**The Art of Advertising**

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The consumer is not omniscient. He does not know where he can obtain at the cheapest price what he is looking for. Very often he does not even know what kind of commodity or service is suitable to remove most efficaciously the particular uneasiness he wants to remove. At best he is familiar with the market conditions of the immediate past and arranges his plans on the basis of this information. To convey to him information about the actual state of the market is the task of business propaganda.

Business propaganda must be obtrusive and blatant. It is its aim to attract the attention of slow people, to rouse latent wishes, to entice men to substitute innovation for inert clinging to traditional routine. In order to succeed, advertising must be adjusted to the mentality of the people courted. It must suit their tastes and speak their idiom. Advertising is shrill, noisy, coarse, puffing, because the public does not react to dignified allusions. It is the bad taste of the public that forces the advertisers to display bad taste in their publicity campaigns. The art of advertising has evolved into a branch of applied psychology, a sister discipline of pedagogy.

Like all things designed to suit the taste of the masses, advertising is repellent to people of delicate feeling. This abhorrence influences the appraisal of business propaganda. Advertising and all other methods of business propaganda are condemned as one of the most outrageous outgrowths of unlimited competition. It should be forbidden. The consumers should be instructed by impartial experts; the public schools, the "nonpartisan" press, and cooperatives should perform this task.

The restriction of the right of businessmen to advertise their products would restrict the freedom of the consumers to spend their income according to their own wants and desires. It would make it impossible for them to learn as much as they can and want about the state of the market and the conditions which they may consider as relevant in choosing what to buy and what not to buy. They would no longer be in a position to decide on the basis of the opinion which they themselves have formed about the seller's appraisal of his products; they would be forced to act on the recommendation of other people. It is not unlikely that these mentors would save them some mistakes. But the individual consumers would be under the tutelage of guardians. If advertising is not restricted, the consumers are by and large in the position of a jury which learns about the case by hearing the witnesses and examining directly all other means of [p. 321] evidence. If advertising is restricted, they are in the position of a jury to whom an officer reports about the result of his own examination of evidence.

It is a widespread fallacy that skillful advertising can talk the consumers into buying everything that the advertiser wants them to buy. The consumer is, according to this legend, simply defenseless against "high-pressure" advertising. If this were true, success or failure in business would be on the mode of advertising only. However, nobody believes that any kind of advertising would have succeeded in making the candlemakers hold the field against the electric bulb, the horsedrivers against the motorcars, the goose quill against the steel pen and later against the fountain pen. But whoever admits this implies that the quality of the commodity advertised is instrumental in bringing about the success of an advertising campaign. Then there is no reason to maintain that advertising is a method of cheating the gullible public.

It is certainly possible for an advertiser to induce a man to try an article which he would not have bought if he had known its qualities beforehand. But as long as advertising is free to all competing firms, the article which is better from the point of view of the consumers' appetites will finally outstrip the less appropriate article, whatever methods of advertising may be applied. The tricks and artifices of advertising are available to the seller of the better product no less than to the seller of the poorer product. But only the former enjoys the advantage derived from the better quality of his product.

The effects of advertising of commodities are determined by the fact as a rule the buyer is in a position to form a correct opinion about the usefulness of an article bought. The housewife who has tried a particular brand of soap or canned food learns from experience whether it is good for her to buy and consume that product in the future too. Therefore advertising pays the advertiser only if the examination of the first sample bought does not result in the consumer's refusal to buy more of it. It is agreed among businessmen that it does not pay to advertise products other than good ones.

Entirely different are conditions in those fields in which experience cannot teach us anything. The statements of religious, metaphysical, and political propaganda can be neither verified nor falsified by experience. With regard to the life beyond and the absolute, any experience is always the experience of complex phenomena which is open to different interpretations; the only yardstick which can be applied to political doctrines is a prioristic reasoning. Thus political propaganda and business propaganda are essentially different things, although they often resort to the same technical methods.

There are many evils for which contemporary technology and therapeutics have no remedy. There are incurable diseases and there are irreparable personal defects. It is a sad fact that some people try to exploit their fellow men's plight by offering them patent medicines. Such quackeries do not make old people young and ugly girls pretty. They only raise hopes. It would not impair the operation of the market if the authorities were to prevent such advertising, the truth of which cannot be evidenced by the methods of the experimental natural sciences. But whoever is ready to grant to the government this power would be inconsistent if he objected to the demand to submit the statements of churches and sects to the same examination. Freedom is indivisible. As soon as one starts to restrict it, one enters upon a decline on which it is difficult to stop. If one assigns to the government the task of making truth prevail in the advertising of perfumes and tooth paste, one cannot contest it the right to look after truth in the more important matters of religion, philosophy, and social ideology.

The idea that business propaganda can force the consumers to submit to the will of the advertisers is spurious. Advertising can never succeed in supplanting better or cheaper goods by poorer goods.

The costs incurred by advertising are, from the point of view of the advertiser, a part of the total bill of production costs. A businessman expends money for advertising if and as far as he expects that the increase in sales resulting will increase the total net proceeds. In this regard there is no difference between the costs of advertising and all other costs of production. An attempt has been made to distinguish between production costs and sales costs. An increase in production costs, it has been said, increases supply, while an increase in sales costs (advertising costs included) increases demand. This is a mistake. All costs of production are expended with the intention of increasing demand. If the manufacturer of candy employs a better raw material, he aims at an increase in demand in the same way as he does in making the wrappings more attractive and his stores more inviting and in spending more for advertisements. In increasing production costs per unit of the product the idea is always to increase demand. If a businessman wants to increase supply, he must increase the total cost of production, which often results in lowering production costs per unit.

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**Art in Advertising**

The following article about art in advertising was written in 1922 and discusses the essential role of art in advertising and the ways the two mediums affected one another.

**ART IN ADVERTISING**

**BY SIR LAWRENCE WEAVER**

I now come to what I find the more attractive part of my speech, and that is beauty in its relation to salesmanship. The admirable leader in the *Times* which welcomed the overseas delegates to this convention closed with these sentences: "One of the subjects to be discussed at Wembley is the value of advertising as the creator of public standards in business. . - The delegates' visit will be doubly welcome if they are also moved to consider it as a potential creator of public standards in good taste."

I could not have been furnished with a finer text. The words are salutary in their relation to elements of advertising which have been and still are a great offence against the amenities of our cities, an offence still more in this country against the beauty of the countryside. But they have wider and deeper imPlications. It is necessary to go further; it is necessary to strive toward making the arts of display in all their manifestations instinct with real beauty. The ideal quest is not for truth only, but for truth in beauty. I am sure there will be many people (I hope there will not be many here) who will dismiss these ideas as "highfalutin stuff." I believe them to be simple common sense, and what is more, very good business. An old-fashioned friend said to me not long since that he positively disliked beautiful posters because they meant the prostitution-and that was the word he used-to trade ends of the high powers of the artist. It is quite commonly felt, not perhaps very consciously, that it is rather an oddity, even a disrespectable oddity, that the artist should give of his best to commerce. But I am persuaded that there is no greater hope for the correction of some evil aspects of the industrial revolution than the whole-hearted devotion of art to the service alike of manufacture and salesmanship; and this in the interest both of artist and business man.

We must look to the time when every article shows that beauty which is in fitness for purpose, when we can realize the hope of John Ruskin that we may possess nothing in our homes and indeed nothing in our lives but what we know to be useful and believe to be beautiful.

The *Times* has said that advertisement has been elevated to something approaching the dignity of a fine art. I look to the time when the arts of display will have achieved a more positive character. They will not approach; they will have arrived;

Nothing will stimulate them more than the employment in the exhibitions, and in all forms of publicity of the future, of the finest minds and hands that the artists of the world can bring to the task.

So best can everyone, manufacturer, merchant, publicity expert, and the great public itself, prove that the artist is not the servant of the few or the creator of the single precious thing, but the alchemist who brings at least seemliness and at best distinction to commerce, and touches to persuasive beauty the thousand things of the common life.

(page 428-429, The Advertising Yearbook for 1924, edited vy John Clyde Oswald, Published by Doubleday, Page and Company for The Associated Advertising Clubs of the World, 1925.)