

Merchandising

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Negative versus comparison advertising

My office phone rang the other day and on the line was an Angus breeder who wanted to talk about advertising. He was unhappy with the way someone was advertising.

"The guy is slamming other people's cattle," the caller emphasized. "I don't like it, and besides, you can't build up your cattle by running down others."

The man is right. Negative advertising is a turnoff. Even politicians have found that it doesn't work. Some negative advertising driven campaigns were probably lost last November because of it. People are sick of the type of advertising that says, "You must like me because my opponent is such a jerk."

So it stands to reason that you probably can't sell semen from your bull by pronouncing all the other bulls in the breed as inferior. It's not believable, it brands the advertiser as a fool, and it produces a reaction in the potential customer akin to scraping your fingernails on an old fashioned blackboard

ANGUS SIGN OF THE MONTH



The photo of this unique sign was sent in by Eldon Flinn of Red Tank Ranch, Fittstown, Okla. The sign was painted with baked-on aluminum and placed in a steel frame. Flinn says it is on a 20-foot tall steel pole. It is bolted to a concrete base so that it can be taken down for maintenance. It is located on Hwy. 99, 15 miles south of Ada, Okla.

So avoid negative advertising, but be careful to not avoid all advertising that some people brand as negative. For example, some people feel that comparative advertising is negative. I am talking about the kind of advertising that lists the statistics of two products, and proclaims, "Look at this, the product I'm selling is better than the leader in the industry, you should consider buying from me next time."

This is not negative advertising. The person who is on the short end of the statistics may think so, but if the facts are right and the comparison is valid, then the advertising is a service to the reader. One thing advertising does best is bring new information about a product to potential buyers that can help them improve their business, and maybe save money, too.

If I had a bull with expected progeny differences (EPDs) and a pedigree that was equal to, or better than, the most popular bull in the breed, I'd be tempted to tell people about it in my advertising, particularly if I was a relatively unknown breeder. I would do it in good taste, being as positive as possible. But I would let as many people as possible know that I had a bull that outranked one of the breed's most popular bulls, and that semen was available at a competitive price. I would lay out the facts on the two animals, in good taste, and let buyers make up their minds.

On the other hand, if I were a well-known long-established breeder, and my bull was better than a bull owned and promoted by a relatively unknown breeder, I would ignore the competition completely. No way would I give the newcomer any more publicity than he or she could afford to purchase. It might cost me business to tell a large number of people that someone who doesn't promote much anyway has a bull that is almost as good as mine.

Instead, I would take the high road, promote the outstanding qualities of my bull, stress my guarantee of satisfaction, and point out how long I have been in the Angus business. I might even throw in testimonials from some of my best-known customers. If you are No. 1 it is usually best

to ignore the competition.

At our grocery store I can buy Best Choice Cola for about 19 cents a can, and I think it tastes about as good as Pepsi Cola. You might one day see a store ad proclaiming that Best Choice tastes better than Pepsi, but there will never be any mention in Pepsi advertising of Best Choice. They would never advertise that a tiny independent brand even approaches their product in taste or quality, or hint that consumers could buy a competing product at a fraction of the cost.

Besides, the big cola advertisers have us where they want us. They know we would never serve our guests a Best Choice, it would make us feel cheap. But that is another matter entirely.

The point is, what some people call negative advertising can be good advertising. The American Angus Association used comparison advertising back in the 1970s when we used research results from the U.S. Meat Animal Center at Clay Center, Neb., to show that Angus had clear-cut marbling and calving ease advantages over other breeds.

These ads ran at a time when Angus cattle were being discriminated against at auction markets around the country. It's hard to believe today, but then it was important to remind producers of the advantages that Angus cattle offered them.

Some people called the elephant ads that ran in the early 1980s negative advertising. Most critics were people who had elephant-sized cattle and refused to believe the facts that moderate-size cattle were more efficient and more in demand by packers and consumers.

Both advertising programs made positive points about Angus, were a service to the industry, and won regional and national awards.

So definitely avoid negative advertising. But don't assume that all advertising that makes some people mad is negative. Tearing down other people's cattle doesn't build yours. But showing how your cattle are better, or even best, is a legitimate job for advertising, one that will help you sell cattle.