



# Merchandising

► by Keith Evans

## The customer is boss

*I don't know whether you need a bull or not, but I have bills to pay, and I was wondering if you could help me out by buying this bull?*

*How's that for a great sales pitch?*

### Making a sale

Few registered cattle breeders would approach a potential customer this way. In the business of selling, the needs of the seller count for nothing, while the needs and wants of the customer count for everything. But sometimes we forget.

A.G. Lafley, who some four years ago was named to head Procter & Gamble (P&G), never forgets. Lafley, according to an article in *Advertising Age* written by Jack Neff, has turned the company from “a stumbling, bumbling leviathan into the very model of a marketing-driven global powerhouse.”

Lafley has three rules that he insists the company must follow.

- 1) The consumer is boss.
- 2) The boss speaks when consumers decide to buy a product in the store.
- 3) The boss speaks again when consumers use the product.

To put it another way, as a breeder of registered beef cattle seedstock your goal should be to understand the boss, to know more about him in some instances than he may know about himself. This guides your breeding program and your marketing program. Your marketing program, among other things, determines how many potential customers come to your place or your auction to buy cattle — when the boss speaks first. These buyers are those who have understood your sales message and liked what they saw and heard.

The boss speaks again when the buyer uses your cattle. If you have done everything right, they should like the results and will likely become repeat customers. If your cattle don't live up to their expectations, then these dissatisfied customers will continue their search for breeders and genetics that satisfy their wants and needs.

Another thing Lafley did when he took over P&G was to insist on putting more emphasis on proven volume-building promotion such as TV. Furthermore, he

didn't allow marketers to guess or to be influenced by fads. Instead, the company tested consumers' attitudes and assumptions and the marketing department's advertising copy to make sure there were data to support most decisions.

Beef breed associations and individual cattle breeders need to base their marketing investments on sound information. Facts may prove or disprove the need to keep on doing what has always been done or the need to initiate marketing programs that will work better.

It is not difficult to survey customers and potential customers to determine their needs and wants, or to find out what sources of information they rely on most. Let me give you one example of how you can get an accurate and inexpensive customer survey done. Decide what you want to know about the people who buy or should buy your cattle. Then contact the marketing professor at your local college or junior college. Many of these people will be overjoyed to have an actual project for their students to work on, while you pay the out-of-pocket expenses. I was involved with a research project like this a few years ago. The results were worth tens of thousands of dollars, and the cost was low.

### Know the customer

I've written many times about the importance of knowing the kind of cattle and the kind of genetics that potential customers need. But it is also important to know the expectations and dreams that your customers and potential customers have

about the cattle business. There are a lot of great cattle available today, but this means little to the buyer who expects more from his purchases than they can deliver.

Knowing a buyer's dreams and expectations before a sale is made puts the seller in a much better position to develop a satisfied customer.

Business consultant William Brooks once said that too many sales people are like sheep. They become so involved with their routine that they keep their heads down and “nibble their way to lost.” It happens with beef cattle breeders, too. Some get so engrossed in the business of breeding and production that they lose touch with their customers and with the basics of marketing. It is easy to do, particularly

since in most registered seedstock businesses the production manager is also the marketing manager, and cattle people go to college to learn cattle breeding, genetics and production, and rarely take a course in marketing.

We all like to think that if we produce a fine product it will virtually sell itself. The boneyards of business, however, are littered with the skeletons of skilled producers and brilliant inventors who were inept marketers.

Cattle breeders who believe that the customer is boss and who listen when the boss speaks almost always enjoy success. Those who lose sight of their customers' needs, wants, expectations and dreams will find that many of their skills in breeding and management will not be properly rewarded.

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