

Facts Are Fine, But Benefits Sell Cattle

Look at your advertising. Is it filled with performance records, pedigrees, show winnings, the names of famous sires and dams, and facts about structural soundness? It should be.

The ads of many good cattle producers are rightly loaded with valuable information, but these ads too often fail to explain what all this means. Advertisers tend to assume that the reader will connect all the information contained in an ad with all the benefits to be derived if he or she buys the advertised product. That's a costly assumption.

Before you start to work on your next ad determine the benefits you want to offer the buyer, then design the ad to explain them. Remember, benefits come first and facts are used to support them.

One very saleable feature your bull may have is a 75-pound birthweight with an EPD of minus three pounds. The primary benefit of these two features is obviously calving ease, right? Well, maybe.

The other day a friend of mine explained why he still uses a Longhorn bull on his first-calf heifers. He persists even though the feedlot manager where he custom feeds his cattle has tried for several years to get him to use another breed of bull, particularly an Angus.

"My wife," he says, "likes to go out in the morning and see those little (Longhorn-sired) calves alive and frolicking beside their mothers."

To put this in perspective, this same cattleman, a few years ago, bred all his heifers to an Angus-Chianina bull that someone had told him should be a calving-ease bull. It turned out that every heifer needed assistance, most of them by Caesarean. The man and his wife converted their garage into an operating room that spring. They will never forget it.

They want calving ease all right, and more live calves and more pounds of calf to sell. But what they want most is peace of mind. They want the comfort of know-

ing that they will never again have to go through this ordeal.

Figure out a way to convince my friend and his wife that your Angus bull will give them this peace of mind, plus more good Angus-sired calves to sell, and you will get his business. A simple listing of the facts, no matter how impressive they are to you or your fellow Angus breeders, won't get the job done.



Suppose your bull has a plus-30-pound EPD for weaning weight. The primary benefit a commercial cow-calf producer derives from this is obviously more pounds to sell at weaning.

There also is the benefit of more valuable replacement heifers to go back into the herd. Those good maternal cows will mean increased profits for years to come.

There are also other less tangible but more potent benefits that heavier weaning weights offer. For example, the pride of having the heaviest, top-selling steers on the market. The good feeling a person

gets when others walk up and brag on the quality, weight or price of his calves can be priceless.

We don't talk much about polled cattle any more. I don't know why. It is an extremely valuable trait for the breeder who sells bulls in areas where horned commercial cows are prevalent.

Many cattle producers pretend that they don't mind dehorning. It is just a matter of rubbing caustic compound on the calf's horn buttons, they quickly point out. But even in the best run operations calves get overlooked and now and then an application doesn't work properly. Every fall at roundup, someone is stuck with the job of a cutting the horns off a number of calves. It is a bloody, awful mess.

One Montana rancher told me how he and his brother, before they switched to Angus bulls, always had a heated discussion about who was going to do the job.

Polled cattle provide the benefit of peace of mind and less emotional stress. This is something that nearly everyone in the livestock business can appreciate.

Good ads come from good ideas that dramatize benefits. Research has shown that a reader studies a page for two seconds or less to decide whether or not to read it. That is not long enough to absorb the facts and features that cattle advertisers use in their ads and translate them into benefits.

What will catch the reader's eye and pull it into the ad is one good idea, one good benefit spelled out in easy-to-read headline type. It is even more effective if supported by an attention-getting illustration and good graphic design.

Sure, facts are essential to the success of an ad. But facts don't sell by themselves, at least in most cases. Someone once observed that people actually buy only two things — good feelings and solutions to problems. Keep this in mind when you design your next ad. 