

DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Conducted by Paul C. Olsen.*

COMMENTS, QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS ARE INVITED AND WELCOME.

Readers are invited to submit comments, criticisms and suggestions regarding the material which appears in this department. The Editor also will undertake to answer questions regarding general problems of business management. Letters of general interest will be published, but the writer's name will not be revealed without his permission.

WHEN SHALL WE CLOSE THIS SUMMER?

"Closed Wednesday afternoons and evenings during the summer." Thus read the sign on the locked door of Bennett's Modern Pharmacy.

"Oh, dear," sighed Mrs. Austin, "I never can remember when these drug stores are open in the summer time. Over in Amblton they close Tuesday and Thursday evenings. Well, I guess I'll go down to the news stand. I hate to buy a tooth brush there but I do know they're always open."

Mrs. Austin was but one of dozens of women who stopped at Bennett's Modern Pharmacy on Wednesday afternoons during the summer, tried the locked door and went away disappointed.

Mr. Bennett's friends sometimes asked him if he did not lose some business by his afternoon closing.

"How can I?" he always replied, "Every other druggist in town is closed. A druggist gets precious little time to himself. Closing Wednesday afternoons and evenings is certainly not much of an inconvenience to anybody. A man has a right to that much time off."

Mr. Bennett is right. No one should begrudge the druggist a holiday. On the other hand, when and how the holiday is to be taken is a matter calling for nice judgment.

In Mr. Bennett's case, for instance, it is easy to see that customers who have every intention of buying from him are being driven to his competitors by Wednesday closing; not to competing drug stores, to be sure, but to even more aggressive competitors; to the news stands, the stationery stores, the department stores, the five-and-ten-cent stores, the ice cream stands and the host of others that sell some of the lines ordinarily carried in drug stores.

Any merchant knows that it is easier to keep a customer than it is to win him back after he has left. Also the shrewd merchant knows that it is easier to hold old customers than it is to attract new ones. Any policy which drives customers away is therefore detrimental.

There is another aspect of the problem. No one seems yet to have determined the ideal hours for summer-time closing. Sometimes it is one or two or more even-

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ings a week. In other cases afternoons are chosen. The practice varies not only from city to city but in different parts of the same city. It also varies with different kinds of stores.

The result is a great confusion in people's minds. In fact, in sections in which evening closing is the vogue, merchants report that the tendency is to reduce considerably their business on the nights they are open, a result undoubtedly of the confusion of closing hours.

The object of this article is not to decry summer closing hours. The purpose is to emphasize the fact that closing hours must be chosen with great care in order to avoid serious and oftentimes permanent losses of business. The problem is individual because conditions vary with each store.

That is the weakness of agreements among stores all to close at given hours. The druggist in the down-town financial district who does practically no business after 6 o'clock is naturally willing to close every night at 9 o'clock. On the other hand there are numerous instances of stores which do 90 per cent of their business after 6 o'clock at night.

Many stores have found it advantageous to close Sunday afternoons because they have learned that they can do practically no business during the hours they now keep their stores closed.

Some druggists become alarmed when they find their nearby competitors staying open late at night when they have always closed earlier. There is no advantage in keeping open late just because a competitor does, unless enough business results to justify it. If the business is not there, the competitor is not taking anything away from the store which does not stay open.

In the case of many stores in busy sections the solution of the closing hour problem lies not in closing the entire store at one time, but in giving each employee the equivalent time on different days during the week. This is usually possible in even the smallest stores by the use of a relief clerk or assistant.

The thing to recognize is that opening and closing hours constitute a problem of the individual store and should be decided upon accordingly.

FIVE PROVED PLANS FOR INCREASING PROFITS IN SUMMER TIME.

NO. 1. KEEP THE STORE COOL.

This is especially important in a store which expects a large soda fountain business. No one likes to go into a store which is uncomfortably warm. Customers and clerks both become touchy and disagreeable in a warm store. On the contrary, a store which is refreshingly cool invites the customer to linger and gives the displays a chance to suggest other purchases. People in the store also have more enthusiasm and zest for their work.

Awnings, dimmed lights, summer colors (greens and blues) help to give the illusion of coolness. Electrical supply houses can recommend where to place electric fans to secure the most benefit. They also can advise about the use of exhaust fans. Glaring, low-hung lights should not be used, especially in daylight hours. Heavy draperies suggest warmth and any of these therefore should be

banished for the summer months. In some stores gay colored cretonne chair covers have proved effective at the soda fountain tables.

NO. 2. FEATURE WEEK-END AND VACATION SPECIALS.

One druggist adds over \$50 every Friday and Saturday to his boxed candy business. On those two days he simply makes a special display of high-grade candy, both in the window and in the store. The same thing can be done with tobaccos and many other items. This is the idea used the year around by successful drug and cigar chains. Located as they are, principally in the downtown sections of large cities, Sunday is a dull day for them. They attempt to sell to their customers their Sunday supply of candies, tobaccos and other goods by offering special inducements for their purchase on Friday or Saturday. Druggists have proved time and again that the mere display of an article is sufficient to increase its sale without the inducement of a cut-price appeal.

It goes without saying that as the vacation season begins the city druggist should constantly feature an ever-changing variety of vacation needs. This merchandise is thus brought to the attention of his customers at the time they are most in need of it and he accordingly has a good opportunity to make the sale. For instance, all bathing caps are not bought at the seashore.

NO. 3. ADVERTISE MAIL ORDER AND DELIVERY SERVICE.

Many people are glad to know that, wherever they go, their favorite druggist will fill their prescriptions and supply their other drug needs. Sales of this kind naturally represent more trouble than over-the-counter business, but it should be remembered that the good will engendered by such service extends to a great many other purchases the customer makes when at home. It is one of the things that helps to make life-long customers.

Customers can be reminded of this service by tactful suggestions in personal conversations, and by blotters and other announcements mailed with monthly statements or inclosed in packages.

NO. 4. SUMMER HOUSECLEANING.

In stores which fill large numbers of prescriptions, summer is the time when business is less active. Accordingly it is an excellent time to install improvements, large and small, which if attempted in the winter would only disorganize business. Perhaps a few changes or additions would greatly enlarge prescription-room shelf space. If an up-to-date index of prescription room items is not maintained, summer is a good time to start one. Sometimes a systematic rearrangement of shelf bottles and other items will make them more accessible and consequently quicker to find and use when prescription activities are brisk. If an old-fashioned prescription filing system is used much valuable time is lost when prescriptions are to be refilled. Summer is a good time to start a modern prescription file.

These activities have no direct bearing on summer profits but they have some very important indirect benefits. In busy prescription stores valuable employees often have to be retained through the summer although there is not always enough for them to do. Improvements in prescription room methods afford them a use-

ful occupation. Any employee who is worth having at all would rather be occupied this way than sitting around waiting for something to happen.

Worth-while improvements, moreover, so improve the store service at busy times that they pay for themselves many times over.

NO. 5. ATTRACT AUTOMOBILE TRAVELERS.

Summer is the time when people travel most for pleasure. More automobiles are on the road, and people pleasure-bent are liberal spenders. The roadside stand obtains much of the business which otherwise would go to established stores. Therefore the stores that want the business must seek it aggressively. Signs, along traveled roads near the store, have proved effective for well-located stores. These signs should be large enough and brief enough to be read easily from a rapidly-moving automobile. This means that the wording to be effective must be definite and explicit.

Drugs—Soda—Films
On the left
200 feet ahead
Conner's Drug Store.

Wright's Drug Store
Right Around the Corner.

3 miles to Toptown
and Marcum's Drug Store
Opposite Court House.

Easton's Drug Store
Turn Here.

Signs such as "Slow down to Blank's Drug Store" not only stir up ill-feeling but are actually forbidden in some localities as a menace to safety. Signs thoughtlessly placed also have exactly the opposite to the intended effect. Anyone should know, for instance, that it is a mistake to put an advertising sign on a beautiful shade tree. Signs should never be placed on private property without the consent of the owner. Regulations regarding placing signs on public property should be carefully observed.

Above all things, the purpose for which the signs are put up should not be forgotten. That purpose is to attract people to the store. From all approaches the store should be instantly recognizable as a drug store and the drug store to which the signs direct. This means an attractive front at all times, neat well-decorated windows and well-conceived signs on the store itself which identify it as the one advertised. This first appearance should reflect the character of the store itself, as well as serve as a means of identification.

SEASONABLE DISPLAYS FOR JULY AND AUGUST.

Cameras and photographic supplies
 Film developing, printing, enlarging
 Vacuum bottles
 First aid kits
 Mosquito and ivy poison remedies
 Sunburn remedies

Talcum powder
 Insecticides
 Sponges and chamois
 Bath requisites
 Bathing caps and supplies
 Soda fountain

Ice cream and bottled soft drinks