

What Can Your Ad Say in Two Seconds?

As your potential customers thumb through this or any other magazine they face a bewildering number of choices. The next page may be more interesting, more exciting, more informative. Do you read this ad or story or turn the page.

Plus there is never enough time. All of us receive more publications than we ever get read completely. We must make fast decisions on what we will read or skip over. In fact, research has shown that readers take less than two seconds, on the average, to decide whether or not to read a particular advertisement or editorial piece.

To get the highest possible readership for your advertisement you must show them something interesting, exciting and hopefully potentially profitable that can be absorbed in less than two seconds.

More often than not people decide to read an advertisement because of the illustration that catches their eye and makes them want to learn more. I was reminded again of this while studying a magazine that had been evaluated, page by page, for readership by Ad Chart, a professional readership study organization. When readers were asked what one ad in the entire issue stood out most in their minds, they invariably selected ads with attractive appropriate illustrations.

But readers were also asked why they selected a particular ad as most memorable. More often than not they mentioned the illustration specifically. The most memorable ad in the magazine, according to the readers, was one for a cattle implant. You probably remember it too. It's the one with the tractor trailer sagging down to the ground in the middle. The implication is that using the product will add more weight to your cattle by sale time.

Every single ad (including the American Angus Association's Marshall McGregor ad) that readers singled out as being most memorable used an attention-getting illustration unlike anything else in the issue. As one reader said about the Angus ad, "(I like) the old farmer sitting on a bale of hay giving you good advice."

There was another breed association ad in the magazine. It used a photo of a nice looking bull in full color, posed about like animals you see in this publication. The ad scored lower in overall effectiveness than the Angus ad. It didn't get a vote for

most memorable in the magazine, although it was a good ad and scored above average on overall effectiveness.

Still it proves that you don't have to have a standard shot of a bull in your ad to entice people to read your message. In fact, it might be a disadvantage in many publications which feature a lot of beef cattle advertising. Remember, even the most beautiful pine tree doesn't stand out in a thick pine forest.

When you plan your next advertising program think of ways to illustrate ads without the standard picture of a bull, cow or cow and calf. If you need an animal in your ad use a large close up of the animal's head and shoulders, or try one from the rear if the bull's rear quarters are a desirable asset. Above all, be interesting and different.

One ad a lot of people liked showed a real farmer in a faded denim cap and sweaty tee shirt. He was sitting on a baler, telling why he liked this particular model and brand. You couldn't see what the baler looked like—you didn't need to. Everyone knows what balers look like. What buyers want to know is why one baler (or one Angus bull) is better than another. Try a testimonial ad using one of your good customers. Believe me your ad will stand out in the *Angus Journal*.

One of my pet peeves was vindicated in this study. An equipment manufacturer who wanted to show eight of his products in a half page ad scored 18 percent below the average in effectiveness. Using a bunch of small illustrations in an ad is most always confusing. Usually the bigger and bolder and more simple the illustration, the more readers it attracts.

Don't get me wrong. You can have a good ad without any dominant illustration. There was one in the issue in question. It took an editorial approach to a problem that many farmers have a question about and used small illustrations to highlight various parts of the copy. The overall ad was attractive, almost like an illustration, and was well designed.

But except in special instances, a great ad will need a great illustration. It is the best way to hook a reader in two seconds or less and get him or her to read all or most of your advertising message.

