

# Merchandising

by Keith Evans



## Foundations of an effective advertisement

When you buy a bull, you check his pedigree and performance records. You need to know how he measures up to the standards you've set for your herd before investing your hard-earned dollars. But do you do the same when you buy advertising?

Many people don't. They buy advertising based upon someone else's standards. The problem is that they have no yardstick to measure an advertisement or an advertising campaign. So they end up with ads that look like everyone else's ads. The majority of advertisers can't be wrong!

Or can they?

Although it isn't always apparent to the untrained eye, the best print advertisements are usually made up of five basic components. When properly combined, these five components should accomplish five basic tasks. Understanding the five components or building blocks of a print advertisement and the five tasks that an ad should accomplish will provide you with an advertising measuring stick.

The five basic building blocks of an advertisement are:

1. A dominant, attention-getting illustration;
2. A headline that includes a benefit;
3. Persuasive body copy;
4. A consistent signature (logo); and
5. An overall distinctive appearance.

Each ad should accomplish the following five basic tasks:

1. Grab the reader's attention;
2. Arouse the reader's interest;
3. Create desire;
4. Build conviction; and
5. Make the reader want to act.

**The illustration is** the most important element in most ads, certainly in most cattle ads. The ad illustration usually shows the product, demonstrates how it is used or illustrates the results a buyer will receive

from purchasing the product. But before it does anything, the ad illustration must grab readers' attention and compel them to stop and learn more, if only to satisfy their curiosity. When it comes to stopping people, we're talking a matter of seconds, maybe two or less, for readers to decide whether to stop and learn more or to turn the page. That's a powerful order for a photograph.

Your herd bull may be so unique and so overpowering compared to his competition that a standard posed profile photo will do the trick. But for most, that won't work. It's true that a potential customer will want to see a picture of your bull before he invests in the bull's semen or progeny. However, a smaller secondary photo might accomplish that task while the attention-grabbing work is done with a more imaginative picture.

**The headline**, like the illustration, should draw attention to what you are selling and create interest. It should expand on the illustration's promise by telling what the picture is about. Moreover, it should state the most important benefit a customer will receive — more pounds, more dollars, more peace of mind, whatever.

A slogan or a trite expression won't get the job done. Some advertising experts work for days to write the "perfect" headline. Never shortchange the headlines in your ads.

**Compelling, persuasive body copy** is essential if the illustration and headline do their jobs. Once your ad has the reader's attention, it's the job of well-written copy to create desire on the part of the reader to own the product or at least learn more about it. This is where you give the sales pitch, explaining the features and benefits of the cattle you have for sale.

Good copy also creates conviction by backing claims with proof. State the facts, spell out your guarantee and make people want to do business with you. Good copy tells the sales story in a nutshell, in a logical

order. Each sentence should make the reader want to read the next sentence. In closing, the copy should ask the reader to take some action — telephone for more information, ask for a sale book, stop by for an open house, come to the sale, etc.

Too many advertisers assume the reader will automatically act in a certain way, but that's seldom the case. Tell them how to do it, and make it easy.

**Part of this final job** is handled by the ad's signature. Effective ad signatures feature the business logo and include the name of the contact person, the telephone number, fax number, e-mail and Web site addresses, mailing address, and directions to the farm or ranch.

The herd logo must be attractive and distinctive and identify your business at a glance. A professional should design it, and you should use it in every ad and every promotional piece you produce.

**These four elements** — illustration, headline, body copy and signature — should be combined in such a way as to create an overall distinctive appearance for the advertisement. You can identify top advertisers simply by the distinctive appearance of their ads, even before you recognize the illustration, read the headline or identify the logo.

A distinctive appearance in an ad is usually produced by someone who knows how to combine proportion, color, typefaces and other graphic elements to produce a pleasing, eye-catching design. Once you have achieved the desired "look," use it time after time to build recognition for your business.

Study advertising like you study genetics and cattle breeding. Insist that each ad you run contain the five basic building blocks and accomplish the five basic tasks. You'll be more confident about approving and paying for advertising, and your advertising will return you more money.

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