

## **“A Tale of Hunting Retail”**

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Living in the hinterland of Northwest Alberta I often get asked if I do a lot of hunting... my answer is yes my hunting season starts the 1<sup>st</sup> week of September and lasts till the 1<sup>st</sup> week of December and then the season starts again mid January and runs through till the end of March. They look at me with fascination and ask if I live in a zoo or the Serengeti with boundless game. Then I explain that I don't hunt the four legged quarry with a rack that would make an American hunter loose his senses... I hunt the two legged kind.... Retailers and Chefs! Stalking and bagging one of these creatures is much more of a challenge and most of all rewarding, because once you got them mounted on your wall they can help feed your family for more than just one season.... But the hunting is tough, the quarry is wary and sometimes it would seem bagging Bigfoot would be an easier task.

What's prompted this kind of analogy? Could be another 9 hour flight, stacked with an 8 hour time zone change but I really think that it is a fitting description of what growing a branded beef program is all about.... Others would refer to them as a fishing trip but I 'm not much of a fisherman since I like seeing the game that I am trying to bag.

My best hunting trips have always been when you manage to take down the Patriarch of Matriarch of the herd.... Translated when you can deal with the visionary / owner / creator of the business; the guys that call the shots, you have a much more likely chance of getting the deal done... Unfortunately the number of small independent retail chains in Canada with more than 5 stores can almost be counted on one hand. Food Service is a different cat, there are lots of independents to pick from but this quarry often lacks volume and weight and it takes a lot of them too use up as much beef as a retailer would. There are chains but then you get into the world of cloak and dagger.

Cloak and Dagger?.... What I mean by this is becomes almost impossible to get an answer or decision and sometimes it seems impossible to figure out who is in charge... It is a world full of multi levels of middle managers that all seem to get, “Analysis Paralysis” when it's time to make decision. They are afraid to make decisions because they may make the wrong one and their ass would be on the line if they screw up....so the wheels spin, you don't get anywhere and the quarry continues to evade your trophy wall. Add to this a quarry that can often get adversarial and as a hunter you have to be quick on your wits otherwise the quarry can pounce and the next thing you are on their dinner table.

It's a good thing that hunting season has a break from May to August because the game of predator and prey / cat and mouse can become tiresome and so it's good to have time to play cowboy and think of the next seasons strategy.

Taking some advice from the bear hunters an easier way I am finding to bag the quarry is “Beef Baiting”.... Bring the quarry to the ranch, take them out of their environment and hunt

on your own turf where you set the rules of engagement.... Best of all they cannot run away! Another way to call it is wine, dine and 69 them ranch style! After 6 years of first fishing, then stalking; Baiting seems to be one of the most effective methods for getting the potential customers to understand what a brand is about. They see the heart, blood, sweat and tears that go into producing a product that they take for granted. Too many end users including butchers and chefs have taken for granted that beef shows up in boxes on their docks and they forget all the hard work that went into producing that product. In fact in many instances they even start to realize that beef comes from living breathing animals that once roamed the pastures they tour.

Now that I have modified my hunting strategy less towards stalking and more to baiting the trophy room is starting to fill, but like any good hunter there is still improvements that can be done.... Use Decoys! But unlike the plastic ones used by goose hunters I prefer the live ones... I call them "End User Champions", Chef and Retailer owners that recommend your products to their colleagues.... This is best marketing/sales / hunting strategy of all... The trophies recommending to other quarry that they should go to you. As said by Jimmy Buffet, "the world is made of innovators, imitators and idiots" ....there is only so many in each category and it requires time and patience for the innovators to influence the imitators or better yet the imitators to copy the innovators...

So there you have my hunting story.... Unlike many that come too our neck of the woods to hunt for pleasure, I hunt for the sake of survival for our family ranch and the 19 others that are part of our branded program....Becoming a good hunter takes time, it take patience, it takes knowing in which habitat to find the quarry and it takes knowledge of skills to take it down. It gets tiring at times when you have not slept for 28 hours but in the end when you get the next trophy mounted on the wall it becomes all worth it and there is always a good story behind each one.

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