



Merchandising

► by Keith Evans

The power of print advertising

Despite the growing use of the Internet and e-mail, farmers and ranchers depend heavily upon agricultural magazines and newspapers for business information. What's more, they will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

Research support

That's the findings of a recently released survey conducted by the Agri Media Council of the American Business Media (ABM). Some 58% of those who responded said ag publications would be more or much more important to them in the coming years. Just over one-third said that publications would have about the same importance for them, while only 8% reported that these publications would be less or much less important.

Clearly farmers and ranchers still read and depend upon newspapers and magazines. But what's even more encouraging to advertisers is that young people, the age group we often think of as relying heavily upon computers and the Internet, read more and are likely to depend more on ag publications than any other age group.

A whopping 99% of farmers and ranchers in the 20-29 age category reported that publications will be as important or more important to them in the coming years. This group also spends more time reading each week than older farmers and ranchers, an average of 5.3 hours (hr.). This compares to an average weekly reading time of only 3.4 hr. for those 30 through 39, and just 3 hr. on average for those ages 40-49. The average time spent reading each week by all those surveyed was 3.3 hr.

Sophisticated advertisers have long known that young people are more responsive to advertising and are more likely to try new brands and products.

Registered seedstock producers and their associations have a vested interest in attracting the attention of this young, more easily influenced audience. But advertising to them and any other group must be done with skill and purpose. The advertising saw cuts in both directions. Advertising that is not factual, or that fails to promise solid benefits and support them with facts, will turn readers off, doing the advertiser more harm than good.

Some 69% of the surveyed farmers and ranchers said that ag publications expose them to the most advertising messages. Farm radio and direct mail advertising were tied for second place with 9%. Ads on farm TV programs and ads in printed directories tied for third with 5% each. Only about 3% reported that they are exposed to advertising on Web sites.

Don't ignore the options

That's not to say that you shouldn't evaluate and use all media when planning your marketing program. Farm radio and direct mail are valuable advertising tools. Sometimes people don't even recognize direct mail as advertising. Your newsletter, yearling bull report and your sale book are all direct mail pieces when delivered to past and potential customers. But the people who receive them may look at them simply as helpful information rather than as advertising.

According to the survey, readers respond directly to print advertising. In fact, 84% reported that they telephone dealers or manufacturers for more information very frequently, frequently or sometimes.

And 50% say they send back advertiser reply cards for products that interest them. To get more information about advertised products, readers visit Web sites — 37% contact a manufacturer's Web site, and 31% contact a dealer's Web site. Ads are also used for reference — 64% say they save individual ads for future use.

Seedstock advertisers should design ads to elicit response. Make it easy for the readers by including all the information needed to check your Web site, send an e-mail or talk to you on the telephone. This kind of feedback from readers helps you evaluate the

effectiveness of ads in various publications. Follow-up measures done properly will boost sales.

Creating an image

Marketers who do a good job of advertising their product seem to have a more positive image among readers. The survey found 53% thought that agricultural suppliers who communicate regularly through publication advertising are likely to be better-established companies.

Good advertisers are also thought of as more reliable suppliers, 37% of those surveyed said. These positive images are important, but of little value until translated into sales. There is many a pitfall between establishing a favorable image through advertising and depositing a check from a satisfied customer. But

the safari through the marketing jungle often begins with a well-planned and well-executed advertising program.

Whether we like it or not, farm and ranch operations continue to get larger. Some 65% of those answering the Agri Media Council survey reported that the size of their operations has increased through mergers or by buying or renting more acreage.

Bigger operators are generally busier people and more difficult to reach personally. But they read magazines, and so do young operators and smaller operators who are trying to compete and become more efficient and profitable.

Print advertising shouldn't be the only way you communicate with your customers and potential customers. But, as the survey shows, it should be an important part of your advertising program.

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