



Merchandising

► by Keith Evans

No such thing as an anonymous salesperson

You can't be unknown and be a successful salesperson. Anonymity and salesmanship just don't mix.

People prefer to purchase everything from nice clothes to registered cattle from someone they know and like. It's one thing to have top-quality cattle, and yet another to be a top-quality salesperson. Your success depends upon both.

An example

One of the most successful car dealers our town has ever seen proved this to me several years ago. Allen (as we will call him) was a young man when he bought a local auto dealership. He moved it to a new, more visible location and started to promote it.

His advertising and promotion were designed to build name recognition for himself and the dealership that bore his name. Potential customers really couldn't separate him from the business. He did his own commercials without screaming or high jinks. He presented himself as the kind of businessman most people respect. He personally guaranteed service and satisfaction and projected sincerity. People in the community felt they knew him even when they had never met him. That's a big marketing advantage.

His promotional message wasn't just talk; he demonstrated his commitment to the area by being active in the community. Allen supported good causes with his money and his time. Yet all the time he touted the value of his automobiles and pickups.

Allen didn't necessarily sell for less. You could have driven 50 miles south and bought the same car cheaper. But, as in most purchases, price wasn't the most important factor to Allen's customers. People paid not only for his vehicles, but also for everything else he offered and for which he stood. He eventually retired young and wealthy and remained in the community that had supported him. The next owner of the dealership wasn't nearly as successful. People who liked "doin' business" with Allen weren't

so pleased with the nameless corporate owners who followed him.

Gaining a customer

By the same token, a farm machinery dealership is a cold and inhuman place without people — nothing but buildings, equipment and parts. When buyers are called upon to spend big money on today's machinery, they want to deal with a real person. They want someone whom they know, trust and like — someone who will be there for them when they need help.

One of the most successful farm machinery dealers I know manages the business and is directly involved in making most of the big sales. He is well-known and respected, and the business carries his name.

Building a reputation is done one advertisement and one satisfied customer at a

time. For example, a while back my lawn mower stopped dead in the middle of a swath and refused to start no matter what I did. Since I'd had little success dealing with the people who sold me the lawn mower, I wasn't optimistic about a quick solution.

My grass was growing fast, and because most of my neighbors use lawn services, I couldn't just borrow a mower. So I gritted my teeth and called a new dealership close to home whose advertisement I had read.

It was noon Monday when Ed answered the telephone. To my surprise he actually sounded happy to hear from me. When I told him my problem, he said "no problem." Bring in the lifeless machine and his mechanic would fix it by Wednesday, he offered. There was no mention of how busy his shop was and no suggestion that I trade for a new mower. In the meantime he lent

me a used mower to finish my lawn that afternoon.

That Monday, Ed and his business claimed a new customer. It wasn't because of the brands he sold or a slick promotion — it was because of his willingness to solve my problem. I sing his praises to everyone I talk to about lawn equipment and repair.

The same goes for cattlemen

What works in farm machinery, lawn equipment and automobile businesses also works in the beef cattle seedstock business. Everything else being roughly equal, buyers gravitate to the breeders who are well-known and respected as individuals and who have developed a reputation for breeding top-quality beef seedstock.

You, too, can probably benefit from becoming better known. Use your advertising and promotion dollars to build up your own name recognition, as well as recognition for the cattle you have for sale. Let potential customers, who don't know you well or at all, gain a better understanding of the kind of person they will meet if they give you a call or drop by your place.

At the very least, always have your name, if not your picture, in your ads. A while back I came across a great-looking ad in a horse publication. The ad did virtually everything right. It featured a dramatic action photo that caught the reader's attention and demonstrated the product. The headline and copy were simple and to the point. The ad promised, "If what you see here is what you like, then give us a call, because this is what we sell." The logo was attractive and easy to read, with both telephone and fax numbers.

But there was no name in the ad. If you telephoned this ranch for the first time, you couldn't ask to speak with James, Joe or Jennifer to tell them you liked their ad and wanted more information. You would have to go through the awkward procedure of searching for the right person with whom to speak. Many people are shy about doing this. Instead they are more likely to telephone people they know.

The perception that people have of you and your business accounts for more sales than any other single factor. Of course you have to provide a top-quality product, but you can't be a salesperson and remain anonymous.

Selling is a very personal business. The people who understand this almost always reap the biggest rewards.

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