

doing a better job

MERCHANDISING

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Great Ads Never Die— Unless You Kill Them

"Great ads never die, they're just thrown away."

With apologies to General McArthur, this paraphrase of the famous line from his retirement address makes an important point that those of us who deal in advertising should never forget.

Good advertising, unlike a good car or tractor, almost never wears out before it is replaced by something new. And, the less experienced the advertiser the more likely he or she is to replace an ad that is getting the job done with one of less selling power.

It is only natural. By the time we have gone through the pains of creating an advertisement, proofing, making corrections, re-reading and re-proofing and then see it appear in several publications, we are tired of it. So, we assume, that everyone else must be sick of seeing it too—it is time for something new. But the fact is by the time you or I get tired of our ad, it is just being noticed and read by the people we want to communicate with.

Let me give you an example. In a recent issue of a national farm magazine, the "best read" ad was for a crop herbicide. Some 30 percent of the maga-

zine readers read the headline and most of the copy on that ad. The average ad in the magazine, however, earned a "read most" score of just under 16 percent. In other words, only one out of six readers of the magazine read the average ad. The worst ad in the book enticed only 2.9 percent of the readers to read most of the ad copy. Out of 58 ads studied, 13 had scores of 10 percent or less for the read-most category.

As you can see, if you have a message that you want to get to a high percentage of a publication's subscribers, then you need to run that same ad several times just to make at least one impression on the majority of the readers.

But advertising is even more complicated than this. On the surface it would appear that if you run the average ad four or five times then you would get your message across to a majority of the subscribers. Not always so.

First of all, not everyone reads every publication. Second, some people skim through some magazines if they are busy and read others more completely. Others may be turned off by your ad or what you are selling and never read it. And most important you must remember that you are not advertising to a static audience, but rather to a passing parade. Every year this magazine, the Angus Journal, has some 3,000 new subscribers and about that many are dropped. In three years there is a 30 to 40 percent turnover in readers.

If you run the same ad five times a year forever, it will be brand new to about one out of eight readers each year. This is true whether you advertise in the Angus Journal or nearly any other livestock publication.

You may remember the ads for Charles Atlas' Dynamic Tension method of body building that ran for years in publications like Popular Mechanics and Argosy. They were always the same. The cartoon strip featured a skinny kid who took his girl to the beach where a muscle-bound bully kicked

sand in his face and embarrassed him in front of his date. After signing up for the Dynamic Tension course the skinny kid, turned body builder, took his girl back to the same beach and used his newly developed muscles to give the bully his due desserts.

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This ad with a few variations ran for more than 40 years and made both its creator and Charles Atlas rich. If Atlas had insisted that his advertising manager come up with a new and different ad each month, the story would no doubt have been different.

So if you develop an ad or a series of ads that are effective, run them time and time and time again. Only when a reader has seen an ad three or four times does that ad begin to lose any effectiveness at all. And if he or she hasn't bought from you by then, probably they never will.

There are several good reasons for changing an advertising campaign. Some of them might be: if you have a new herd bull, if you are planning your first production sale, or if you have a new product for sale that you don't regularly have, such as a large group of mature cows. Otherwise discard an ad or an advertising approach only when you are sure that it no longer works. The same ad approach that got your bulls sold this year should do as well next year. A small modification might make it work even better.

Just remember, good advertising is hard to come by, and buying good advertising space is a major investment. So the next time you are tempted to toss out an ad that works in favor of something "new and different," remember the general. "Great ads never die, they're just thrown away." **AJ**

