

# Merchandising

by Keith Evans



## Market your herd as a brand

“Traditional marketing is dead,” contends Sergio Zyman, the former marketing executive for Coca-Cola.

The marketing guru, featured in a recent issue of *Advertising Age*, is referring to the new trend in high-dollar advertising that rejects the traditional approach of building recognition for a product and promoting its merits.

Instead, producers of many of today’s TV spots seemingly create just for the fun of being creative, he says. Company-advertising people let them do it in fact they don’t buy into the no-sell theory. You’ve seen the ads that try to entertain but don’t mention the product being sold until the close of the commercial. During the whole time, nary a single benefit is promoted.

“I think half of the advertising that is put together today has no linkage to a strategy to sell more stuff,” Zyman says.

Although most of us in the seedstock business haven’t bought into this new ad trend, some of Zyman’s comments apply to our business, as well as to the international marketing of sneakers, soap and soft drinks.

Our big problem is that too many seedstock advertisers still haven’t learned the basics of traditional advertising. Not only do many cattle advertisements not entertain, they don’t attract attention or sell benefits either.

“Advertising,” Zyman contends in the *Advertising Age* interview, “is supposed to be a small part of the marketing mix; it’s supposed to communicate the benefits and differences of a brand. That’s all.”

On the other hand, he defines marketing as “a discipline, a science that positions your product in front of target consumers in relative terms to your competition. It has to present and explain and package and incite and insist the (customer) buy more of your stuff instead of the other person’s. Marketing has to drive the product development.”

### ■ Only the start

It’s all true. Too often cattle producers look at advertising as their entire marketing

program. Advertising should attract the attention of your customers and potential customers, and it should communicate the benefits of your cattle and your genetics and the reasons customers should buy from you. Your advertising, done properly, will interest people in you, your cattle and your breeding program. It should get them to your door or to your sale or at least on the other end of your telephone line. But advertising doesn’t sell cattle — you do.

We also tend to advertise features rather than specific benefits. Features like performance and pedigree are certainly important. But we tend to forget that our target audience has the opportunity to buy seedstock from a wide variety of sources. As a result, it’s often necessary to tell why a particular birth or yearling weight is important to commercial customers.

More than likely they buy bulls of various breeds, or at least consider them for purchase. And, as we know, not all EPDs are made alike. So list the features, but explain their benefits.

Most breeders don’t look at their herds as brands like John Deere tractors or Tide® detergent, but they are. Every herd needs continuous promotion to maintain top-of-mind awareness. Advertising is the most important way to establish and maintain awareness of your business. When people think of Angus cattle, you want everyone within your designed market area to think of you first and favorably. That’s top-of-mind awareness. It’s the most valuable asset you can own, and advertising is the best way to achieve it.

I recently spent a month in Australia helping that country’s Angus Society put on a series of marketing workshops. Producers of nearly every beef breed in Australia, as well as registered sheep and emu breeders, attended them. Our goal was to help these people understand how to design a complete marketing plan for their business. Most of the material for these programs came from my 1999 columns.

During this past year I hope I’ve convinced you that marketing takes planning and involves almost everything

you do. Your involvement in the livestock industry, your work in the community, the appearance of your headquarters and of yourself, and the professional or unprofessional way you handle potential customers are all as important to your marketing program as your advertising. And they shouldn’t be left to chance.

### ■ Driving product development

The same goes for your breeding program. As Zyman says, marketing has to drive your product development. This means not only knowing what commercial producers want today in the bulls they buy, but what they will likely want five years from now. How successfully you market cattle in 2000 depends directly upon the breeding decisions you made two to three years ago. Thinking five years down the road is the minimum planning time you need.

Finally, Zyman believes that marketing is too important to be left to professional marketing people alone. Everyone, he says, is in the marketing business. And in your cattle operation that means you, whether you are the owner or the manager. It means that you can’t delegate responsibility for the direction and substance of your marketing program.

You can hire people to design ads, sale books and herd brochures. You must have the assistance of professional media people. But none of these professionals or amateurs, as the case may be, know enough about your cattle or your breeding program and what you want to accomplish to do the job without your help and your vision. As Zyman concluded in the interview, “The strategy has to come from the company.”

You are the company, and that’s why every seedstock producer needs to know the basics of traditional advertising and marketing. It’s not dead; it’s just hibernating, waiting to be awakened and put to work for you.