

\$ Merchandising

► by Keith Evans

Don't overlook farm radio

The National Association of Farm Broadcasters (NAFB) is encouraging agricultural advertisers to invest more of their advertising dollars in radio. They have a point. Radio advertising can be very effective if it is used properly.

Some of its advantages

- **It's mobile.** Potential customers can listen while in the truck, on the tractor or combine, or while working in the shop.
- **It's timely.** Radio can tell us what's happening today, or even right now. Market reports, weather reports, show results and on-the-spot live interviews are just a few examples.
- **It's flexible.** You can have your advertisements on the air tomorrow, or even today, if need be. You can also change the copy any time. You don't have to plan weeks in advance to make a change.
- **It's local.** You can often buy advertising on a single radio station that covers your primary market area. Local advertising rates, as opposed to much higher national rates, can make radio a very efficient buy.
- **Agricultural people listen to farm radio.** The average farm or ranch has an estimated 10 radios; many have even more. Nearly 78% of people in the beef cattle industry regularly listen to farm radio, according to NAFB studies. They listen a little more than an hour a day on average. The favorite programs for beef producers are markets and weather.

The other side

This is not to say that radio advertising has no drawbacks. It does. First, it gives the advertiser no opportunity to use attractive illustrations to draw attention to a product.

Second, there is no vertical market segmentation. All kinds of agricultural people listen to the same programs. You can't isolate cattle producers with radio as you can with publication advertising or direct mail.

What's more, good farm radio isn't equally available to cattle producers in all parts of the country.

Selective attention

The NAFB has produced a special advertising program aimed at professional

farm media buyers. It makes much of the fact that listeners are forced to listen to radio advertising because they "can't turn the page." One of their ads goes so far as to claim that even poorly written or produced advertising sells product, because the prospect is forced to pay attention. On the other hand, they claim, most people read only a few words of print advertising.

The fact is, people can selectively listen to radio, including the commercials, much the same as they selectively read print, billboard or direct mail advertising. All of us can quickly turn the page on a print ad that is uninteresting. We can toss out a direct mail piece, sometimes without even opening the envelope, and we can turn off a radio spot at will. All it takes is to turn down the volume, start talking to someone in the room or the truck, or turn it off in our minds. We are all exposed to so much broadcast advertising that we have learned to tune out what we don't like or are not interested in. So, even radio advertising must entice the listener to pay attention.

Because of this, radio advertising, just as print advertising, must be well-constructed to be effective. Advertisers in both media must follow the same rules in order to get their message across.

Grab attention

Before all else, a radio spot must get attention. Print advertising does this with an illustration, a headline and attractive design. Radio advertising must do this completely with words and sound effects. Over the years the radio advertising with which I have been involved has used cattle mooing, dinner bells ringing, a town crier, the

auctioneer's chant of a well-known country and western music star, and music to attract attention — all to good effect.

The opening sentence of a radio spot should be similar to a print ad headline — it should attract attention and promise a benefit. The voice used to deliver the commercial is also important. Some announcers have a voice that is hard to ignore; the tone of their voices makes people want to listen.

The words and sounds of a radio spot should paint a picture or create an image in the reader's mind. It should make the listener see the advantages of the product and entice them to want to learn more. Finally every commercial must ask for action, by telling listeners what they should do — come to a sale, stop by the ranch for an open

house, telephone for a sale book or whatever.

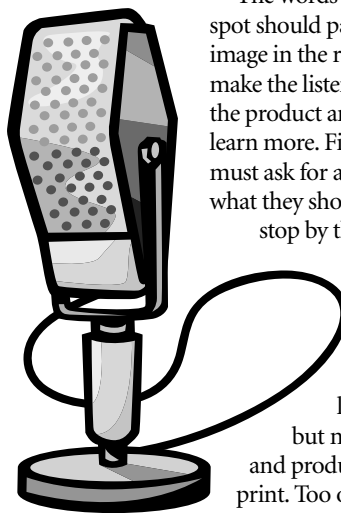
And all this must be done in 30 or, at most, 60 seconds. It sounds

like a tall order, and it is,

but no more so than writing

and producing advertising for print. Too often cattle people pay good money for both radio and print advertising that is little more than glorified classified advertising. That's poor business. Good planning and good writing can produce a radio commercial that will be listened to and remembered by a high percentage of the audience.

Devise your marketing plan to reach the highest percentage of your potential customers at the lowest possible cost. When you do, you may find that radio deserves a place in your advertising budget.



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