

doing a better job

MERCHANDISING

by Keith Evans, Director of Communications and Public Relations

A columnist can become mighty discouraged.

Here I sit in my squeaking office chair pounding this ancient Royal typewriter with such force that I risk arthritic hands long before I reach retirement age. All this in an effort to help you improve your sales of Angus cattle to the point that you can become independently wealthy. And what do I get? Rejection.

Let me give you a few examples. Early on I warned of the neutralizing effect on an ad produced by using a photo that carries the name of the photographer written boldly between the legs of the animal. I emphasized that this effect is compounded if the photo has been flopped and the name of "Joe Blow" becomes "woɹB ɹoɹ". Yet, in a recent issue of a prominent publication what did I see?

The cover picture showed a beautiful Angus bull calf with the photographer's name pasted close to the animal's foot. Worse yet it had been flopped, and I spent precious minutes trying to figure out who the photographer was. It was all so disconcerting that I can't recall the name of the magazine, the bull or the photographer.

To add insult to injury, nearly every ad photograph in this issue carried the name or initials of a photographer. And in one ad on the inside back cover, three photos were featured, and, you guessed it, each carried the photographer's logo—flopped. I was crushed.

Next, I picked up an issue of another Angus magazine, this magazine, to be more specific. Surely, I reasoned, things would be different. Every Angus Journal reader has had the opportunity to be enlightened by this monthly discourse on advertising and promotion. I should have forgotten the whole idea.

The photo situation was little better. Photographers names abounded between the legs of the advertised animals—many of them flopped. There was one encouraging note. One advertiser had resorted to having drop-out halftones made of all his advertised animals. This (for the uninitiated) is when only the animal itself is used from a photograph, with no ground or background shown. This means the photographer's name is obliterated, too.

I felt good until I realized that this particular two-page spread contained nine individual pictures of cows, calves and bulls. Hadn't I railed long and loud about the sins of cramming an ad with photos? Hadn't I further counseled on the need for a single dominant illustration to catch the reader's eye and rivet his or her attention on the ad's message?

Surely this was an exception. It seemed improbable that breeders would further neutralize their own valuable ads with a profusion of photographs. Particularly so when the cost of having individual photos taken is so high, not to mention the cost to have individual cuts produced. A quick thumb-through of the magazine provided a sharp slap in the face, and unlike the fool actor in the old TV after-shave commercials, "No thanks. I didn't need that!"

The ad with the drop-out halftones had only nine photos on two pages.

My quick survey turned up one two-page spread with "20"—count them, 20—individual photographs. Each photo was 14 picas by 10 picas (approximately 1 column by 1½ inches), and all but two carried the name of the photographer. Luckily, for my sanity, none were flopped.

And this was no isolated incident. Another two-page spread, turned on its side no less (a subject for another columnic dissertation) contained 17 photographs of a variety of animals to be sold. Each photo was from the same angle and carried the same photographer's name. The breeder who paid for this ad had his name in the two-page spread twice. The photographer, who presumably had already been paid a fee to produce the photographs for the advertiser, received mention 17 times. I will leave it to you to determine who got the most benefit from this advertisement.

Another two-page spread was cluttered with 16 small photographs. It was a sale ad, but there was not a single line of copy about the herd's breeding program or performance records. The photographs were evidently counted upon to carry almost the full weight of the ad, but there was no dominant illustration to arrest the reader's attention. In fact, the flow and design of the photographs acted like an arrow to direct your vision quickly across the two pages and on to something more interesting. Any reader who stopped would have discovered that the most repeated word in the two-page spread was the photographer's name.

I soon quit counting small photos in ads. Several single pages contained six and eight photos per page. And ads too numerous to dwell upon left the impression that many advertisers reason that three photographs are the minimum needed per page.

I was left to answer three questions. Do Angus breeders rush to the mailbox once a month in heightened anticipation of finding the new Angus Journal so they can sit down and read this Merchandising column? **NO!** When finally, if ever, they get around to reading this labor of love, do most faithfully heed its sage and sound advice? **NO!** And finally, in the face of this overt rejection, do I plan to save my finger joints from certain arthritic pain by dropping this column like a hot potato? **NO!** I'll meet you next month, same time, same place.

AJ

