



# Merchandising

► by Keith Evans

## Darn good may be good enough

*Advertisers who claim they have the very best, even if it is true, usually disappoint their customers. The same is true for those who claim just a little more than their product can deliver. When it comes to advertising claims, darn good may be good enough.*

### Disappointment setup

A newspaper that serves the bed-and-breakfast industry reports the biggest gripe customers have about the business is that many establishments don't live up to their billing. Out of necessity, customers often book a bed-and-breakfast reservation based upon information in an advertisement or flyer. Disappointment results when the place isn't quite as good as it was described or pictured.

A peaceful Victorian mansion may actually be on a busy street. The venue that claims a secluded backyard with a hot tub might have a high-rise apartment building looking down upon it. These bed-and-breakfasts may very well be nice places and worth the daily rate — maybe even bargains. However, their true value will mean little or nothing to customers who feel cheated because the advertising promised more than was delivered.

On the other hand, Barry Schwartz, a professor at Swarthmore College and author of the book, *The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less*, claims that some customers get

so caught up in trying to find the absolute best product that they are never satisfied, no matter how good their purchases prove to be. Schwartz calls these people "maximizers." In a recent *Advertising Age* article, Schwartz explained that when advertisers make exaggerated claims, they may actually

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—Barry Schwartz

encourage people to be maximizers. So, no matter how good the "best" product is, it may fail to meet buyers' expectations and leave them disappointed.

### A pleasant surprise

Customers love it when their purchase proves to be even better than expected. Schwartz advises business people to, "Advertise in a way that establishes modest expectations, so that consumers will be satisfied, perhaps even pleasantly surprised. The more modest the claims you make for a product, the more satisfied customers will be."

Some registered beef cattle marketers exaggerate without even thinking about it. They assume that superlatives are standard fare in advertising and use them in an attempt to make their claims stand out from all the others. Caught up in their own

enthusiasm, they headline their ads with a timeworn slogan or a cliché that has little to do with the cattle being sold and probably overstates their value. This type of promotion is almost a sure bet to create disappointed customers.

It is difficult to know if you have disappointed customers because they will seldom tell you. Their dissatisfaction is usually expressed in one of two ways. The most damaging to the seller is when unhappy customers complain to other people. There are various estimates about how much damage unhappy customers do, but it is almost always serious. Customers who feel shortchanged usually complain to somewhere between six and 20 people, who then pass the complaint on to others.

The other way a dissatisfied customer reacts is by taking his business elsewhere. The seller will lose a customer and never know why. It is a costly business.

### Avoid exaggeration

There is absolutely no reason to exaggerate in advertising. What will tempt people to read and believe your ads are excellent illustrations and headlines that expand upon the main benefit offered. Your advertisement must be built around a central idea: a sound reason why customers should buy from you. The remainder of the advertisement should support and expand upon the claim expressed in the headline and illustration. Hyperbole won't help. In fact, it is almost sure to hurt.

Many beef cattle seedstock ads make too many claims with too little proof to back them up, even if all the claims are true. Today, in the face of research that tells us otherwise, we still see ads filled with small pictures, disjointed pieces of information and claims of superiority that go unsupported.

You probably won't buy a truck from a dealer who only tells you his vehicle is the best in the world. You will want to know what makes the truck a good buy and how it can fill your needs before parting with your money. Bull buyers are no different.

So, when you advertise, keep potential customers and their wants and needs in mind. Stick to the facts, and keep your claims modest. Customers who are pleasantly surprised with the cattle they buy are likely to come back for more. What's more, they will pass the good news along to others.

Darn good may well be good enough.

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