

MERCHANDISING

by Keith Evans, Director of Communications and Public Relations

I Know I Should Advertise More, But.

"I know I should advertise more to sell my cattle," the letter read, "but when should I advertise, and how much, and how much will it cost me to get the job done?"

It is a common query from seedstock producers who are more comfortable with breeding cattle than marketing them. It is one that must be answered satisfactorily if a breeder is to succeed in the registered Angus cattle business.

Let's look at the problem from another angle. Instead of a breeder of registered Angus cattle think of yourself as the owner of a yacht. You are cruising alone when you fall overboard and your boat sails on without you. There is no help in sight as you assess your situation.

Your goal is simple — to get safely to shore. The question is, how far and how fast should you swim and in what direction? Your first thought might be to make a dash for the nearest land. But if it is too far away you could run out of energy before you run out of water. A slow, energy-saving swim might be called for. If there is a current running parallel to shore it might be easier to let the current carry you along as you work your way slowly to safety. Or, maybe you should grab a piece of driftwood and hang on until help comes within signaling distance. Each of these methods, or a combination of two or more, could help you achieve your goal.

Advertising presents some of the same challenges. The program you develop depends upon your particular circumstances — the size of your herd, the number of cattle you want to sell, the number of potential buyers available to you, your experience and skills, your financial strength, and the amount of time you have to reach your goal.

Your long-range goal, as a marketer and advertiser, is to establish top-of-mind awareness among potential customers in your market area. When cattle producers in your area think of Angus cattle, or Angus bulls, you want them to think of you first and favorably. At the same time, if you are advertising during the bull marketing season, or the spring grazing season, you also want people who read your ad and contact you about bulls or females. Good ads create immediate response, and build top-of-mind awareness.

How much you invest in a program depends first upon how large a market area you need to cover. Eight to 10 counties is obviously less expensive to cover than five states. It also depends upon whether you plan to reach these potential customers entirely with paid media and direct mail, or with personal farm and ranch visits and telephone calls.

Top-of-mind awareness cannot be achieved in a week or even a few months. Sometimes it can take years. But everything else being equal, the more you advertise and promote the more people will receive your message and begin to act upon it.

Plan for the long haul. If you budget the bulk of your advertising for the first few months and don't have enough to maintain a year-round, long-range program, you may not reach your goal. You could end up like the swimmer who makes a mad dash for shore only to completely exhaust himself 100 yards from safety.

What every advertiser needs is a program. If your doctor tells you to get in shape and you go out that evening and exhaust yourself running and doing calisthenics, you are not in shape. You are only sore and exhausted. You'll be in shape only after you have been on a good exercise program for some time. You will stay in shape only by remaining on a program.

Advertising works the same way. You need to contact 90 percent of your potential customers, a minimum of six or eight times a year with your sales message. And you need to do this year after year, as long as you're in business.

You can reach potential customers with paid broadcast or print advertising by sending out flyers, brochures or letters; with road signs; by making sales calls; by making telephone calls; by referral from someone like a livestock Extension specialist or banker; by being on a program that presents you as an expert in beef production; by getting cattle producers to visit your place for a field day or open house; or a number of other ways. More than likely the successful marketer will use a combination of these and other methods.

So study and define your market area. Evaluate the media and other ways you can reach potential customers. Determine the cost of each, both in time and money. Figure out how to reach the bulk of your potential customers with a message six to eight times a year. Then allocate your advertising and marketing investment.

Finally, budget your resources to accomplish your goal as economically as possible. Only then can you answer the question, "How much and where should I advertise, and what will it cost me to get the job done?"



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