

MERCHANDISING

by Keith Evans, Director of Communications and Public Relations

Way to Effective Advertising Is Not Paved With Rules

"There are three rules for writing a novel," Somerset Maugham once said "Unfortunately, no one knows what they are."

The same could be said for advertising. Someone is always coming up with a set of rules to follow to write brilliant copy, or award winning headlines, or to produce dramatic, attention grabbing illustrations. I have probably quoted some in this column over the years, and maybe even composed a few of my own.

It is useful to know the rules of advertising and how to apply them. However, as time passes I become more convinced that year in and year out the most effective ads are produced by the people who best understand their own business, and the business of their customers, as well as their competitors.

A college friend of mine in the 1950s deserted agriculture for the law immediately after he graduated with a 4 point grade average in animal science. He probably made the right choice. He ended up in a San Francisco law firm and became rich at an early age. During this highly productive phase of his career he never lost a case never.

The reason for this, he told me one evening as we shared a bottle of vintage California wine, was that whenever he went to court he was better prepared than his opponents. He made sure of that. He tried his best to know more about his opponent's client than maybe they knew themselves, and he certainly knew more about his client and how the law affected his case than did anyone else. It paid off handsomely.

I think the same principle applies to marketing. How are you going to tell people about the great qualities of your cattle and what makes them different from the competition if you don't really know your product and its genetic potential? And how can you make comparisons if you don't know your competitors' products?

The fact is you can't. The advertiser who tries to pull the wool over the eyes of potential buyers is fooling only himself or herself. There are not enough fools in the cattle business to support breeders who don't know these things. The market for

pigs in pokes is rapidly dwindling.

On the other hand how can you sell seedstock to someone else if you don't understand their cattle operation, particularly their needs and how your cattle can fill them? The art of selling, some people contend, can be boiled down to explaining how your product will solve problems and

success of your marketing program, must be you, your partner or someone already on the payroll.

What you probably can afford, regardless of the size of your operation is someone who can take all the information and knowledge you have and transform it into the right kind of advertising and promo-



make life easier and more enjoyable for potential customers. If you don't know the problems your customers and potential customers face, there is little chance you can help solve them with the cattle you produce and market. Even if you produce cattle with the genetic makeup that would work for some, you wouldn't know how to position your product properly and advertise it correctly.

I've seen advertising people over the years who created advertising that looked wonderful and attracted a great deal of attention, but it didn't work. It failed to produce sales, not because it wasn't well designed and well written, but because its designers understand neither the product being sold nor the needs of the intended customer.

Unless you represent a huge registered Angus breeding operation you can't begin to afford to hire someone with the necessary knowledge and understanding of the beef cattle business and your business. That person who is the key to the

tion. These people can do wonders once you tell them what you have and how it will solve problems for potential customers.

You may get this assistance for no extra charge from the media you advertise with. You may find this help in the art or business departments of a local college or university. Or, maybe there is a professional advertising person in your community who would like to moonlight.

But these people only complement your knowledge. They are not a substitute for you, your knowledge of the business and the direction you intend to take it. This is the one ingredient that most seedstock marketers can't buy or hire. Yet unfortunately, it is the one that is too often lacking among livestock producers who would rather breed cattle and let someone else worry about marketing.

Keith Evans