

MARKETING **\$** Merchandising

► by Keith Evans

What advertising can do for you

Advertising has taken its lumps over the last few years. A number of experts predict its eventual demise even as they dispute its value today as an efficient, effective marketing tool.

Don't go stale

It is true that millions of advertising dollars are wasted. Proof is all around us. Just turn on your television and force yourself to endure a single three-minute commercial break in which ad spots are strung together like old-fashioned sausages in a butcher shop display. It is hard to tell when one commercial ends and another begins.

Sometimes it is difficult to figure out what product is being advertised. Far too many TV spots look and sound alike, yet they cost millions of dollars to produce and run. No wonder some people question the value of advertising and the sanity of advertisers.

Unfortunately, the big players don't commit all the advertising waste. It happens close to home, too.

Take a look at your favorite registered beef cattle publication. Seedstock ads share some of the same characteristics as their national TV cousins. A few stand out, while far too many exude a staleness and sameness that makes them easy to ignore.

In most magazines there is some good advertising, some really bad advertising and a lot in between. We know that good is good and bad is bad, but there is some proof that in-between or average is bad, too.

A few years back, when the value of performance records was sometimes disputed, researchers at Mississippi State University did a study to find out if good records increased the value of bulls, and by how much. In the process they found that high-quality marketing also accounted for a big chunk of the value of registered bulls. But there was a dark side to the findings.

The study showed that the marketing programs ranked as average had little more value than poor marketing. Marketing must

attract the interest of potential customers and convince them of the value of the cattle being sold — or it doesn't work. So, the question isn't whether advertising works or not. The question is, do advertisers work to make their advertising investment return dividends?

What advertising can do

Jack Trout, of Trout & Partners Ltd., Old Greenwich, Conn., one of this country's best-known advertising experts, listed five things in the publication *Advertising Age* that

The advertiser who knows how his cattle, his service, his location, etc., are different and better has the knowledge to construct a powerful advertising message to sell these differences.

— Jack Trout

advertising can do better than other marketing tools.

1) Advertising builds fast awareness. Other types of marketing, like public relations (PR), can be effective, but are "painfully slow," Trout contends.

Advertising, he says, can quickly deliver your message to the maximum number of prospects. So, if you need to get the word about your sale cattle out fast, advertising is the best way to do it.

2) Advertising can dramatize your difference. Trout says that if you have a point of difference, good advertising can dramatize it in a memorable way. A lot of registered beef cattle ads do little more than say, "I have cattle for sale." But if there is no difference between one advertiser's cattle and those offered by others, what will attract the attention of a potential customer? There are a lot of good cattle for sale. The advertiser who knows how his cattle, his service, his location, etc., are different and better has the knowledge to construct a powerful advertising message to sell these differences.

3) Advertising can create a rationale. No matter what you are selling, you need to

supply a reason to buy. Marketers, big and small, who sell all kinds of products, often fail on this point. A commercial producer has the opportunity to read hundreds of ads for breeders with bulls for sale. The ads that get results not only dramatize differences, they translate these differences into reasons to buy.

4) Advertising can deliver news.

Registered beef cattle producers have more timely news to report than most other advertisers. Each year there are new expected progeny differences (EPDs), new cows in production, new bulls for sale, etc. A PR news release might or might not get used. A good ad gets the news out in a hurry to a large number of potential customers.

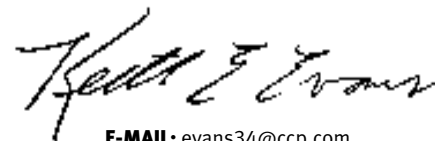
5) Advertising can build credentials.

Trout says that people tend to buy what others buy, and advertising can tell that story. I have always felt that seedstock advertisers could make better use of testimonials. Some breeders and some breed associations have turned out some great testimonial ads. But for the most part, advertisers mostly ignore this sales tactic. Advertising can also build a breeder's credentials by positioning him as knowledgeable and trustworthy, a leader in the business, and one who understands customer needs and problems.

Part of a marketing program

It's true that advertising isn't the only item in a cattle breeder's marketing toolbox. Good marketing involves positive word of mouth, the whole range of PR options, direct mail, and wise use of the Internet, to name a few. But these can also be wasteful if used improperly.

Every ad in this magazine costs about the same per page. However, the value of each ad to influence potential customers ranges from virtually nothing to exceptional value. High-quality advertising will remain an essential part of well-designed advertising programs for a very long time.



E-MAIL: evans34@ccp.com