

# MERCHANDISING

by Keith Evans, Director of Communications and Public Relations

## Black and White Equal to Color? Well, Sometimes!

Should you eschew black-and-white ads for more costly four-color advertising? Yes, maybe.

Four-color advertisements, as you probably know, are the result of using four colors of ink (red, yellow, blue and black) to produce a life-like printed color illustration. Research has shown that four-color ads, on average, are better read and remembered than black-and-white ads.

The research, by Cahners Advertising Research, shows that four-color score 38 percent higher than black-and-white ads. The study of 89,292 individual ads over a 20-year period revealed the following medium "noted" scores: black-and-white ads, 34 percent; two-color ads, 35 percent and four-color ads, 47 percent.

A noted score means readers remembered seeing the ad in the issue surveyed. It is a good indicator of the attention grabbing power of an advertisement. An ad that isn't noted will not be read.

**But that's not the whole story.** The researchers at Starch Tested Copy, an independent organization which measures advertising effectiveness, have shown many black-and-white ads attract attention and get readership equal to the best four-color ads.

Black-and-white ads work well when picturing people in dramatic situations, Starch reports. One ad-which worked especially well, featured a closeup of a well-known person's face. Black and white advertising works well to focus the attention of the reader and make an ad seem

more "real," they reported.

The researchers recommend advertisers avoid black-and-white when appealing to the appetite or

I never criticize individual Angus ads in *the Angus Journal* or any other publication. But I urge you to study all the advertisements in



when depicting physical demonstrations. Color, they said, helps to make distinctions -to make individual parts stand out.

No question about it, the four-color process puts life into Angus cattle ads. Angus cattle are more appealing in color, more life-like and thus more attention getting. Many black-and-white photographs of Angus look simply dreadful in print.

the first 23 pages of the August 1994 issue. Almost without exception the color photographs are more attention getting than the black-and-white ones. Note your reaction to similar ads, in black-and-white and color. Determine which ones you like best, and why.

There is at least one exception in these 23 pages. One advertiser grabs your attention with a black-and-

white photo of a bull grazing on the range. The animal's head is buried in the grass. There is no attempt to present the "ideal" bull, though the animal is obviously masculine and well muscled. The photo is not pretty, yet it focuses attention on the ad and invites readership. I am not sure that four-color would improve this advertisement.

**Having said all this,** remember that color use in your advertising shouldn't be a primary consideration. It should come out of your advertising plans and your goals. Invest first in good advertising planning. Decide what your message is, who should hear it, and how to reach them.

Next, invest in well designed and well written advertisements. Make sure every element in every ad works together to deliver a powerful message. At this point you will decide about color. Then invest in good photography. Hire a professional and make him or her responsible for producing the photographs you need.

Finally, look at your ads as a long-term investment rather than something to use once and throw away. Run them time after time until you are certain they have been seen and read by a majority of your potential customers.

Color can be a useful tool to help produce powerful, effective advertising. But like any tool it must be used for specific reasons, to accomplish a specific job.