

# Merchandising

by Keith Evans



## Million-dollar tip: Design ads to be noticed

I learned how to become a millionaire the other day.

An author, pitching his book on a radio talk show, told how he had identified the characteristics of people who have accumulated a net worth of at least a million dollars. The book, he promised, was full of facts and checklists that readers could use to change their lives and to set themselves on the road to riches. The cost was a measly \$30 — a small investment indeed for the information you would need to become wealthy.

But as I drove down the road, the author continued to fill his allotted time with the interviewer, and the truth was revealed. To amass a million bucks, all you need to do is get a good job, live below your means, save what you don't spend and invest it wisely. No need to read the book. The idea could be expressed in 50 words or less.

Bookstore shelves are stacked with all kinds of self-help books. Most of them start with a sound, practical idea or two that can be summed up in a few pages, if not a few paragraphs. But to be profitable, the ideas must be expanded to cover several hundred pages bound between hard covers that can be hyped and marketed successfully for \$30 or so. The book is necessary to enrich the author and publisher, not to make it easy for us to get useful information.

A while back, searching through some advertising journals, I came up with a list of questions designed to help people in business determine whether their advertising is effective or not. I'm willing to share them here rather than to develop a book that could make me a million.

Here goes.

- Will your ad get noticed immediately?
- Will it get noticed at all?
- Is it interesting?
- Is it relevant?
- Is it telegraphic?
- Is it single-minded?
- Is it safe?

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**Research shows** that as readers go through a magazine, they decide in two or three seconds whether to read a particular story or ad. That's why successful advertisers use techniques that get their ads noticed immediately.

Sometimes an advertiser gets a second chance to get noticed. Most of us reread magazines that we like. The second time through, we are more likely to notice items we skipped the first time. This is particularly true of breed-association magazines. But some ads get such little attention, they are passed over time after time.

It goes without saying that getting noticed is the most important job of any ad. The illustration, the headline, the benefits offered and the overall design of an ad determine whether it will be noticed immediately, later or not at all. We've already talked about this, but one big mistake livestock advertisers make is to run ads that look like all the other ads in a publication. Look-alike ads get overlooked.

It's an advertising sin to be boring. If nothing else, an ad should be interesting. As a registered cattle breeder, you sell a product that can affect the profitability of your customers' business. You have to work hard to keep this kind of ad bland and uninteresting, but many succeed. Just because you advertise cattle or some related product to cattle producers doesn't mean they are automatically interested in what you have to say. Interesting ads entertain, inform, appeal to a reader's self-interest or do all three.

Your bull may be "the greatest" animal

you ever have raised. So what? Your ad for him must tell why that is relevant to the buyer. Whatever characteristics make your bull great in your eyes must be translated into benefits relevant to the potential customer. You have to demonstrate worth and value by providing evidence to prove your point. Advertise from the buyer's standpoint, not the seller's.

**Don't hide** the benefits you offer in your ad — make them jump off the page. That's what being *telegraphic* means. People don't have time to waste. They won't take time to figure out what you are trying to communicate. Get their attention, then tell them your story without making them work. Be telegraphic. Make the layout simple, and make every word in the headline and in the body copy count.

You may have a dozen things to say about your bull or your program, but don't. Keep your ads single-minded. A good rule of thumb in advertising is one ad, one idea and one promise. The more themes you introduce into an ad, the less effective it becomes. If you have more than one main point to make, you need more than one ad.

Finally, don't play it safe. Good advertisers take risks to make a point and stand out from the pack. If you don't dare to be different, you risk being ignored. Taking risks doesn't mean that you should set out to offend someone or to stretch the truth. But I can guarantee you, if you use fresh ideas that are creative and make strong points, you are likely to upset someone. Those who fear that a competitor might take exception to their ads are probably playing it too safe.

So there's the checklist. Use it to make your advertising program pay dividends. And don't feel sorry for me. I'll look for another idea that will make me a million dollars.