The culture and style of the business operates must bring alive the promises made. In this

way the combined effect of strategic clarity and delivery of expectations can result in accelerated progress for those ready to take the next step.

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