

Merchandising

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You Can't Short-Change Advertising

It was so incongruous that I was taken aback. A television spot for a nationally franchised printer was telling potential customers, "Advertising doesn't work." Instead of doing advertising, the TV spot encouraged businesses to contact the printer for help in attracting customers.

But the company obviously didn't believe its own advertising. Here was a company using sophisticated advertising to promote its business by brazenly proclaiming that advertising doesn't work. Later, when I checked on the spelling of the company's name in the Yellow Pages, I found a large display ad touting its benefits and "six convenient locations." So much for the contention that advertising doesn't work.

What the company was obviously doing with this TV campaign was playing on the

insecurity many business people have about advertising. Like some in the registered Angus business, few small business people have training in marketing. They haven't learned how to design an effective advertising program, and when they do advertise they are tentative, which usually translates into "ineffective."

Too many businesses, large and small, haven't defined their market area. They haven't outlined on a map where their best potential customers are. An advertiser who can't tell you geographically where his or her customers are can't efficiently buy advertising.

Furthermore, business owners seldom do a thorough media study of their trade territory. They don't know what media reaches potential customers in the territory and the cost of each. This lack of information can lead to using

the wrong media which produces inefficient advertising buys. Of all businesses, small businesses can least afford to waste precious advertising and promotion dollars.

Even advertisers who have defined their trade territory, and who understand media demographics and costs, still find that their advertisements don't produce satisfactory results. That's because ads compete with each other and with editorial for a reader's or listener's attention. Ads must be attention getting, interesting and relevant. Business people who are responsible for creating their own ads often don't understand the differences between features and benefits. They don't realize that people buy benefits not product features. That's why you see too many ads for businesses that claim they have the newest, most expensive production equipment, or a "million dollar bull." What the advertiser thinks is a great selling point, the buyer sees as potentially inflated prices. Advertising must tell how product features provide benefits to potential buyers.

Another factor that allows the printing company in question to play on feelings that advertising doesn't work, is a misunderstanding of the buying cycle. Business-to-business advertising may take weeks or months, sometimes even years, from the time a potential customer reads or hears the first ad until he or she contacts the advertiser. Few people need a product the day they read about it in an advertisement.

Consequently, ads must make favorable, memorable impressions. But even the most memorable ad impressions fade

with time. That's why repetition (ad frequency) is so important. Before the potential customer forgets, another ad is needed to reinforce and build on the last impression. Eventually, when that person is ready to buy, he or she should think of the advertiser first and favorably. That's called top-of-mind awareness, and businesses who achieve it in individual buyers get first crack at their business.

Lack of information about, or understanding of advertising basics makes it difficult to design a good advertising program and then stick with it until it starts working.

When a small business owner in town, or one in the country who markets registered Angus cattle, fails in any one of these areas, they are prey for those who offer easy solutions – solutions that don't involve your participation, just your money.

In order to attract the most potential customers, your marketing program should apply all the basics. It takes a strategic marketing plan to reach and influence enough potential customers to make your's, or any other's business, successful. The gods of commerce know that it makes no difference what media is used to reach and influence people to buy your cattle. But the fact is that most businesses can't achieve top-of-mind awareness in enough people with word of mouth, good business letters and direct-mail herd brochures alone. Effective advertising is the most efficient way to build a large customer base and grow a business.



If you need a sign that's movable, or if it's illegal to place a permanent farm sign in your area, you might try what the folks did at Mead Angus Farm, Barnett, Mo. They mounted their farm sign on an old steel loading chute. Kevin O'Bryan, who sent in the picture, says it sits near a main highway and has drawn in several customers. The sign, designed by Marjorie Mead, is made of aluminum with vinyl lettering. The arrow and the word "Mead" are in red, the rest is black and white.