

Merchandising

by Keith Evans



Image may not be everything, but it's something

In what kind of package do you wrap your cattle?

That's not an irrelevant question. Packaging can affect the sale of a product more than the contents. Advertising research has proven this time and again. The impression the package makes on customers and the reaction it produces in them actually can affect a consumer's reason and taste.

Two classic tests demonstrate this. They explain why national marketers put so much time and effort into image and packaging — and maybe why you should, too.

A few years back the manufacturer of a new roll-on deodorant ran a test to determine which of three label colors was most effective. The labels were placed on bottles containing identical deodorant. Although only the colors were different, the test subjects were told they were evaluating three different deodorant formulas.

An overwhelming preference was shown for label B. The test group reported that it had a more desirable aroma and was effective longer than the other two.

The label C color scheme didn't fare nearly so well. Testers said that C had a less desirable aroma and didn't work as long.

Color scheme A nearly got the company in trouble. Some in the test group said that A gave them an irritating underarm rash. Three of the test group actually visited a doctor, and some threatened a lawsuit for subjecting them to a dangerous product.

More classic examples

What's more, labels can affect the taste buds. In a test to determine which brands of beer tasted the best, a panel was given the opportunity to drink four brands of beer under three different circumstances.

Initially the test group poured the four brands of beer from identical, unmarked bottles. Their taste buds and noses told them brand B was best and brand A was second-best.

Next the test group tasted the same four beers in the same kind of bottles, but this time a typewritten label was attached, identifying the brand of beer in each bottle. This time brand A was voted most desirable, and brand C came out the loser.

Finally the panel poured the beer from the familiar bottles by which each brand was marketed and known. Given this information, the panel rated C as best and put D at the bottom.

The familiar bottles and graphics — none of which had anything to do with the flavor and aroma — sparked different reactions and responses within the people who were doing the test. The labels and bottles connected the consumers with such things as how they were first introduced to the brand of beer, whether or not it was an enjoyable time, how their peers relate to the product and a host of other subconscious factors.

Many of us can remember when the Coca-Cola Co. decided to change its century-old formula for Coke. They ran all kinds of blind taste tests, which showed that their new formulation was preferred over both the original formula and their major competition. But when it was introduced and people drank the new formula from the old, familiar bottles and cans, something was wrong. It didn't taste right, and the new formula was eventually eliminated.

Your turn

What does this have to do with marketing registered seedstock? More than you might expect. First of all, breeds of cattle affect cattle producers differently. One bad experience, or one bad word from someone they respect, can affect their attitudes about that breed for a lifetime. You've seen it happen. That's why you have a responsibility

always to present your breed in the best light.

More importantly, how you package your own cattle within the breed affects your sales. Your standing in the cattle industry affects how good potential customers think your cattle are.

How you first introduce yourself to potential new customers is like putting the right color on a product label. The right approach is pleasing; the wrong approach may cause them to develop a rash. The impression your place makes when visitors first arrive can affect how good or how bad these individuals believe your cattle to be.

None of this has anything to do with the genetic value of your cattle, but it has a great deal to do with how much a customer is willing to pay.

The breeder who can quickly find the performance information on a sale animal has the advantage over the breeder who has to dig through a stack of printouts to locate the right figures. The breeder who exudes confidence in his breeding program and his ability to add value to the cattle he produces wraps his product in a much different package than the breeder who appears hesitant and unsure.

A top-quality advertising program creates an impression that cannot be separated from how and what people think of your herd. Advertising not only should promote the benefits that you and your cattle offer a customer, it should position you in the market as an innovator and a leader. Do not allow yourself to be perceived as one who is not much different from the rest.

Nearly all of us have shaken our heads over the years in reaction to breeders who seem to consistently sell cattle for more than they are worth. Believe me, cattle don't sell for more than they are worth, not year after year. In an age when the best beef cattle genetics are available to almost any serious cattle breeder, packaging is more important in marketing now than ever.