

# MERCHANDISING

by Keith Evans, Director of Communications and Public Relations

## Advertise Only What You Can Deliver

Makes no difference what kind of business, the basics of marketing don't change.

Some time back I came across a newspaper that serves owners and managers of inns and bed and breakfast operations. The biggest gripe about these businesses, the newspaper reported, is that guests complain they don't get what they thought they were paying for. The author's conclusion was simple, "do not advertise what you don't have."

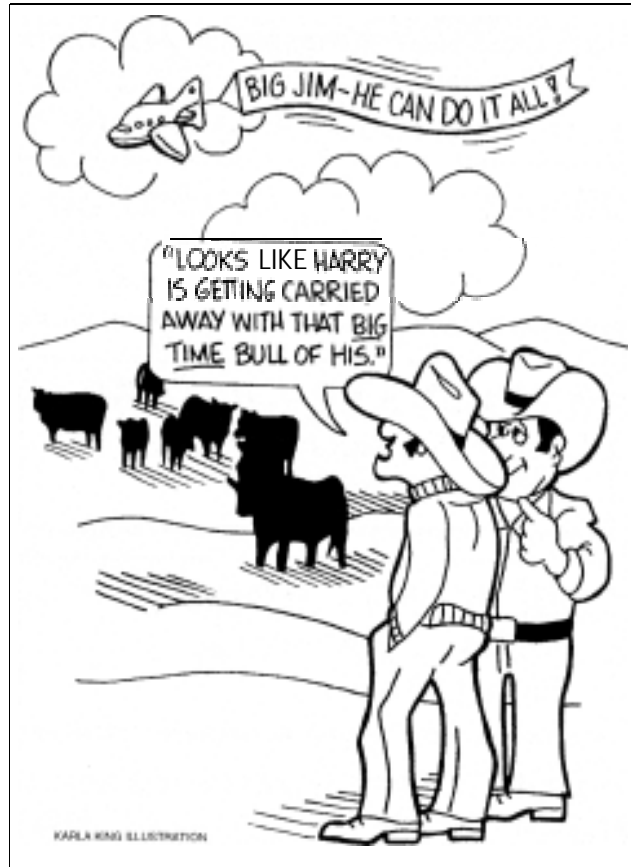
Some advertising claims are so far fetched that readers don't believe them. You have seen these ads in all kinds of media and for all kinds of products — "The World's Best Widget," or whatever. People laugh at such claims, and then turn the page.

The real problem comes with more sophisticated advertising which looks and sounds believable, but makes claims the advertised product can't quite live up to. It makes no difference if the product is good, or maybe even the best available, if the advertiser has promised more than the product delivers, the customer will be unhappy. And rightly so.

Some advertisers fall into the trap of promising more than they can deliver without thinking about what they are really doing. They want to produce an advertisement which is different and that will attract readers. They actually believe that a clever slogan or a far-fetched claim is the right thing to do. Often they simply get caught up in their own enthusiasm.

For example, many a breeder with a bull that looks great and has very good performance records, combined with a popular ancestral pedigree, has been tempted into advertising, "The bull that does it all." Or they advertise him as "The finest bull of the breed," or some such thing. It doesn't enter their mind that what they say will be taken literally by many readers.

A good way to avoid customer disappointment when writing advertising is to eliminate abstractions and hyperbole. Instead of writing that a bull is "great" or that he is a "quality" animal, cite the bull's best features and then explain what they can do for the buyer. Translate them into benefits that the buyer will receive, then let the reader make up his or her own mind whether the bull is "great" or not.



Some people resort to abstractions because they believe they shouldn't write long headlines or long copy. This is seldom the case. Research has shown that long headlines and long body copy do not frighten off readers. In fact if the advertiser has a good story to tell and does it well, people not only read long copy, they enjoy it.

So if you happen to have a bull with an outstanding combination of expected progeny differences (EPDs) for birth, weaning, maternal, yearling and carcass, there would be nothing wrong with writing a headline something like this:

*Need a bull with a balanced combination of EPDs — birth through carcass? We may have what you need.*

The important thing about headlines and ad copy is not how long or how short they are, but whether they get the job done. Working together the two must create interest in the

product. This is done by offering benefits. The copy then must convince the reader that the product can deliver the benefits. The copy must offer proof such as EPDs, pedigree, even testimonials from satisfied customers. Then it must ask the reader to act — either telephone for a free brochure, write for a catalog, or come by the farm or ranch. All this can't be done in a couple of sentences.

When a person plans to make a major business investment — and bull selection is such an investment — it is hard to provide them with too much information. That's why advertising which concentrates on benefits backed by facts and sound reasoning is far better than advertising featuring slogans, or a play on words, or braggadocio claims.

Buyers expect a product to be at least as good as it is advertised. They are nearly always delighted when a product delivers more than the seller promised. But heaven help the seller when the reverse happens.

*Keith Evans*