

# Selling Points

The best livestock ads create demand for your product.

by Brooke Byrd

Open any livestock publication, and there are pages and pages of advertisements — many of which look the same. Each ad costs approximately the same, but their values range across the board. “The best ad readership is somewhere around 30%-35%,” says Keith Evans, marketing professional and former American Angus Association director of communications. “If one ad gets 5% readership and the other gets 35% readership, you can see how much more valuable that is.”

Advertising is perhaps the most common solution to the seller’s challenge of making his name known to his customers. “The importance of advertising for a producer is to put his name and program in front of potential buyers,” says Cheryl Oxley, Angus Productions Inc. (API) advertising/production manager. “He’s in business to be in business, so every marketing move he

makes should be geared toward drawing in that business.”

Evans says, “You want to develop top-of-mind awareness. When people in your market area think of Angus cattle, you want them to think of you first and favorably.”

## Planning is everything

The first step in creating any ad or public relations program is planning carefully and thoroughly. “I’d like to see advertisers sit down a year before they start their new advertising programs, decide where they’re going to advertise, make a budget, and decide when they need to advertise and when they need to do some public relations work,” Evans explains.

For advertising to be successful, Deb Norton, president and creative director of Graphic Arts of Topeka Inc., says producers must think about what advertising will do for them. “What are your goals and objectives, and what are your expectations for results for an advertising campaign?”

A commitment from the producer is essential, says Norton, who has 30 years of livestock advertising experience. “I can spend hours and hours developing the very best strategic advertising

campaign that I can, but unless there is a long-term commitment from that producer to see it to fruition, it has no chance of succeeding

“Without a plan,” she continues, “all you have is an ad that probably isn’t going to do much for you long-term.”

Evans says the first step to planning is to determine your market area. “If you’ve got 10 bulls to sell and a few females, you’re probably going to do that within 25-50 miles of home.”

If a cattleman’s market area is that small, advertising in national publications may not be economical. “Your advertising and your promotion would be done first in that primary market area,” Evans says, “and then your business can expand as increased sales permit.”

After determining your market area, Evans suggests examining all the possible ways to communicate with potential customers, such as farm radio, local newspapers, newsletters or other direct mail. Use the media that reaches the most potential customers at the most economical prices.

Producers should study any potential

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PHOTO BY CRYSTAL ALBERS

► **Above:** Major changes from ad to ad are detrimental to a producer’s marketing efforts, says Cheryl Oxley, API advertising/production manager. Consistency is key to such major advertising campaigns as those promoting Marlboro® and Coca Cola®, she points out. “Consistency can really lend itself to gathering an audience. It lends credibility to an advertiser when he’s got a consistent program, a consistent message. That encourages people to look at his advertisements.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHERYL OXLEY

► **Right:** With so many pages in a magazine, there’s only a split second to stop readers and engage them in an ad, says Deb Norton, president and creative director of Graphic Arts of Topeka. “Many ads are exactly the same. I want that ad to hit me between the eyes.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF LISA BRYANT

► “At best, only a third of a magazine’s readers see your ad each time it appears,” says Keith Evans, marketing professional. That’s why it’s important to advertise several times.

publication's or medium's audience, Oxley says. "Many advertisers want to reach the commercial producer and not the seedstock producer necessarily, which encourages different media selections. Producers need to know their audience, as well as the publication's reach."

Oxley recommends that a producer start gradually in putting his or her name in front of people. State cooperative advertising pages or less-than-full-page ads can be excellent tools for this process.

"Get your regional manager to help you with your campaign, where you should place your advertising and how you should spend your dollars," she says. Regional advertising can be complemented with ranch brochures or postcards developed by API's Special Services Department.

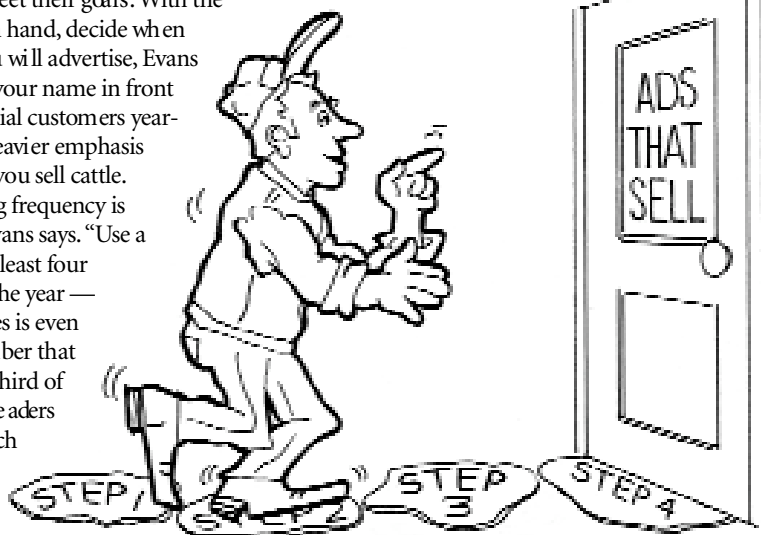
### Timing

A common mistake many cattlemen make, Norton says, is only advertising within a 90-day window before a sale, leaving themselves off the map for the rest of the year. "Any other time of the year, nobody hears from them," she says. "They have no way of creating brand equity."

She recommends producers focus on their programs and genetics in ads throughout the year, then focus more heavily on the sale 90 days before the event. After building a program's reputation during the rest of the year, a producer can focus on specific lots or genetics during this window.

Budget your advertising program. Know how much you can afford to invest during the coming year before you start buying advertising space. Some people use a percentage of their gross sales to determine their budgets, others try to match their competition and yet others look at what they will need to meet their goals. With the budget total in hand, decide when and where you will advertise, Evans advises. Keep your name in front of your potential customers year-round, with heavier emphasis near the time you sell cattle.

"Advertising frequency is important," Evans says. "Use a publication at least four times during the year — five or six times is even better. Remember that at best only a third of a magazine's readers see your ad each time it appears."



### Creating demand

"Having something to sell doesn't mean that somebody wants to buy it," Norton says. "The most important strategy for a small producer is to focus on creating demand."

"We create demand by letting people know what our positions are," she continues. "What is your operation? What do you stand for?" Producers must advertise to gain customer interest, not just because they have something to sell.

"What are those things that set me apart in terms of integrity, ethics, professionalism, good ranch management, stewards of the land," Norton says, encouraging producers to identify what they can deliver that makes them unique. "It's the story that's going to set you apart."

Building an overall mission statement or philosophy for your operation provides a solid foundation for an advertising strategy.

"Everybody who advertises should have a positioning statement that sums up marketing goals, something like, 'I will sell yearling bulls to commercial customers who are interested in producing high-quality beef,'" Evans says. "Then build your program to carry out this marketing philosophy."

After developing an overall message to present in your ads, the next step is making sure they're actually read. "An ad is of no value unless it gets attention," Evans says. "If nobody reads it, obviously no



one will get your sales message."

### Piece by piece

"Headlines are the most neglected thing in livestock advertising; few ads have a real headline that attracts attention and promises benefits,"

Evans says. Many headlines only use the name of the ranch or the bull, or simply "Angus bulls for sale."

A headline should offer a real benefit to the reader, he says. "It's been said that people only buy things for three reasons: to

make them look good, to make them feel good or to make them more money. A headline and illustration that can encompass one, or even two, of these things makes an ad attract more attention."

The length of a headline is not important if it is interesting and promises a benefit to readers, Evans says, adding that as long as it doesn't ramble, a two- or three-line headline can work well. "The main thing is to make people want to learn more."

He advises against generic claims. "Everybody knows there's no one bull that 'does it all,'" he says. It is best to focus on specific traits in which the bull excels and then explain why this is important to the reader.

While the first thing readers may notice in an ad is the headline, it's important that no one piece of the ad overshadows the other. "It all has to work together," Oxley points out. "There has to be something that draws readers into the ad, keeps them in the ad, and helps their eye flow through the ad to the punch line that says, 'do something.'"

Norton comes up with a headline first, then tries to find an illustration or photo that ties to it and "becomes an anchor for the rest of the ad." However, she is often charged with the task of fitting several pictures into an ad. "It's a hard sell to convince a producer to limit the number of photos they put in an ad," she says.

Unfortunately, Evans says, having multiple photos is often an immediate turnoff for readers. "There should only be one photo," he says. It's important to have one focal point that stops the reader and makes him say, "What's going on?"

Evans describes a striking picture of a bull staring the reader directly in the face. "You cannot, if you're a cattlemaster, turn by the

page with that illustration without stopping and looking at that bull. That's what an illustration is supposed to do — stop the reader and make him want to learn more.

"I wish producers would work with creative photographers," he continues. "Put some creativity into photography, because the illustration is the thing readers are going to see first. Great illustrations cost more, but they are worth the expense."

Photo quality is crucial. Norton suggests producers hire professional photographers. "Lighting is an issue," she says, especially for black cattle.

Even if a picture doesn't show off all the attributes of the animal, Evans says, the key is stopping readers and making them interested in reading the body copy. "Using the headline and the illustration to offer that benefit and bring people into the ad are the two most important things," he says. "You've got to get them there before you can convince them about the value of your cattle."

After your reader's attention is captured, his eye should move to the copy. The point of copy, Evans explains, is to build upon the promise in the headline and the illustration, creating conviction and interest and providing a sales message that'll get people to remember and to act.

The copy should provide attributes of the bull or cow, such as performance data, \$Values or offspring that have done well at bull tests, Oxley says. "Body copy can be really interesting sometimes if it talks about the history of an operation."

She suggests using producer testimonials. "If you've got a bull and he's been selling semen, why have people been buying that semen? Have people called you, told you, e-mailed you?" Having

others testify to the quality of your cattle can add a unique twist to your ad.

However, Oxley advises against too much copy, which can lose a reader's attention. "The less there is for them to have to wade through, the more chance you've got of them stopping and reading what's there."

To make the copy more appealing to read, Evans suggests choosing a readable type style, or font, and breaking the copy into short paragraphs so that it doesn't look formidable. Large blocks of copy and hard-to-read fonts discourage readership and lessen the effectiveness of the ad.

As the reader's eye moves through the headline to the photo, then through the copy and down to the bottom of the page, the logo offers the last opportunity to make an impression. "You need a logo that you're going to live with for a long time," Evans says. "A logo should identify you and your operation at a glance. It's your trademark."

### Less is more

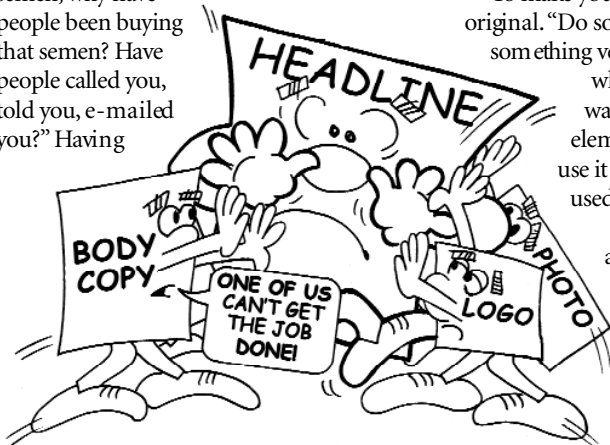
When it comes to ad layout, the simpler, the better, Oxley says, even if it goes against a producer's first instincts. "Typical advertising budgets for livestock breeders are very tight. So, they have a natural inclination to want to tell everything they possibly can — fill up all the blank space; fill up every corner," she says. "What they end up doing to themselves is looking like everybody else."

She suggests turning the pages of any magazine and noticing which ads make you stop. "They probably have fewer elements in them. And they have open space," she says.

To make your ad stand out, try to be original. "Do something diagonal; do something vertical," Oxley says. "Turn the whole page horizontal if you want to get wild. Find an element that nobody's used and use it in a way that nobody else has used it before."

Evans also encourages advertisers to not cram the page full. "White space is an important part of design and helps focus the reader's eye on your message," he explains. With

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## Collaboration is key

When producers decide to advertise their Angus genetics, Deb Norton, president and creative director of Graphic Arts of Topeka Inc., suggests they collaborate with a professional. She advises against producers taking things completely into their own hands when constructing an ad.

"You can learn all the whiz-bang tricks in Photoshop®, you can use 15 font styles in an ad, but that doesn't make it a good ad. And it doesn't mean anybody's going to read it," she says. Norton works with producers to develop ideas for their ads, then takes those ideas and fits the pieces together.

Keith Evans, a marketing professional and former American Angus Association director of communications, considers producer input absolutely critical. Nobody else knows about your cattle, your goals, who you're trying to attract as customers or the facts of your breeding program, he says.

"A producer needs to take full responsibility for his ads, providing solid information and an explanation of what he wants to accomplish," Evans continues. He suggests that people trained in design and visual communication actually put the ad together, but a producer's direction is invaluable.

A common problem that arises when producers try to do everything themselves is adapting their ads for publication. "We have to do things to an ad to prepare it for output to the magazine presses, utilizing what they sent us and preparing it for quality output," says Cheryl Oxley, Angus Productions Inc. (API) advertising/production manager. "That quality is everything from good color quality to photoreproduction to information accuracy to spelling and grammar."

Some common desktop publishing programs are not conducive to preparing for printing on magazine presses. Oxley suggests that if doing their own desktop layouts, producers include the raw files of their ads along with the PDF versions to avoid problems. "Many advertisers have discovered how helpful the API production department can be in taking their files, enhancing them, improving them, and helping with color, punctuation and grammar," she says.

"We're getting excellent stuff, and we're getting mediocre stuff," Oxley explains. "We're trying very hard to help the breeder put his best face forward in his ad. We have a design staff who will be happy to take any idea you've got, take your copy, take your headline idea and work with you."

too many elements on the page, there's no one place to focus a reader's attention.

"You don't want people's eyes jumping here and there, from one element to another, because they will lose their train of thought," he says. "Eye flow is really important. If you do something to interrupt that, chances are you will lose the reader."

The rule of simplicity also applies to colors, fonts, backgrounds, borders, additional graphics and any other extras. Evans considers anything not directly contributing to the message of the ad a distraction.

"People tend to want to do too much in a one-page ad," Evans says. "Don't get carried away with more than one good idea." This especially goes for less-than-full-page ads, he says, which have to be hard-hitting and to-

the-point. "Most advertising should be that way, but a small ad has to stick to one selling point."

### **Following up**

A key way to keep yourself in your reader's memory is to elicit a response. "An ad should always have a call to action. Tell them to do something," Oxley says. "Call us. Come to the sale. Call us to get a catalog."

Producers should highlight e-mail addresses and Web sites on their ads, or offer cut-out coupons to mail in, Evans suggests. Having something to send back to interested producers also ensures your position in their minds. "If you offer to send something free to the reader or even promise something they can get on your Web site, you can extend

your sales message beyond a single ad impression."

Backing up the promises made in ads with real-world results is crucial, Norton says. "The real kicker to whether your ad succeeds or fails is that if someone does respond, they're actually responded to in the same way that you positioned yourself through your advertising"

For the true key to successful advertising, Norton says, "You must be willing to step outside your own circle, be an outsider looking in and put yourself in the position of the reader. Unless we have the ability to objectively assess our strengths and weaknesses, we can't possibly begin to really define our differences."

