

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.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF EFFECTIVE DISPLAY.

(Continued.)

Saturday in Arhopolis was invariably a day on which the merchants did more business than on all the other days of the week put together. This Saturday, however, the people from the surrounding countryside were not busy shopping in the stores. Unmindful of the blistering Kansas sun beating down upon the shadeless Arhopolis Main street, a great and ever increasing knot of people were gathered about a gesticulating individual speaking from the precarious height of a sugar barrel.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, watch me carefully. I hold here in my hand a genuine Geneva razor (the old-fashioned straight razor is still the favorite means of shaving among even the younger generation in Arhopolis County).

"First, I will show you the marvelously keen edge of this razor. Step in closely so you can see. I hold now in my left hand a single human hair.

"With one horizontal stroke of this razor I will cut that hair squarely in half. See?

"Now watch me carefully while I do a little whittling on this hickory stick with this self-same razor. Of course that keen edge I just showed you is gone now. The razor won't cut a hair. Look!

"Just a minute. A few easy strokes upon this Magic Razor Compound and now watch this razor. Watch it cut this hair. There!

"For the small sum of 25 cents, my friends, you, too, can have a package of this Magic Razor Compound which will put and keep the same sort of an edge on your own razor.

"Step right up and get it, folks."

The crowd was a little slow in accepting the barker's invitation, but presently two strangers from different parts of the circle bustled forward and ostentatiously placed their quarters in the barker's hand. They were his cappers; they were paid by the barker to get the crowds started to buying. Their example brought forward a dozen genuine purchasers who departed immediately. As newcomers arrived, the barker began his demonstration again.

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On the outer circle of the crowd stood Gordon Grey, local hardware merchant, whose store had been virtually depopulated of customers by the activities of this itinerant vendor.

"Can you imagine that?" he said to an acquaintance disgustedly. "Twenty-five cents for that razor-sharpening compound. Over a year ago I bought a dozen of the very same thing to sell at 10 cents a box and, I believe, I still have 11 left.

"These people around here certainly do fall for high-power salesmanship. They'll go home and use that stuff once or maybe not at all and then forget all about it. Then they'll go right on blaming me because I sold them a high-priced razor which won't keep its edge. How can it, when they won't take any care of it?"

This kind of high-pressure selling is by no means limited to Arhopolis, Kansas, and others of the smaller towns of the Middle West. It thrives to an amazing degree in what, supposedly, are the most sophisticated sections of the city of New York. It is to be seen in Chicago, Philadelphia and on the Pacific Coast.

How does it succeed? The first thing the sidewalk orator must do is attract attention. That, of course, is one of the very things a display aims to do. The street corner vendor in Arhopolis got attention to himself and his merchandise by the novelty of his presentation. People are naturally attracted to what is unusual and different.

This is true whether the attraction happens to be on a street corner or in a merchant's window or inside of his store. In fact, I have seen this very demonstration conducted in drug store windows and block the sidewalks. But in far too few of these cases did a golden harvest accrue to the enterprising druggist. He, of course, had no cappers to start the crowds to buying and even if he had, the action required would have been far too complicated to be very successful: walk in the store, wait for some one to appear, say rather shamefacedly, "I'd like some of that the man is showing in the window," and wait for wrapping and change. People are naturally backward about publicly admitting they have succumbed to selling pressure. They like to think they decided things for themselves.

That is the difficulty which may occur in a display which depends upon novelty for its attention-drawing power. It will get the attention all right, but the attention will be concentrated all upon the novelty rather than upon the merchandise to be sold thereby.

Water flowing from a glass jug in which the water remains constantly at the same level will hold a crowd fascinated for hours, but about all the enterprising druggist will get for his pains in working out and installing the display will be the opportunity of explaining endlessly how it works to perplexed and vexed customers who come in the store only to ask about it.

A department store used a dummy which rolled its eyes, lifted its eyebrow and tapped upon the window to attract attention to the display of a newly installed tobacco department. In the few days the display was in the window the store received more inquiries about the possibility of buying the doll than about the merchandise it was intended to help to sell.

George B. Evans, shrewd and successful retail druggist in Philadelphia, once undertook to beautify his store by hanging paintings in various places about the

walls. The novelty attracted much favorable attention, so much in fact that people started to ask if the pictures were for sale. Mr. Evans, able merchant, answered anxious inquiries of his surprised sales force—"By all means, yes. Anything in this store that my customers want is for sale."

The very novelty of pictures in a drug store was a very important factor in their attracting the attention which they did. In addition, pictures in themselves have a tremendous capacity for attracting attention. Several prosperous businesses have been built up solely on the idea of selling to retail merchants photographs of current events to be pasted on the window or hung in the store. Sometimes the space around the pictures is used for advertising messages about the store or the sale of some particular merchandise.

The theory is, of course, that the drawing power of such pictures, as a result of this universal interest people have in pictures, will increase the attention the window gets and thus increase its selling power. As in the case of novelties, however, the danger is that people's attention will be concentrated upon the pictures to the exclusion of the merchandise shown near it. There is a long mental jump from a picture of a grade-crossing accident to a display of Whitman's Samplers or from a panoramic view of the contestants in a beauty pageant to a Pharmacy Week window.

Thus it is perfectly apparent that the pictures which have the greatest selling power are those which are tied up directly and immediately with the display of which they are a part. All pictures have the power to attract attention; those which by their very nature must help to sell merchandise naturally are the most valuable.

That is why pictures of a product in various uses, and pictures showing the way it is made and the materials used in making it have a double selling force: the attention-drawing power of any picture plus the selling power of the picture itself.

The purely mechanical factors which aid in attracting attention to a display are size, contrast, isolation, position, motion and intensity. A giant shoe or a giant toothbrush attracts attention because it is large, not because it is a shoe or a toothbrush. The thing that attracts the attention is the size of the article shown. That is why I say that these attention-drawing factors are purely mechanical; they do not have anything to do with the things being displayed.

In contrast to this, there are other factors in attracting attention which have drawing power because of what they themselves are. These are called interest factors. A picture draws attention because it is a picture—not because it is a large picture or a small picture. A novelty attracts attention for what it is.

You will see at once that it is possible to combine in a display both mechanical and interest factors and thus make the display have the greatest possible amount of drawing power. The sidewalk vendor selling a razor stropping compound had in his favor not only the interest factor arising from the sheer novelty of his presentation, but also the mechanical qualities of motion and of intensity as engendered by the enthusiasm of his presentation.

A third interest factor in attracting attention is action. The arresting power of action results from an ever-present interest people have in what others are doing. It is one expression of the curiosity instinct. A display in which action is included

is by the very nature of action likely also to have the mechanical factor—motion—so that its drawing power is doubly effective.

Just how is the effect of action obtained on a display? It may be shown in a picture—the product in use, or being made, as I said before. The picture itself helps to attract attention and the action shown in the picture makes its drawing power just that much stronger.

Consider this: A still-life picture of a baseball resting placidly on a dark background, or the same baseball pictured just as it leaves the hand of the pitcher and the pitcher still poised in position after his throw—*which will have the greater power to attract attention?* That is why I say the stirring quality of action has a most important influence upon the attention obtained by a display, using it effectively.

Demonstrators sitting in show windows rarely fail to draw a crowd. Novelty, action, motion and position all are influences. However, just as in the other influences discussed, there is danger if action factor is not used with care and judgment. A number of my friends have sworn never again to eat hand-dipped chocolates after having had all the details of the process demonstrated before their eyes in a show window. A display to be successful must not merely attract attention. It must attract favorable attention.

There is danger in trying to use comedy as a factor in attracting attention to a display. Everybody likes to be amused, but the variations in people's tastes as to what is amusing are simply amazing. A display must please everybody; it can't afford to create unfavorable reactions. Humor can be used effectively in conversation and even in letters because a salesman knows his customers, but the appeal of the display is so general that it is safe then only to employ the deft touch of a professional humorist if comedy is to be an attention-getting factor. The professional humorist's intuitions and knowledge of human nature enable him to succeed where anyone less skilled would be bound to fail. A number of advertising campaigns and display posters have, in recent years, been built around the drawings of famous cartoonists.

Don't forget, however, that the danger which is inherent in any novelty is present in displays with a comedy motif. People will be attracted as a result of their desire to be amused, but their attention will be concentrated upon the comedy effects rather than upon the merchandise which the display is to sell. Therefore be sure when comedy is used to attract attention to a display that its use is so definitely and inseparably bound with the merchandise being sold that one cannot be apprehended without the other.

(A fourth article in this series will appear in the next issue.)

SEASONABLE DISPLAYS FOR OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER.

Pharmacy week
Prescription department
Surgical goods and hospital supplies
Syringes and atomizers
Hot water bottles and electric pads

Telephone order department
Olive oil
Flavoring extracts and spices
Crepe and tissue papers
Books and magazines