

# Merchandising

by Keith Evans



## Sell it with a classified

Some of the least-expensive, effective advertising available to you is classified advertising.

A classified in your local newspaper or a regional livestock publication probably would cost \$15 or less. But if the conditions are right and the ad is good, it will bring customers to your door, ready to buy. Were this not the case, local newspapers wouldn't have long lists of bulls for sale in their classified livestock sections.

I know classified advertising works. I've sold things with it. I even got in trouble with my family for selling our kittens.

It's not what you think. We had to find new homes for the kittens. The wife and kids just felt it was rather crass to sell these cute playmates rather than to offer them free to someone who would provide them a good home. My way, the kittens got good homes, but the new owners helped pay for the ad.

You can put the power of classified ads to work for you this bull-marketing season or improve your results if you already use them. It's just a matter of understanding how classified ads work and how to write them.

### ■ Ready to buy

Classified ads are unlike regular advertising. Few people read the want-ad section for entertainment or information. People seek out the classified section when they are ready to buy. They actually come looking for what you are selling. That's why want ads produce results almost immediately.

When potential buyers read a classified ad that interests them, they usually reach for the telephone. So when you write an ad for this section, you want not only to stimulate some readers to call but to weed out others. Here's how it works.

People usually scan the classified ads rather than read them word for word. Consequently, the first thing you need to do is stop them as their eyes scan down the column.

Never begin a classified ad with the words, "For Sale." That's redundant. Every advertiser has something for sale. Begin your classified ad with a boldface headline or read-in that describes what you have for sale

and offers, or at least implies, a benefit. Then follow up with all the information for which a bull buyer would be looking.

Below are the best and worst classified ads for bulls in my local newspaper this morning. It's obvious the second one is the best. The only thing I have changed is the name of the breed and the telephone number.

*Angus bull. for sale, excellent breeder, 4 years old. Tel. 555-5555.*

*Angus bulls. purebred, 18 mos. and yearlings. Excellent performance. Fertility tested. Can deliver. Tel 555-5555.*

You can do better than this, even though the second ad is far better than average.

Let's assume you have three bulls to sell locally. They are average bulls with fairly good pedigrees. They have respectable expected progeny differences (EPDs), and you will deliver them within 50 miles of your home for \$1,300 each. A good classified ad could read something like this:

*Angus Performance Bulls. Sired by Big Ned. 3 bulls with above-average weaning and yearling EPDs. Fertility tested. Good pedigrees. \$1,300 each. We guarantee every bull we sell. Free delivery within 50 miles. Jones Farm, Tel. 555-5555.*

Your first reaction might be, "That's too long. Classified ads sell by the word." But it is only a little longer than the better of the first two examples. In most publications the cost of the larger advertisement per bull you are selling will be insignificant. On the other hand, the few extra words of information and description will pay off in more serious inquiries.

### ■ Include the price

Most people shy away from including the price. It goes back to the old horse trader's mentality, I think. But printing the price has at least two benefits. First, it weeds out those people who are looking for an \$800 cow fresher. You won't have to answer all those calls from people who won't pay at least \$1,300 for a bull. Second, it brings to you only the cattle producers in the community who are willing to pay \$1,300. When the buyer calls, you are ready to talk about the bulls, not the price.

The "Performance Bulls" headline attracts not only buyers interested in your breed, it also attracts buyers who pay attention to performance. Most buyers look at performance records as a benefit. It wouldn't hurt to include some of the best EPDs in the copy to back up the performance claim.

By the same token, if the bull's sire is well-known, include that recognizable name in the ad.

Certainly include that the bulls are fertility-tested. That's important.

And finally, identify yourself and mention that you guarantee your cattle. This builds the reader's confidence. It is interesting how many breeders don't put their names in their classified ads.

Nearly every ad closes with a telephone number, as it should. This means you need to be near your telephone the day the ad is first published. People want to call immediately if they are interested, and you want to talk with prospects when they're hot.

What's more, if you miss the prospect's first call, the newspaper could disappear and your telephone number could be lost. Worse yet, the second breeder the prospect calls may answer the phone and get the business. If you will be near the telephone only in the evening, be sure to say so.

### ■ Not a complete program

With all the talk about classified ads, it's important to understand that you can't build a complete marketing program with want ads. Classified ads don't embellish your reputation or help you build much top-of-mind awareness. Furthermore, it's almost impossible to market "added value" in a classified. If you have herd-bull prospects or bulls priced greater than average, you probably won't bring in many prospects with a \$15 classified.

But the lowly classified advertisement does have a place in almost every registered beef cattle marketing program. Used properly, it will pay dividends.

*Keith Evans*