

Merchandising

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When features are benefits

One of the oldest rules in advertising is “customers buy benefits not features.” This is as true today as it ever was, but in business-to-business advertising — the kind registered Angus breeders do — it’s sometimes hard to distinguish the difference. In many cases, features actually are also benefits.

For example, if you are selling semen from your best bull to other registered Angus breeders, a +.45 expected progeny difference (EPD) for marbling is, by any definition, a feature. But it’s also a benefit. Why? Because virtually every serious registered Angus breeder knows the value of marbling EPDs in today’s market and understands the benefit of using a bull with this kind of record.

So if you develop advertising for the serious cattle producer, you wouldn’t need to explain that your bull with a +.45 marbling EPD will sire calves that stand a much better chance of grading high Choice or Prime than a bull with a -.11 marbling EPD. They already know this.

Cattle breeders aren’t swayed by high-flown claims, even if they are true. They want facts. Therefore, most of your advertising must be specific and technical. You simply can’t sell registered bulls without highlighting their pedigrees and their complete range of EPDs. There’s no need to translate most of these features into the benefits that they offer the buyer — they know them.

So your advertising is not really a matter of features vs. benefits. It’s a matter of knowing which features are recognizable benefits to the people you advertise to and which ones aren’t. How many of you, for example, can explain what a ribeye area (REA) EPD of +.17 really means? More to the point, how many of your customers would know?

As cattle producers become more concerned with muscling in beef cattle and satisfying consumers, the fact REA

EPD correlates closely with percent retail product, and possibly with muscling, can be important to your customers. But it’s not likely that just quoting the EPD will have much influence on potential buyers. This is a feature that must have its benefit explained.

A headline touting the fact your bull has a ribeye area EPD of .98 will probably sound like Greek or Latin to most of your potential customers. The information won’t stand alone as a benefit.

The key to effective advertising is to know your customer and potential customers, then speak their language. Sure, a lot of well-informed commercial producers understand EPDs and the names of top Angus bulls nearly as well as the registered breeders from whom they buy bulls. But many do not. When you advertise to an audience that doesn’t completely understand the technical jargon we take for granted, it’s best to introduce even a high-marbling EPD with some explanation. Don’t assume too much knowledge on the part of the reader about EPDs, bull lines or performance information.

And never forget, regardless of whether you stress benefits or features that strongly imply benefits, it’s important to insist your ads are fundamentally correct with an attractive layout, good writing and attention to all five basic advertising building blocks:

- 1) Dominant illustration;
- 2) Headline;
- 3) Persuasive body copy;
- 4) Consistent signature or logo; and
- 5) An overall distinctive look

Too many seedstock ads substitute a slogan or trite phrase for the headline and a series of disjointed statements set in headline type for the body copy. Ads like this waste money and effort. For an effective ad, the headline must grab the reader’s attention with the offer of a strong benefit, and the body copy should present a reasoned sales message that moves the reader to action. It really makes little difference whether you highlight features, benefits or both if the ad fails to attract the desired readers.

Good advertising — whether it runs in a magazine, is sent as a direct mail piece or aired over the radio or television — should tell the prospect what they get when they buy cattle from you and what your cattle will do for them. Avoid jargon, trite expressions and data that has no meaning to the person you are trying to influence.

As a registered Angus cattle producer and marketer, it’s your responsibility to first find out what potential customers need to know about your cattle to make an intelligent buying decision, then tell them in your advertising in the most easily understood way possible.

Dominant
illustration

HEADLINE

Persuasive
body copy

Consistent
signature
or logo

An overall
distinctive
look