

MARKET COMMUNICATIONS

ONE WAY TO GET MORE MONEY FOR YOUR GOOD CATTLE
First of a 6-part series on promoting and marketing purebred cattle.

by B.E. Fichte

Market communications is a very complex science and includes everything necessary to favorably influence public attitude toward your ranch, your cattle and yourself. It will make money for you. It includes market planning, advertising, public relations, photography, ranch or company visual identity, direct mail, film or any combination of methods necessary to effectively tell your story. This first article discusses the overall concept of market communications. Following articles will discuss specific subjects such as advertising, public relations, photography, visual identity, direct mail (brochures) and other merchandising methods.

The series is developed and written by B.E. Fichte, a lifetime cattleman, award-winning journalist and photographer, and professional market communicator. A graduate of Texas A&M University in agricultural journalism, Bud is a former editor of THE PROGRESSIVE FARMER and FARM QUARTERLY and a contributor to numerous leading national and regional publications. His clients include leading agribusiness firms, beef cattle breeders and breed associations. He is author of "The Beef Cattle Book," a popular "how to" of beef production in the southern United States. His company, B.E. Fichte & Associates, provides advertising, photography and overall market communications for many leading beef cattle breeders and beef organizations.

Market communications. Promotion. Advertising.

Intangible, elusive, blue sky. The thought of combining this industry with one equally as volatile as the beef business had seemed remote. Unworkable.

At least, that's what we'd been told.

We also knew two or three things about the cow business.

1. We were the world's best producers!
2. We weren't good salesmen. We didn't sell cattle; people bought them. Too often for less than they were worth.
3. There should be better ways to sell our cattle, better ways to tell our stories and increase the value of our good cattle.

Thoughtful market communications seemed the best way to go.

A few cattlemen agreed. They put their dollars on the line, adopted the position long used by other industries and established year round market communications programs. Their motives were simple: Invest to make money. Increase demand. Increase prices. Increase profits.

It worked. That's why my company has stayed in beef cattle communications; that's why more and more progressive breeders consider sound promotion (communications) vital to their success.

What Is It?

Market communications includes everything you need to contact and favorably influence your prospective clients. It starts with an overall plan and continues through advertising, public relations, direct mail, photography, film, ranch or company visual identification, and any other merchandising methods which may be useful.

Market communications *will make you money*. We have proven it. But it must be based on *credibility*; it must accurately reflect what you have to sell; and the communications program must be consistent and quality-oriented. ("Credibility," or getting things in shape behind your fences, is the subject of another article to appear in this series.)

So far as the purebred cattle business goes, we believe in *class*, not mass. When you present yourself to the public, you'd better be dressed properly—with quality, accuracy and taste. That goes for the

quality of the idea or concept and the quality of the presentation. Prospective buyers do relate *how you look* to the type of operation (and product) you have. If you believe in the quality of your product and operation, then you must relate that quality to your public.

Too Much Good Advice

We get a lot of free advice in selling purebred cattle—lots of sure-fire 1-shot ways to meet our marketing needs.

"Advertise in my book. That's all you need. We'll even put it together for you. . . ."

"Let me put on a sale for you. That's the only way to get top dollars and establish prices for your cattle."

"Let's get some really good pictures of herd bulls. Show 'em around and send out a few. That'll pull in the buyers."

"Let me do a series of ads for you. Oh, sure, they're canned and have been used by a dozen or so other breeders. But it'll sure get people talking."

Or "Buy some of these candy-striped show sticks or star-spangled ball point pens that write in three colors. . . ."

The point is, all of us in communications have our own oxes to gore, our own special interests to protect. Unfortunately, *no one single technique will solve all your needs. But the right combination will work*—providing you do your homework, follow through and follow some of the guidelines and principles which will be discussed in this series.

Profile of a Good Program

Before considering that first ad, before taking that first picture or deciding on your first brochure, carefully think out your marketing program. Decide exactly what you want it to do. Here are some guidelines which may help you develop your program.

Continued on Page 121

MARKET COMMUNICATIONS

Continued from Page 26

1. State your *objectives*. A good marketing program should have definite goals. Write them out, evaluate them. Are they practical? Can you make them work? Will you make them work? In short, what do you want your program to accomplish?
2. It must be *continuous*. Stick with it. The rewards will be cumulative. Panicky 1-shot jobs generally cost more than they produce.
3. Your program should reflect or develop the *image* you want for yourself, your ranch and your cattle. Who are you? Where do you want to be? What do you want the industry to think of you and your cattle?
4. It must specify your *marketing position*. You must emphatically establish where you want to be in the market. Generally, you can be whatever you tell people you are *so long as you say it with conviction and quality* and can support that position. You simply decide where you want to be in the market, then design your marketing program to support that position. For example, do you want to appeal to the affluent high rollers? Then perhaps you should establish yourself as a snob or high roller. Do you want to be the leading producer of commercial bulls in southeastern Missouri, for example? Then assume that position, tell your prospective clients what you are, then support that position. Some non-beef cattle examples of effective "market positioning" include the Strawberry Board promoting the "fun fruit," ignoring the traditional nutritional appeal; orange juice promoted as the "any time" drink, not as a breakfast drink; Mercedes replacing its snob appeal with a "practical functional investment" approach.
5. It must identify your *audience*, that special group of people you must reach and motivate with your message. Decide who you must reach to gain your objectives. Commercial bull buyers? Purebred breeders? Investors? Where? How far can you reach, geographically? All external promotion—advertising, public relations, direct mail, etc.—should reflect a knowledge and empathy of the problems and needs of the audience(s). One of the most common faults of agribusiness promotion is the assumption that all ranchers and farmers think and act alike; therefore, they are faced with the same circumstances.
6. You must consider your *timetable*. How quickly can you reach your objectives? How quickly will people accept and favorably respond to what you are doing or saying? (For example, a rank new-

comer to the business will have a tough time selling his managerial and breeding expertise to the industry.)

7. You must realistically *evaluate your capabilities*. Can you produce what you claim in your promotion? Can you supply the need you create? The essence of marketing is to find a need, create a demand and meet that demand. If you create the need, then meet the demand with a product less than what you promised, you have committed a serious breach of confidence. Less kind folks call it fraud.
8. Your marketing communications program must reflect the *quality* necessary to project the image and achieve the objectives.
9. *It should make money for you*. Good marketing is an investment.

Putting It Together

After you have evaluated these points, you must get down to the nitty gritty of developing your program; you must come up with the right combination of elements to get your story across exactly the way you want it. Your external marketing-promotion program will include a combination of these communications techniques: *A visual identity program* or a specific "look" for all material used in promotion; *paid advertising*; *public relations*; *direct mail and other merchandising methods*; and *photography*.

Each of these techniques will be discussed in detail in following issues. Next month: Developing a Visual Identity for Your Ranch.

