

## Odds and ends

*The only real pleasure derived from cleaning out the garage or the farm shop, aside from having everything back in its place, is to discover the things you thought you had lost or the items you stashed away to use later and then forgot.*

### Cleaning house

Sorting through my column file, I found clippings and notes that were carefully put aside for later use because each one wouldn't make a full column. So here they are — those valuable odds and ends that have been saved from obscurity.

### Selling to your audience

Tractor Supply Co. (TSC) is one business that has found there is profit to be made from part-time farmers or people who buy land and move to the country to enjoy the rural lifestyle. TSC has revised its marketing strategy to attract small-purchase customers to its stores. The company caters to those people with a few head of livestock or a small farming operation.

In 2004 TSC is profitably bucking the trend that has led many marketers to believe that the only profitable customers are those with large operations who can buy in volume.

Registered beef cattle producers, it seems, could profitably tap this same market. Part-time, hobby or lifestyle farmers, whatever you want to call them, are growing in numbers. What's more, off-farm income provides them with the money to indulge their rural interests. Unit price isn't the deciding factor in where they buy. They want to deal with someone they can trust to give them good advice, fair treatment, and service before and after the sale. So, if you can't or don't want to compete with breeders who sell 10-30 bulls at a time to large operators, try to sell to people who want a show steer or heifer or to people who want to take care of a few cows.

### The truth about advertising

There are a lot of half-baked ideas floating around about advertising. Not only are they untrue, they mislead advertisers into doing things that waste time and money. Here are four research-proven facts about advertising that probably run counter to what you have been told.

1) Ads that run on left-hand pages are just as well read as ads that run on right-hand pages. The same is true for ads that run in the front third, middle third or back third of a publication. Still, advertisers worry about the position their ads have in a publication, and some pay extra for a "preferred" position. The fact is that since many publications carry more ads on right-hand pages, ads appearing on left-hand pages sometimes get better readership.

2) Unusual-shaped ads that jut into the editorial copy do attract more attention. Some publications won't allow you to run this kind of ad, but it may be worth a try. The only people who read your ads are the people who notice them, and unusual shapes can attract attention.

3) Full-page magazine ads that run next to each other are just as effective as ads that run next to editorial. Advertisers often insist that their ads run next to an interesting, exciting piece of editorial. Problem is, the editorial may be so good that it steals attention from the neighboring ad. One study showed that ads next to each other actually increased readership. Another study showed no difference. So don't worry about where your ads run, worry about their ability to attract attention and deliver your message.

4) Two things making a really effective ad include a) creative work that attracts attention and leads the reader through the ad and b) material that strikes the reader's interest in the message. The second explains why poorly designed breeder ads often get some results in livestock publications.

Virtually every reader of beef cattle publications is interested in beef cattle. But don't be fooled. Really well-done ads get far better readership and attract far more potential customers per dollar invested. Take with a grain of salt the person who claims

that everyone reads all the ads in any publication.

### Flag their attention

A headline flag, or kicker, can help an ad reach a more specific audience and boost its readership. For example, if you want to sell a group of bulls with excellent weaning weight expected progeny differences (EPDs), your headline might read, "We have 20 bulls with excellent weaning weight genetics." You can add more punch by adding a kicker, "Tired of selling lightweight calves?" to catch the eye of those who have suffered from low calf weights at sale time. The headline could look something like this:

**Tired of selling lightweight calves?**  
We have 20 yearling bulls with excellent weaning weight genetics.

### Focus on flow

On another note, some advertisers like to wrap copy around an illustration to create a special effect. It can create reader interest if it is done properly. But when you do, be sure to keep the block of type on the left side of the illustration. People are accustomed to reading copy where each line begins just below the beginning of the previous line — the way this column is set. It is called flush left. They are also accustomed to copy that is uneven on the right (ragged right). Magazine copy is often set this way, so the uneven lines that butt up to the illustration on the right present no problem. However, virtually no editorial copy in any publication is set flush right and ragged left. Ragged left copy is difficult to read because the eye gets lost as it moves from the end of one line back to the beginning of the next one. People stop reading copy that is hard to follow.

### Build it strong

Finally, remember that building an ad is somewhat like building a fence. You can buy posts, wire, staples, stretchers and a posthole digger, but you don't have a fence. By the same token, you can assemble type, photos, a logo and purchase space in a magazine, but you don't have an advertisement. In both cases it takes a plan, an understanding of what you wish to accomplish and skill to put it all together to achieve the desired results.

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