



# Merchandising

► by Keith Evans

## When we fail to communicate

*Business success in almost any field is tied directly to the ability to communicate. It is a fact that we in the beef cattle seedstock business can't afford to ignore, but too often we do.*

*Marketing is communication. Those of us with services and products to sell must know how to attract people's attention to our businesses. With creativity we must illustrate and describe benefits we offer, and we must make people want to learn more.*

### No place to learn

As I have observed many times, registered cattle producers are far more skilled in production than in marketing. Most of us know this, but we aren't making much progress in correcting this problem for the young people who will one day run this nation's registered seedstock businesses.

More and more young people are going to college, but too many of our sons and daughters graduate without ever taking a writing course. There are almost no courses available in any college of agriculture to help them learn even the basic principles of marketing and how advertising and promotion work.

The fault lies partly with our major agricultural colleges. Only a handful make advertising and marketing courses available to students who want to go into registered livestock production or product sales. The few classes available are almost always noncredit or low-credit-hour courses. Students spend little time on any one aspect of marketing.

I served on a Livestock Publications Council (LPC) committee some time back that attempted to persuade agricultural

colleges to provide advertising, marketing and salesmanship courses for animal science students. We weren't as effective or as aggressive as we should have been, but the fact remained that educators weren't interested. Furthermore, they complained, there was no budget for new courses.

### The problem's source

Be that as it may, the problem starts long before enrollment. A few years ago I received a letter from a recent high school graduate. It began like this:

"I am writing a term paper for college and was wondering if you could send me some materials on these questions or tell me more about them."

He then asked five questions, the most garbled of which read, "Who found the Angus cow and how did it come back." There were no question marks at the end of these sentences, if indeed one could call them sentences.

He closed with, "I sure would appreciate it if you could answer these questions or send me some material on it."

It is difficult to believe that a young

person could get into college with these limited communications skills, but it happens. My son-in-law taught high school Spanish for a short time (before he found out that he couldn't support his family on what a high school teacher with a master's degree earns). His students were mostly in his course because they needed foreign language credits in order to enroll at the state university; yet many didn't even know what a verb or an adjective was.

It is easy to blame educational problems on school administrators and teachers, but the fact is that most schools are about as good as parents and citizens in the community or the state demand and are willing to pay for them to be. The frequent failures of school bond issues across the country show how unwilling a majority of voters are to support local education.

Steadily increasing tuition rates at state universities make it more difficult for students from middle-class households to attend these institutions. Despite increased costs, graduate students or part-time instructors too often teach classes. No politician will risk reelection by calling for higher taxes to keep tuition costs down.

Although there are some exceptions, children usually apply themselves to their studies and extracurricular reading about as much as their parents insist upon. A steady diet of children's commercial television, with its senseless cartoons and violence, starves the mind and reinforces bad habits. Teenagers are influenced by Music Television (MTV), TV sitcoms and motion pictures that disrespect authority, glorify sex and immorality and lampoon schools, teachers and parents.

Fortunately, many farm and ranch children have the advantage of having more interesting and productive things to do as part of the family operation. This helps create motivated, intelligent and high-achieving students. Despite this, we do too little to teach our children to write and communicate effectively. Many young people find it difficult to write a simple, sincere note of thanks to a relative or friend, a moving love note to a future spouse or a thoughtful letter to a legislator.

It is a failing that we all share in, and it can strike close to home. Communication-deprived children who later decide to enter the registered cattle business will find it difficult to develop marketing and communications programs to build their businesses. They will be at a great disadvantage to those who do know how.

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