

Merchandising

by Keith Evans

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Turn yourself into your customer

"If you can't turn yourself into your customer, you probably shouldn't be in the ad writing business at all."

That's a quote from the late Leo Burnett, legendary advertising professional and founder of the Chicago advertising agency that still bears his name. The words are as true today as when he uttered them years ago.

So much advertising waste stems from the fact that advertisers don't understand the people they seek as customers. They don't know what makes customers tick, how they do business, or more specifically, what problems they have that need solving. In short, too much advertising is created from the point of view of the advertiser, rather than the intended customer.

This is true of too much of the advertising created for or by seedstock producers. For example, registered Angus breeders understand bull lines and pedigrees. Famous bulls that are long gone, like PS Power Play and Pine Drive Big Sky, for example, have a place in the heart and mind of nearly every Angus breeder who was active in the business a decade or so ago. Many have cows in their herd that go back to these bulls, and they can cite you the sire and dam of each. Registered breeders know the importance of a grandson of a famous

bull of the past or present. This is not so with many commercial producers.

Popular bull names and pedigrees mean far less to the average commercial cattle producer and bull buyer. These cattle business people rely more on expected progeny differences (EPDs) and the reputation of bull suppliers. Yet many Angus breeders seek to sell bulls to commercial cattle producers and insist upon communicating with them like they had the mindset and interests of registered breeders. They talk pedigrees and list the names of their herd bull battery, assuming this is the kind of information a commercial cattle producer needs to make an informed purchasing decision.

Moreover, not every EPD is created equally in the minds of commercial cattle producers. A registered breeder may have great carcass EPDs on many of his bulls and feature them to the exclusion of all else. But these figures mean little to the commercial producer who sells by the pound at weaning time. Carcass quality may be a good secondary selling point, but the fact is, this kind of producer needs weaning weight before anything else, and probably calving ease second. Other commercial producers stress other things. A producer who retains ownership of his cattle and sells them grade and yield on the rail, will worry less about weaning weights and more about yearling weights and carcass quality.

What Leo Burnett says to advertisers, including you, today, as a breeder and marketer of registered Angus seedstock, is that you must be able to put yourself in the place of these potential customers -to see the cattle business from their point of view. You must understand them and produce advertising that is not only intelligent, interesting and easy to read, but that presents your cattle in ways that address the problems and hopes of those whom you want to be your customers.

It seems obvious to me that this approach drives the most successful and serious seedstock producers. Instead of worrying about what other registered Angus breeders are doing, these people worry about what their commercial customers are doing and thinking. They are particularly cognizant of what will be on the minds of customers two years down the road. That's when the breeding decisions registered breeders make today will yield the bulls designed to attract the attention of their potential customers.

As I've pointed out many times over the years, people purchase benefits, not features, and they do it for one or all of three basic reasons:

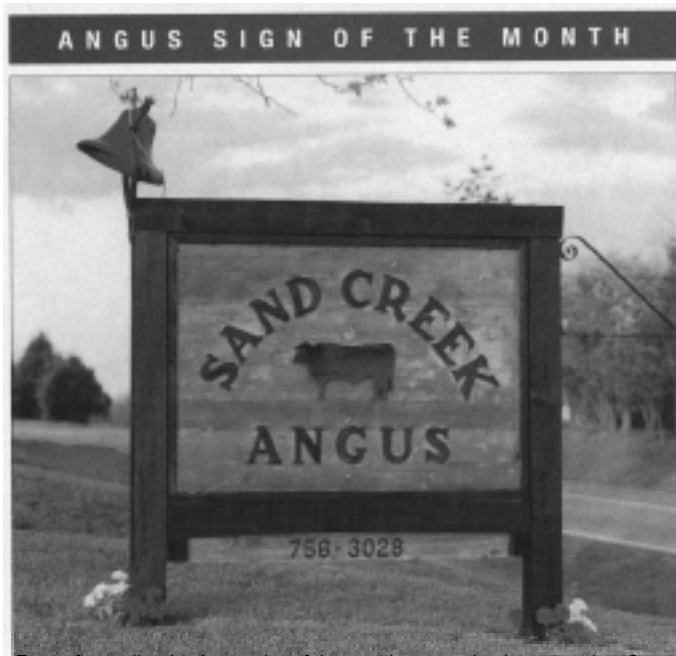
1. To make themselves look good
2. To make themselves feel good or
3. To make more money.

Therefore, the advertiser who isn't sure what makes his customers look good, feel good and make more money is in a poor position to breed bulls that appeal to the intended buyers, or to produce an effective advertising program to sell them.

Think about this as you read another Leo Burnett quote, one I like just as much as the one that opened this piece.

"I have always felt that advertising could be something to get excited about. Something to do thoughtfully and well."

AJ



Even after ending the Angus sign of the month we received more entries. So we run one final, homemade sign before ending the program. This beautiful sign for Sand Creek Angus stands on Hwy 32, two miles east of Farmington Mo. The sign was submitted by owner Randell B. Johnson, and was constructed by his stepson Marty Hibbits. It's made of two-inch cedar boards and mounted in 8 x 8 treated pine posts.

Please don't send any more sign photos. If you already have them in the mail we will return them. And, again, thanks to everyone who took the time to photograph and send in a picture of your sign for our readers to see.