

MERCHANDISING

by Keith Evans, Director of Communications and Public Relations

Don't Build Your Business On These Advertising Myths

We are here today to debunk two seductive and often repeated advertising myths.

THE FIRST—You can even sell a dud with great advertising.

THE SECOND—A great product will sell itself

“A great advertising campaign will make a bad product fail faster. It will get more people to know it's bad.”

William Bernbach, a famous New York advertising agency executive once said. And there are plenty of case histories to support his claim.

Some of you who remember the 1950s recall the introduction of the Edsel, a new Ford Motor Company automobile. Its birth was accompanied by all the fanfare and advertising that the Ford family and their company could muster. If advertising could assure a success, Edsel was a sure hit. But it failed. All the Ford millions couldn't convince many consumers to buy Edsels. Thanks to the advertising and promotion nearly every adult and teenager knew about the new car. But it couldn't make them like it.

Also about this time the Joseph Schlitz Brewing Co., changed the brewing formula for its beer. At that time Schlitz was the largest selling beer in the United States, if not the world. The change would save money, but it would also slightly change the taste. The Schlitz executives reasoned that with their position in the market and the powerful “Gusto” advertising campaign their business would continue to grow and prosper. Many beer drinkers, however, did notice the change and they didn't like what their taste buds told them. Despite the brilliant advertising campaign they switched brands. Today the company no longer exists.

More people remember the Coca-Cola brush with disaster. This came when executives decided to change the formula of the world's largest selling soft drink to make it taste more like Pepsi. Coke drinkers rebelled and the company brought back the old formula in time to retain market share. Coca Cola's much admired advertising could not convince consumers that the new product was better than the old.

Just as advertising will not guarantee the success of a poor product, a great product will not sell itself. U.S. business history is littered with great inventions and ideas that failed for lack of advertising and promotion. David Sarnoff, the late head of Radio Corporation of America (RCA), knew nothing about electronics. Yet he recognized the value of radio technology and changed the world, first with radio broadcasts and radio set manufacturing,

and later with television. Few if any today can name the men who developed the radio and made the first broadcasts because these men were scientists and not marketers.

Two separate inventors in the 1920s produced a food blender. But neither made a penny with their invention. However, Fred Waring, better known for making music, took the idea around 1937, and hired people to perfect and market it. He made a small fortune with the Waring Blender. Good as the idea and product was, it couldn't sell itself.

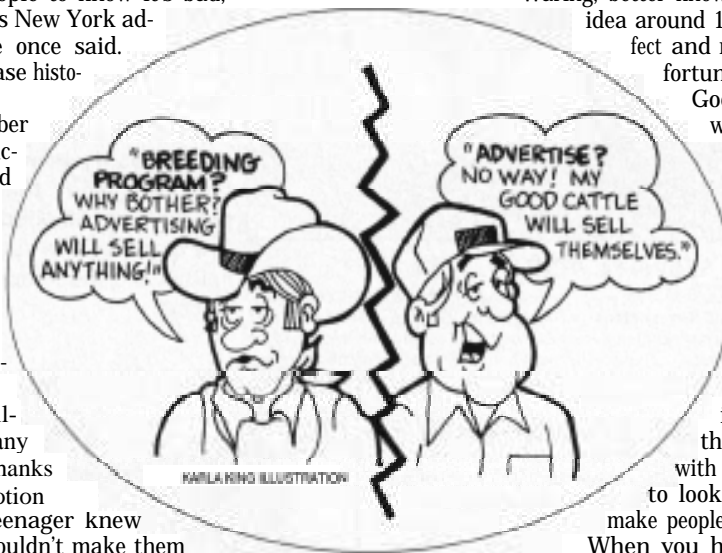
What works is a great product backed with great advertising. If you want to be successful in advertising, start with a great product, William Bernbach told an interviewer some 30 years ago. He said that the most important element to successful advertising writing is the product. In those days his agency worked with clients, inspecting the product to look for advantages that would make people want it.

When you have something that people want, that they can get nowhere else, then you have a product that is easy to advertise and that sells. Then if you can develop advertising that skillfully conveys the message of uniqueness and value you are ahead of the competition. But Bernbach warned, “No matter how skillful you are, you can't invent an advantage that doesn't exist.”

So remember, before you start designing advertising, the product comes first. Your cattle not only need to be the kind your customers want and use, but you need to find something about your operation, your breeding program, the cattle themselves, the service you provide, your location, your family, or whatever, that sets you apart from your competition. This special “something” should provide a benefit or benefits that the buyer can get only from you in your market area.

This accomplished, then advertising becomes vital. Develop a skillful and effective way to convey the benefits you offer to potential buyers in your defined market area. And finally, back this program with a budget that will accomplish the results you need.

So perish the thought you can sell any kind of dog with good advertising. Likewise, don't fool yourself into believing that a great herd of cattle will sell themselves. These are myths. The real magic in advertising comes with a marriage of the two — a great product and powerful advertising.



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