

# doing a better job

## MERCHANDISING

by Keith Evans, Director of Communications and Public Relations

Planning an advertising program, particularly when the planner is spending his own money, is about as exciting as preparing your income tax.

There is a small difference, however. If you don't pay your tax, Uncle Sam comes out to get you. If you don't get your advertising program properly planned and executed, no one challenges you, with the possible exception of a few hungry ad sales people. That may be why so few registered cattle producers set up a 12-month advertising budget and then develop a plan to invest that money so that it reaps the biggest possible dividends.

Planning is the key to the success of any advertising program. Even great ads with eye-catching design, creative headlines and illustrations, and hard-selling copy can be wasted if they are run at the wrong time or don't reach the right people. It has been proven time and again, in all types of businesses, that failure to establish a budget and set up a comprehensive advertising plan can be one of the most costly mistakes made by a merchandiser.

Here are some guidelines that might help you get started.

**First**, set aside a convenient time to plan your program. It will probably take you a couple of days the first time.

December, when most of your cattle are sold and things have quieted down some, could be ideal.

**Second**, draw up a sales map of your market area. Put a dot near the town of every purchaser of your cattle over the past three years. This will show you exactly what your market area is and let you decide what other areas you need to cover in order to attract more customers.

**Third**, decide upon a 12-month advertising budget. Look at what you have spent in the past, then think about what you want to accomplish in the year ahead and how much advertising you would need. Or, set aside a certain percent of gross sales of registered cattle for your ad budget. Some people figure 10 percent of their gross sales, yet others do an effective job with as little as four or five percent. After a year or two of planning, you will have a better idea of what is required.

**Fourth**, start to draw up your advertising calendar by determining when you need to advertise. If you have bulls coming off test in May, for example, and want to sell them as yearlings, you will want to advertise those cattle in April and May, and maybe even in March. The schedule will allow you to not only get your advertising in on time, it tells you when to prepare it as well. If you advertise in a March monthly publication, for example, the advertising deadline will probably be Feb.

1 or earlier. So as you can see, if you decide the day you are weighing bulls off test that you need some advertising to get them sold, you are literally months behind schedule.

**Fifth**, take your goals, your sales map, your budget and your advertising

calendar and start allocating advertising. First make a survey of the publications and radio stations that cover your market area. Also decide whether you want to use some media that goes beyond your marketing map—something that is regional or statewide.

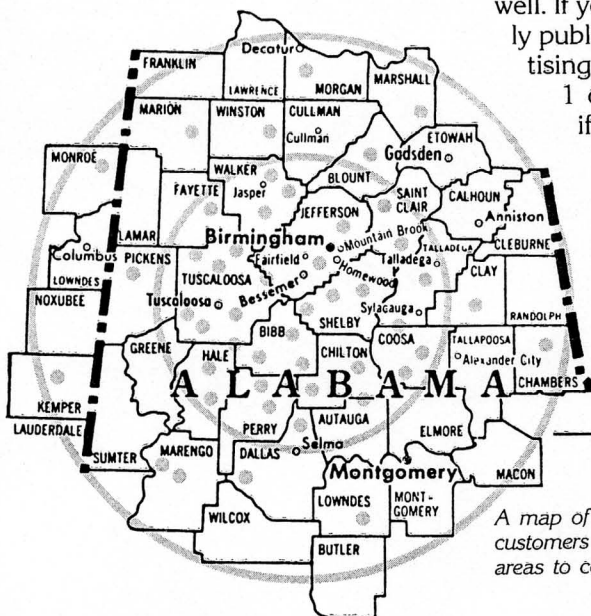
When you have these facts, telephone the various media to determine their advertising rates, if you don't already know them. With this information in hand, start dividing your budget. You will soon see just how many and what size ads you can run in any one publication or on any radio station. You'll do a lot of juggling. You may eliminate some media in order to get larger ads in the remainder. These are compromises that everyone makes when planning an advertising schedule.

Your final product is a little gem—a comprehensive advertising plan and schedule you can follow for the next 12 months. At the beginning of each month you check the schedule to see what ads are due that month. Also check on the ones that are due a month or two down the road so that you can begin putting together the necessary photographs and other information you will need to make them effective.

You will also be a hero to the people you advertise with. If you are able to provide them, 30 days in advance of their deadline, with information about what you want to advertise, what you want to accomplish with the ad, ideas for an illustration, etc., they are going to bend over backwards in an effort to provide you with the best possible advertisement.

So, even though planning an advertising program may not be any more fun than figuring your income tax, it can certainly be more rewarding and profitable. And once you have developed a system that allows you to check the value of various media (more about that later) you may find, as some Angus breeders have told me, that planning the program becomes one of the fun and exciting jobs you do each year.

AJ



A map of your market area can illustrate where customers are located and help you decide what areas to cover in order to attract new buyers.