



Merchandising

by Keith Evans

The unforgivable marketing sin

The one unforgivable sin of advertising is to be boring. It seems so obvious, yet advertising Hades overflows with work that was greeted with a yawn or, worse yet, wasn't noticed at all.

Boring is unforgivable because our world is filled with interesting things and fascinating ideas — and so is every business. If an ad does nothing else, it should be interesting and informative. Furthermore, every ad should explain how the idea or product being sold would benefit the potential buyer. That's the most interesting message an ad can convey.

Some time back a producer of registered seedstock asked me if I thought he should include "institutional" advertising in his advertising mix. It was difficult to answer, because the individual wasn't sure what he meant by "institutional."

When some people think of institutional advertising they are reminded of advertising that features little more than an attractive logo and a slogan, such as "ADM — Supermarket to the World" or "GE — We bring good things to life." Some of us can remember "DuPont — Better things for better living through chemistry."

This kind of advertising doesn't sell a specific product. It's designed to make people feel good about the company and maybe increase the value of its stock. Companies that dominate their industries often sponsor these kinds of "institutional" ads. Dominant companies sometimes want to project themselves as being above the fray of ordinary commercialism.

If your business is on this level, then maybe you should run ads that don't sell the advantages of your cattle. But I don't recommend it.

Forget institutionalism

As a producer of registered beef cattle you should run only two kinds of ads — ads that promote the cattle you have for sale now and ads that promote the cattle you will have for sale in the future. Forget "institutionalism."

Every ad you run should be specific about your cattle. Each ad should give potential

customers at least one sound reason to buy from you.

Furthermore, prospective customers must be convinced to act now. You may not convince them to jump in their trucks and drive to your place to buy cattle, but you at least want them to send in a coupon, to make a telephone call for a sale book or brochure, or to get in touch over the Internet.

Convincing people to spend their hard-earned dollars on the genetic packages you sell, or even to take time out of their busy lives to contact you, can't be done efficiently with bland, look-alike advertising. To engage readers' minds and hold their attentions until your point is made, your message must be strong, compelling and interesting — never boring.

How can you accomplish this when you are not an advertising artist or an accomplished copywriter? I know the problem because I can't create great ads by myself. My suggestion is that you don't try to be creative, not unless you are skilled in this area. What you do need to be is a good advertising manager. That means knowing your business, knowing what you want to communicate and understanding the basics of advertising.

Understand the basics

We've discussed advertising basics in previous columns. To refresh your memory, they include:

- You must know and believe that benefit-filled advertising works. It is impossible to produce an effective advertising program if you have reservations about advertising's effectiveness.
- You must understand your customers and potential customers. Learn what they need and want. Almost no one can help you if you aren't sure what makes your customers tick and what will motivate them to buy your bulls.
- You absolutely must know the five things that every advertisement must

accomplish — grab attention, arouse interest, create desire, build confidence and conviction, and ask the potential customer to act. Further, demand that every ad you run accomplishes all five.

- By the same token, know the five basic building blocks of a good advertisement: a dominant, attention-getting illustration; a headline that promises a benefit; persuasive body copy; a consistent signature (logo); and an overall distinctive appearance. Don't run an ad that is missing one of these strategic blocks.
- Learn enough about the media within your designated market area to buy advertising space efficiently.
- Finally, work with talented people who can build on your knowledge and the information you have to produce ads that won't end up in advertising Hades.

Don't waste money

Boring advertising is not only a sin, it's a waste of money. I know one magazine publisher who claims that even the worst ad is worth something to the advertiser. Someone, he says, will see it and remember. But so what?

The question is, do enough people respond to a boring, uninteresting ad to make it economically viable? The answer is almost always, no. Boring ads waste time and money.

If you don't believe that, think about your own reading habits. Do you read every ad in a newspaper or magazine, or do you read only the ones that attract your attention and really interest you?

Don't fool yourself into believing that your advertising is better than it really is. Don't pay for ads that you wouldn't read if they didn't feature your name and logo. Also remember, it's a sin to tell a lie — even to yourself.