



Merchandising

► by Keith Evans

Add advertising last

Advertising is usually the first thing that comes to mind when registered beef cattle producers think of marketing, but it shouldn't be.

Logical progression

At least that's the opinion of Amy Curtis-McIntyre, vice president of marketing for JetBlue, the highly successful new discount airline that has created so much excitement among vacation and business travelers.

"Advertising is the last thing you bring to the (marketing) mix," says Curtis-McIntyre in the December issue of *Advertising Age*.

"You start by getting the product right, getting your attitude right, getting everyone (connected with your business) to understand the mission. Then you move to telling the story through PR (public relations). You build the advertising last, and that way you can live on realistic budgets."

This is a logical marketing progression for most companies, including those in the beef seedstock business.

There is no question that the most important thing in seedstock marketing is to develop the right product — cattle with the kind of genetics that satisfy customers, solve problems and make more money. To do this a marketer not only needs good cattle, he must also define a primary market area and learn what the majority of potential customers within that area need and want. And this is not a onetime thing. Keeping up with customer demand is an ongoing process.

Further, as Curtis-McIntyre emphasizes, along with the right product a marketer needs to understand the mission. In most instances, successful breeders realize from the start, or soon learn, that they are not in the business of selling cattle, they are in the business of satisfying people.

JetBlue realized, after Sept. 11, 2001, that they weren't in the business of selling air transportation, the *Advertising Age* story

relates, rather they were selling travel, service and humanity.

The next step

PR is the next logical step in marketing. It can do things that are very difficult to accomplish with advertising. PR can personalize you and your business in a noncommercial way with someone else telling your story.

Good PR involves knowing and gaining the respect of the leaders in your area who can help influence a cattle producer's buying decisions — people like livestock Extension

specialists, feed and equipment dealers, youth leaders, bankers, etc. Make sure that local newspaper, radio and

even television reporters and editors know about you and your business, then give them something positive to report on — your new bull, your participation in a beef cattle convention or meeting, etc. Host field days and other events that bring people to your operation to learn about your cattle and your breeding program. Be active in local and regional beef cattle organizations. Use every PR vehicle available to establish your reputation as a solid businessperson, a serious cattle breeder, and one who is willing to help.

If you stop and think about it, most businesses use this marketing approach. You often read about new model cars, tractors, farm machinery or veterinary health products, before you see them advertised. Once a product has been developed for a particular customer base, and the industry has been informed through PR, advertising is the next step.

This is especially true in business-to-business marketing where the buying cycle,

the time between when a potential customer first hears about a product and then purchases it, can be months or even longer. Most of your bull customers probably only buy from you once a year, so keeping them informed, and maintaining top-of-the-mind awareness, requires an advertising program. Advertising is also essential for developing top-of-the-mind awareness in producers who aren't regular customers, or who have never purchased from you.

How to advertise successfully

Successful advertising has nothing to do with exaggeration and everything to do with communicating your message in a memorable, effective way. "We have never overclaimed in our ads, nor will we," says Curtis-McIntyre in the *Advertising Age* article. "We don't say, 'We have the best flight attendants in the business,' even though we do. But what we feel we now get across is a real sense of who we are — human and humorous."

You may not want to position your business as humorous, but you surely want to be seen as human and approachable — someone with whom people would like to do business. If more people in the seedstock business understood this, the value of their advertising would increase dramatically. When producers advertise that they have "the best bull in the breed" or a bull "that does it all," they can be assured that many people don't believe it, even if it is true. Buyers who do believe the claim are likely to be disappointed because they expect too much. Advertising the same bull with more modest claims that highlight benefits will almost surely produce more satisfied customers and probably more sales.

There is a big difference between selling airline seats and selling bulls. But the fact remains, the techniques used by the most successful companies can be applied with equal success to even the most modest registered beef cattle operation.

E-MAIL: evans34@ccp.com