

MERCHANDISING

by Keith Evans, Director of Communications and Public Relations

An Advertising Checklist

I'm not much for self-improvement checklists. Most are simply devices to sell magazines at the newsstand. Editors know we are suckers for ways to lengthen our life or improve our love life.

Having said that, the other day I came across a list of seven questions to ask yourself to determine if your advertisement is good or not. And it is excellent. I don't know who compiled the list. But it is worth passing along.

So here it is:

1. Will your ad get noticed immediately?
2. Will it get noticed at all?
3. Is it interesting?
4. Is it relevant?
5. Is it telegraphic?
6. Is it single minded?
7. Is it too safe?

The big mistake many livestock advertisers make is conformity—they produce look-alike ads. As a result most ads don't stand out from the pack. Too few ads are noticed immediately, and some never attract a reader.

The illustration, the headline and the overall design command most of the attention an ad receives. The more time and effort put into these three elements, the better chance the ad will be noticed.

Getting noticed is one thing, retaining a potential customer's interest is something else. That's why, at the very least, an ad should be interesting. If there is nothing interesting about your cattle, your breeding program or yourself, then you have no reason to invest in an ad in the first place. We all read what interests us and ignore the boring. Boring ads don't stand a chance.

It seems obvious that an advertisement should be relevant. Why would anyone spend money on Angus advertising and promotion to put forth a message which isn't relevant to the business interests of potential customers. Yet it happens every day. Good advertisers always address the problems and needs of potential customers. Good ads show how the advertised product will solve problems and fill needs.

A vague or hidden advertising message remains that way. Readers won't work to understand what an advertiser is trying to say. Ads should be telegraphic. The instant a reader notices an ad the essential message should be telegraphed to him or her. Readers aren't intrigued by ambiguous slogans, or plays on words or headlines that mean nothing unless the body copy is also read.

A rule of thumb for good advertisements is, "One ad, one idea, one premise, brilliantly executed." In other words ads should be single minded. The more messages an ad tries to deliver, the more ideas it includes, the more promises it makes, and the more elements used, the less effective it becomes. The toughest job in producing an effective ad is throwing out all but the most important ideas, words and elements. The second most difficult thing is keeping the ad focused on the main point.

Playing it safe is smart for a driver or airplane pilot. It is not so crucial in advertising. An advertiser sometimes needs to take risks. I am not talking about taking chances by being dis-

honest, or disgusting. But the advertiser who tries never to offend anyone, especially competitors, runs the risk of very bland advertising. It can be beneficial to use a fresh, untested approach. Maybe every Angus ad needs up to 12 bull pictures and a pedigree for every one, or maybe it doesn't. Not many breeders, however, have ever tried another way.

So don't play it too safe. But even if you decide that only safe ads and safe advertising is for you, at least make your ads fresh and original. Also, make sure they demand attention, are interesting, relevant, telegraphic and single minded. And throw in a touch of brilliance whenever possible.



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