



Merchandising

► by Keith Evans

Creative marketing

Advertising is a personal and creative business. Great advertising, even just plain good advertising, comes from a basic understanding of how the ad creation process works.

Starting with ideas

“Creativity doesn’t create something out of nothing,” write Kenneth Roman and Jane Maas in *How to Advertise*, the third edition of this popular and informative book. Creativity, they say, “... uncovers, selects, reshuffles, combines, synthesizes already existing facts.”

Great marketing can’t be drawn out of a vacuum; it is painstakingly created under the pressure of marketing competition. Using facts, marketers identify the most valuable benefits they can offer to customers, then develop the ideas that great ads are built upon.

“You don’t start out with an ad, you start out with an idea,” Roman said in a recent *Advertising Age* interview. Once you have the idea, only then do you put it into a form — a print ad, a radio commercial, a billboard, a direct mail piece or a Web page.

These concepts were brought home to me recently when I made a presentation about writing headlines and body copy to a group of livestock publication people charged with turning information and photos into ads for registered beef cattle.

Responsible advertising

Their problem, they all told me, is that they are seldom, if ever, handed an idea with which to work. Forget ideas — rarely do they even get enough solid information with which to create an effective advertisement. Yet, without this information they have little, if anything, with which to work. The result is that far too many livestock advertisements don’t have a headline that attracts attention by offering a strong benefit, body copy that presents a reasoned sales message, or an illustration that pulls people into the ad and makes them want to know more.

The crux of the problem, as these advertising layout and design people explained to me, is this: The advertising manager doesn’t provide them with enough information. Why? The manager doesn’t have it, likely because the ad salesperson

didn’t provide it. The salesperson doesn’t have enough information either, because he or she didn’t ask for it, or the advertiser didn’t come up with anything more.

Another problem, the ad layout people explained, is that some breeders send in their own layouts and won’t accept changes or suggestions, let alone a complete rewrite and redesign of the ad.

There is enough blame to go around for the hundreds of advertisements that shortchange advertisers month after month and year after year. But, in the final analysis, it is the fault of the advertiser. The media will run virtually whatever you want and will pay for. If you are satisfied, then generally so are they. The responsibility for running your business is yours. Few people, for example, will point out your mistakes in genetic selection or herd management. The same is true with advertising — if you like what you get and pay your bills, then you won’t hear a peep from anyone.

The third degree

If I were going to write an advertisement for you, I would first put you through the third degree, and so would almost any professional marketing consultant. I would want to know exactly what you plan to sell — bulls, bred heifers, cow-calf pairs, semen,

etc. Ads shouldn’t be asked to do more than one thing at a time. The more tasks you assign an ad, the less interesting and productive it will be.

Second, I would want to know exactly whom you want to attract as customers. Are they commercial bull buyers, registered breeders or young people looking for heifer projects? Where do they live? Do you want to attract buyers in a five-county area, an entire state or nationwide? You must identify potential customers and define your market area before you start spending money on advertising.

Third, I would ask you to explain just why you believe potential customers will be interested in buying what you have to sell. What can buyers gain if they trade with you, rather than the breeder in the next county or the next state? To determine this, you need to list the benefits that you offer to buyers, and then rank them according to importance. The more specific you are, the better the ad will be.

Fourth, I would insist that you provide me with a photograph that grabs the attention of prospective buyers and stands out from all the other ad illustrations in the magazines in which you will advertise — the kind of photo that a creative photographer can make. The quality and creativity of the illustration, combined with the benefits you plan to promote, will determine what the advertisement looks like and how effectively it will attract potential buyers.

It’s this kind of vital information that advertising layout and design people need — but don’t often get. That’s a shame, because all breeders can come up with the facts to help make their ads rise above the ordinary and bring in more valuable customers.

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