

When writing headlines...

Tell How Your Cattle Can Help the Customer

Leo Burnett was one of the greatest advertising people of all time. He once told an advertiser, "Don't tell people how good you make the goods; tell them how good your goods make them." It is sound advice for anyone who advertises.

Good advertising tells prospects how your cattle can help them; in Burnett's words, "...how good your goods make them." When you tell people how wonderful your herd or your herd bull is, you are just bragging. People aren't impressed. Good advertising doesn't brag, it explains how the reader can benefit from what you have to sell.

Believe me, no one cares if your bull is "The best kept secret in the Angus breed," or if you now have "The most exciting calving ease herd sire ever born..." Buyers are not impressed by the fact that you have "Fabulous Females," or whether your bull is "Still The One."

Like you and I, your customers have problems. What they want are solutions. Business to business advertising that works best doesn't claim to have "the best" of anything. It offers practical solutions to real problems.

Since I have used lines from recent ads that are not as effective as they could be, let me give you a few from the same issue that work much better. One of the good ones reads, "Calving ease genetics without sacrificing growth." That headline offers two benefits that cattle producers are searching for.

Another good headline, that should have been printed in bigger and bolder type than it was, asked, "Looking to improve your carcass performance?" Following this was the name of the bull which the headline explained was the highest marbling bull of the breed. That claim, backed up by proof in the copy, isn't bragging. It is a fact that is needed to back up the advertising claim and convince the reader that he or she will receive the promised benefits.

Another headline offered, "The genetics to advance your program." That headline is a little more vague than the others, but it does talk about "you" the customer rather than "me" the seller.

And in this day, when designing the right breeding program seems more important than ever before, it catches your attention.

Headlines are just one aspect of an advertisement. But they work with the illustration to stop the reader as he or she pages through a magazine. Good headlines make you want to learn more about the goods being sold. If the rest of the ad resorts to hyperbole rather than presenting facts that back up the benefit offered in the headline, then a lot is lost. But the fact remains that stopping the reader with the offer of a sound, important benefit is essential if the advertiser wants to get the rest of the sales message across.



Remember that word "hyperbole." It describes very accurately what is seen in a lot of bad advertising. The word comes from the two root words, "hyper" which means excessive and "ballein" which means to cast or throw. Almost literally an excess of throwing the bull: extravagant exaggeration.

I know why we see hyperbolic headlines and claims in advertising. Some people misunderstand what advertising is supposed to do. No doubt many are influenced by what they see on television. Also, it can be difficult to write a good headline, and combine it with body copy that backs up the offer contained in the headline. It is easier to make an extravagant claim that doesn't have to be backed up and hope it attracts readers. Trouble is it usually won't, and it almost never is convincing.

As Leo Burnett knew, advertising should be customer oriented. It should address the needs, wants or desires of the customer. Most effective advertising works best if it offers to make customers feel better, or to give them more self esteem, or to help them overcome a problem and make more money, or all of these.

So when you produce advertising remember Leo Burnett: "Don't tell people how good you make the goods; tell them how good your goods make them."

