

# Merchandising

by Keith Evans



## Using Madison Avenue sales techniques in the bull pen

It's a long way from New York's Madison Avenue to your place. But the techniques for selling at either an upscale boutique or in your bull lots are much the same. The basics don't change whether you market clothes to a self-centered big spender who parades before his peers in the most trendy designer finery or bulls to a cattle producer who wants the best genetic package he can afford.

*The New Yorker* magazine, some time back, did a feature story on a 27-year-old super salesperson who was selling some \$40,000 worth of clothes and other items a week. Her workplace is a trendy Madison Avenue store that is said to feature the most understated and sophisticated clothes in the world. Here a sweater can go for \$600 and a tuxedo for \$2,000. Her gross sales the first year on the job reportedly were nearly \$2 million.

One would think she has a secret formula to perform at this high level. But no; she does it the old-fashioned way. She knows her product. She knows her customers. And she provides service. She talks by telephone to one special customer every morning to help him plan his wardrobe for the day, all clothes he has bought from her.

When Gloria (not her real name) took the job, she dogged the buyers and managers until she knew as much about the store's products as they did. If a suit cost \$2,000, she wanted to know why it was that expensive so she could explain it to the customer. Customers must have a good reason for buying any product. It's the salesperson's job to communicate these reasons to the buyer.

**Your customers are no different** than Gloria's in this respect. If two bulls that look similar are priced \$500 or \$1,000 apart, be prepared to explain the difference and how the more expensive bull can earn back the price differential and more.

If your bulls are higher-priced than those of your competitor, there must be a good reason — so explain it. Never assume customers can figure out these things on their own. Even if they know, they'll

probably feel better about the price if you professionally explain the benefits your cattle offer.

Selling starts with creating great relationships with potential customers, starting with the first meeting. Gloria doesn't ask questions that can be answered "no." She doesn't inquire, "Do you have any questions?" Instead she comments on what they are wearing.

When a customer comes calling, you should take the same approach. Talk about their cattle; find out about their market. By showing interest, you build trust even as you discover how you can help them solve their bull problems.

**Although Gloria sells mostly to men**, the story explains that she never gives less attention to the woman of a couple. Just because the female is not buying doesn't mean that she can't or won't block the sale.

In your business, that bull may well be worth \$5,000, but if the wife doesn't agree that the bull is a better investment than some alternative, then you can easily lose the sale. Treat both parties as equals, even though it appears that only one is the primary decision-maker.

It's not just a man-wife thing. The same theory holds true when the two people are owner and herdsman.

Gloria tries to slow people down — to keep them from rushing out of the store. She offers customers something to drink and serves it herself with cookies or some other treat that she brings each day. With more time to think and enjoy themselves, customers may end up purchasing more.

You don't have other products to sell. However, as your customers get more comfortable, they might decide that the higher-priced bull is a good idea after all, or that they might just as well buy two bulls from you rather than chasing over to another breeder's place to look.

Even if Gloria doesn't have exactly what the customer wants, she doesn't come back from the stockroom empty-handed. There is a chance she can get the customer to

switch to a similar product or upgrade to a more expensive one.

Cattle breeders don't have as many options as a salesperson in a trendy store on Madison Avenue, but don't send the customer away empty-handed. Maybe you have a more expensive bull on which you would be willing to lower the price for the sake of making a sale and a satisfied customer.

If you don't have an option for the buyer, then offer to call someone you know who might have what the customer wants. It's a way to build customer loyalty even without making a sale.

**Building trust is important.** Gloria believes that if she persuades a customer to buy something that isn't right, she will never see that person again. It's the same in the cattle business. Better to send a potential customer away happy, with no bull, than with a bull that is bound to eventually make the client unhappy.

In the seedstock business, as well as in most other businesses, success is built upon repeat business. Gloria invests a lot of time keeping in contact with customers and providing service. The man who receives a call each morning to help him dress for the day is probably an exception; however, she tells good customers about sales even before they are announced to the public. She sends personalized New Year's cards to tell customers how much she appreciates them. She encourages people to get in touch with her, at home or at the office, whenever they need her help or want to talk. When a California client couldn't get to her store, she videotaped the new showing and sent it to him.

Good cattle salespeople do the same. You are an expert to many of your customers. Accept this and make them feel comfortable about contacting you for help and advice about any aspect of the cattle business.

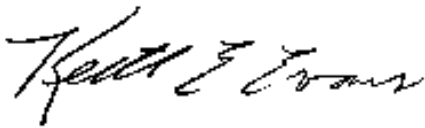
Use video; it's a great way of showing off a bull or your herd to customers who can't visit your ranch. The same holds true with the Internet. Always look for ways to serve

customers even as you create trust and build conviction.

**Good salespeople keep** good customer records. According to the story, Gloria keeps exceptional records, which helps her make repeat sales.

I've seen seedstock producers who are just as good. They record the name, address, phone, fax and e-mail of every customer, along with names of their family members and nicknames. Plus they keep detailed sales records. Complete information is listed on every animal sold, along with the date and price. Thus a breeder knows what bulls a customer has used for the past several years, and what bloodlines will work best on the resulting replacement heifers.

Yes, the basics of selling are the same regardless of location or product. So go ahead and try New York City techniques on your country bull customers.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Keith E. Evans". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.