

Merchandising

by Keith Evans



Don't use the one-shot approach to marketing

Let's face it: It's fun to breed cattle, but it's cattle sales that pay the bills. And you may never reach your sales goal without a marketing program. Understanding the importance of programming is essential to marketing success.

Look at it this way. Suppose your doctor says that to preserve your health you must lose weight and get in better physical condition. Taking his advice to heart, you skip lunch. That evening you do as many sit-ups and push-ups as you can, then you run until your legs and lungs force you to quit. For dinner you forego the beef roast and mashed potatoes and eat steamed vegetables and a dry salad.

It's a heroic effort, but are you in shape? Obviously not. You are dog-tired, sore and hungry as a bear coming out of hibernation.

What's more, the prospect of going through this routine again in the near future has lost all its appeal. Chances are you'll conclude that improving your health and dropping weight can wait until later.

■ Try a program approach

A one-shot, all-out effort doesn't work. To get in shape and lose weight, you need a program — one that fits your needs, your goals and your ability to sustain it day after day and year after year. Stop for any length of time and muscles get slack and the waistline bulges.

Marketing works much the same way. I've known people to take the one-shot approach. They become convinced they must do more advertising and promotion to get their seedstock business off the ground.

So they plan something spectacular — several one-page color ads to run next month and a four-color herd brochure to mail widely to potential customers. Then they sit back and wait for the sales to roll in.

When not nearly enough happens to justify the expense, they become discouraged and conclude that advertising really doesn't work after all.

Breeders with unhealthy marketing practices, like the person with an unhealthy lifestyle, need a program — one designed for their particular business and one they can stick to month after month and year after year as long as they plan to remain in business.

The marketing program must take into account the goals of the breeder, the message that must be delivered to potential

customers, and the ability and willingness to make the investment.

A program must also be dynamic — able to change with times and conditions. What you do this year may not be appropriate two years from now.

Change may be warranted because your cattle operation has grown or developed in another direction or because other conditions like media or the market change.

What's more, regular testing and evaluation of a marketing program will almost surely dictate change.

One of the best small-herd owners and marketers I ever knew would regularly ask his customers where they learned about him and his cattle. He eventually narrowed down his advertising to two unlikely publications, plus his national breed magazine.

He never would have known to do this if he hadn't constantly evaluated what he was doing and been willing to make changes. He was a friend of every media person in the area, but he only bought advertising in media that delivered customers.

■ More than advertising

A good marketing program for registered cattle involves a lot more than advertising. Other tools to stir into the marketing mix are direct mail, personal sales calls, cattle

shows, consignment auctions, road signs, truck and trailer signs, and effective logo use.

A program also should include good public relations. This means a plan to contact and influence potential customers and to work with the media in your defined market area.

When you host a field day or a tour stop or when you invite FFA students out for a judging contest or to weigh cattle and study performance records, you will influence potential customers.

When you inform the media about these events, they will appreciate the story idea and more people will learn about your business. This kind of planned exposure is extremely valuable.

During my years in public relations, it was always gratifying when breeders told me that a news photograph or story prepared by our department and printed in their hometown newspaper had brought them a new customer.

Sometimes this kind of media exposure just happens. Someone mentions an upcoming field day or other event to a reporter who then shows up unexpectedly to cover it.

More often, it is the result of a plan or program. Programming doesn't necessarily mean that you will have to invest more advertising and promotion dollars. A good

program will make your marketing investment work harder.

■ Make dollars count

A program might even allow you to reduce marketing costs. What's more, it will give you more confidence in what you are doing and more control over your destiny. Without a program, you always wonder if you are doing the right thing.

There is always the temptation, when an advertising salesperson calls, to buy one more ad or do just a little more. With a planned program to follow, you can say no with confidence, knowing that you have all your marketing bases covered.

This is not to discredit media advertising representatives; they are essential to our business. Too often, however, breeders buy ads because a friend asks them to rather than because the advertisement fills a particular marketing need.

Design your program carefully. Evaluate it constantly. If something doesn't pay off, drop it and invest more in the things that do. And never plan to shut down your marketing program until you are ready to shut down your business.

