

Merchandising

by Keith Evans



Your ads reflect your business

Ads can either attract attention and convince people to buy or turn people off and steer them away from doing business with you. How can this be? You might be surprised if you listen to your customers and pay close attention to your own reaction to advertisements.

A while back, I received a thoughtful letter from a regular reader with some definite ideas on the subject of advertising. I'll share them with you.

"I've always admired advertisers who have enough nerve to let you know up front how much money is involved," he wrote. "I shy away from advertisers who won't [print] a price for what they have to sell.

It's as if [the advertiser] thinks it's too much, but if he can ply [me] with high-powered sales talk, he can get me to spend more money than I intended or can afford."

It's a good point. Research shows that people respond

positively to ads that include the price of the product. My guess is that you do, too. Although price isn't ultimately the most important factor in making a sale, it is often the question a buyer asks first.

Should someone ask you to buy a page of advertising in an unfamiliar publication, the first question from your mouth likely would be, "How much is it?" This, despite the fact that the most important thing you need to know is how many of your customers and potential customers the magazine reaches and at what cost per reader. Price tells the buyers if they can afford the product in the first place.

Buyers sort by price and vice versa. Advertising the price of your cattle can help select the right customers. If your bulls range in price from \$2,000 to \$4,000 and you advertise this, producers looking for a \$1,000 cow freshener won't contact you. On the other hand, if such customers stop by to look at bulls, they will be mentally prepared to pay more than normal.

On the other hand, I wonder about people who proudly promote the average and top price of their recent auction without also publishing the full range of prices paid. This conveys the wrong impression, and it keeps people away who wouldn't pay the \$3,000 average price but would be comfortable bidding on the \$1,500 or \$2,000 bulls in the offering.

Another buyer who wrote me about advertising said, "The thing that catches my eye every time is a good picture, never mind the scenic background. I'm not interested in what a beautiful place they have. I'm just interested in a clear picture of [the livestock they have for sale]." He



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concluded with (and I don't think he was a commercial photographer), "Money spent on good photography is well-spent. Better no picture than one that does not flatter."

There's little to add to this. In most print advertisements, it's the illustration, in combination with the headline, that entices the reader to stop and to read the advertisement. The more interesting and provocative the illustration and the better it demonstrates the product, the more response it will generate. Good photography is indeed a good investment. In a future column we'll discuss ad photos and what you can do to get good ones.

Other pet peeves

Another letter writer knocked shows and the people who advertise show winnings. I don't think this is a real problem today in the cattle business. There is hardly a commercial cattle producer alive who rushes to a bull auction because the grand champion at the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) sired the animals. But many would go if the bull had a powerful set of expected progeny differences (EPDs) and also happened to have been the grand champion bull a year

ago. What you emphasize in your ads depends upon who your customers are and what makes them tick. You have to be aware of what will turn them on — or off — when you invest in an ad.

"People who just print their telephone number with no town or state must be ashamed of where they live. I never give consideration to these ads," another ad critic wrote me. Not many advertisers are this secretive. However, I do think that many marketers don't include enough information in their ads to make it easy for people to act.

List the names of every person who can answer a question for a potential customer, along with that person's telephone number. Don't forget your e-mail address. A potential customer can e-mail you a question any time the thought comes to mind. You have time to think it over and answer it quickly and accurately, at your convenience. It's an effective way to communicate.

Listen to customers

These are just the reactions of three or four people who read livestock advertising and respond to it, either positively or negatively. They don't have the accuracy or dependability of a survey. Still, they should prompt us to solicit information from customers and to pay attention to what they have to say. Also, listen to yourself. Become aware of what attracts you to various ads and what holds your attention. Use this information to improve your own advertising.

Then let me know what you think. I'd like to hear from you. If you are an advertiser, write and tell me what works best for you or maybe even what hasn't worked. If you are a buyer who responds to advertising, or who doesn't, tell me what kind of advertising impresses you. I won't print your name, but I'll use your ideas and pass them to others.

My e-mail address is evans34@ccp.com. You also can write in care of this magazine. I look forward to hearing from you.