



Merchandising

► by Keith Evans

The advantages of direct mail

Do you ever throw away a piece of mail from another cattle breeder without first opening it? Chances are you seldom, if ever, do — and the same is true for most other beef cattle producers.

Deliver your message

Despite all the jokes and complaints about junk mail, research shows that people read and respond to mail that attracts their attention and piques their interest. Instead of “junk mail,” think “direct mail.” Good direct mail offers marketing advantages to registered cattle breeders that other media cannot.

The major advantage is that it can deliver a specific message directly to selected customers — and it is timely. For example, you can send your yearling bull expected progeny differences (EPDs) and other pertinent information to a selected set of customers and potential customers within a few days after they are available. You can put an auction sale reminder in the hands of potential buyers at the last minute. The reminder can include any changes you have made since the sale book was printed.

Direct mail advertising allows you to present your sales message without any competition. The day your message is pulled out of the potential client’s mailbox, it will probably be the only beef herd promotion the cattle producer receives that day. If you have done your homework and deliver an attention-grabbing, interesting, thought-provoking piece, then you have the reader’s full attention.

Reading the mail

The U.S. Postal Service, with an obvious interest in stimulating mail use, has completed some interesting research on mail and what it means to all of us. They have found that 74% of people read direct mail advertising every week. Some 52% of those surveyed said they purchase products and services that they read about in the mail they receive.

People enjoy bringing in the mail — 35% report that bringing in the mail provides them with a time to relax and unwind, and 30% look at it as a “time-out” period. Some 57% say they bring in the mail to keep in touch and to be informed about what is going on. What’s more, 93% of the

consumers surveyed said that they spend time alone with their mail — often moving to the kitchen to read.

But, not all direct mail is welcomed by consumers. People resent nontargeted, irrelevant clutter in their mailbox. That’s why targeting an audience is so important.

As we have discussed

before, registered cattle marketing is business-to-business selling as opposed to retail marketing. There is little impulse-buying of registered beef cattle. Breeders must understand their customers and the problems that customers need to solve. Furthermore, marketers must demonstrate to potential buyers that they understand their business and can offer real profit-making solutions. Direct mail in some instances is the best way to accomplish this.

Be direct

Because you mail a piece about your herd to a commercial producer doesn’t mean that it will get the full message across. Just because a person opens the envelope doesn’t mean that he or she will read the material and receive the intended message. Mail that doesn’t get to the point and grab the reader can quickly end up in the wastebasket.

To be successful, direct mail, like a successful magazine advertisement, must get attention, be interesting, create desire, build conviction that the advertiser can deliver on the promise, and then provide the reader with a reason to follow up on the message. It

also has to be memorable, because direct mail advertisers have only one chance to make an impression.

Put a headline that offers a strong benefit on the envelope. Expand upon that offer immediately in the direct mail piece. Keep the message simple — direct mail, like good advertising, should try to accomplish only one thing. The headline and the copy must be concise and well-written. People are prone to read good headlines and information that is set off by bullets.

Attractive design is important. Leave that to a professional. To get the best results, follow up the mailing with a telephone call.

Another key to successful direct mail is a high-quality mailing list. It should include past customers who are still in the business, as well as the names of good potential customers in the defined marketing area. Direct mail should be targeted to the cattle producers who are most likely to buy, along with people like feed dealers, livestock specialists and others who are often turned to for advice.

Direct mail can take many forms. It can be a personal letter, a personalized form letter (a form letter where only the greeting is personalized), a herd brochure, a page announcing something new at your place or even your sale book. In fact, sale books should be produced with direct mail in mind because most are distributed this way. The cover should have a headline and illustration that offer a benefit and compel the reader to find out more inside.

Direct mail is almost always more expensive and time-consuming than producing a single advertisement. It also goes to a much more limited audience than does advertising in a newspaper or magazine. As a result, direct mail is no substitute for regular advertising.

But, for some jobs it is the ideal solution, and it deserves a place in most registered beef cattle marketing programs.

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