

DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF EFFECTIVE DISPLAY.

Many people are frightened by the word psychology. It smacks of the classroom and sounds forbidding. Psychology is simply a study of the behavior of human beings—why we act the way we do and the mental processes which cause or result from, these actions.

A person who wants to sell anything has an immediate and serious interest in psychology—the mental processes and behavior of human beings—because in order to sell successfully mental processes and behavior must be so stimulated as to produce the desired action—the purchase of whatever it is he is trying to sell.

It is easy enough to explain in a general way what psychology is. Likewise, the connection between psychology and successful selling is apparent with very little thought. Anyone who has ever tried to sell anything—be it a folding camera in a drug store, or a new line of biologicals in some physician's office—will testify, however, that there is an enormous gap between understanding in a general way what the sales process aims to do in the way of influencing human behavior and the actual accomplishment of the desired reaction with the prospective buyer. There is a big difference between knowing what you want to do and doing it successfully.

One of the principal reasons for this big gap between knowing what selling aims to do and actually accomplishing these aims is the complexity of human nature. Selling is complex because human nature, with which selling of necessity must deal, is itself complex. Psychology is a study of human nature, behavior and mental processes. Therefore, the more a person knows about psychology the better equipped he is to sell successfully.

Anyone who remembers his difficulties in learning to operate an automobile will recall how utterly complex and difficult the whole thing seemed. There was the steering, the spark control, the hand throttle and the foot throttle for gas; the two brakes, the clutch, the gear-shift, the gasoline supply, the water supply, the oil pump and gage, the starter, the battery, the generator, the lights, the tires, all of which had to be considered every time the car was started. And after the car was started there were, in addition, all the complexities of to-day's traffic with which to cope. After a few days' experience, however, automobile driving for most people becomes as simple and easy as walking. All the various things to be done become habitual and second nature.

I wish it could be said that the processes of successful selling are as easily mastered. In selling, however, a person is dealing with human beings whose actions and thoughts are subject to infinitely more variations and changes than the purely mechanical characteristics of a motor car. Psychology has undertaken to classify the actions and thoughts of human beings. This classification of necessity is complex because human nature is complex, but if a person can master

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well these psychological principles governing people's actions and thought they soon become so thoroughly ingrained that they too are habitual and second nature.

However, psychology, marvelous though its progress in recent years has been, has not yet developed to the point at which all of the principles controlling human thought and action can be pronounced with the certainty of instructions on how to drive a motor car. There are lots of things that aren't yet known. That is the reason that selling cannot be reduced to-day to an exact, mechanical process. We don't know all there is to know about human nature.

On the other hand, there are a number of facts about people's thoughts and behavior which are known definitely. Thus it is possible to make use of the available knowledge of human nature to make the selling process in that degree more certain and productive.

In all the preceding paragraphs I have talked only of selling, although the title of this series of articles is, "The Psychology of Effective Display." There is the first principle to recognize. The only justification for displays—either in the window or in the store—is that they help to sell merchandise. My purpose is to try to set down in a form that I hope will be usable a few of the tried and tested psychological principles which can be taken advantage of to make displays accomplish their purpose more surely and completely—that is to sell more goods.

It is only stating the obvious to say that if a display is to sell goods or to help to sell goods it must be seen. In order for it to be seen a display first must attract attention and then it must hold this attention long enough for the display to impress itself upon the mind of the person who sees it. Naturally, the hope is that this impression will be so strong and so favorable that the person looking at the display will have an irresistible impulse to buy then and there whatever it is the display is trying to sell.

Some displays will reach this maximum of effectiveness with at least a part of the people who see them. This does not mean, however, that a display which does not cause a single person to buy at the time it is seen is a complete failure. An extremely successful manufacturer of a cough syrup told me of an interesting experience of his which illustrates the point.

A druggist would put in a window display of this remedy. If during the week following the weather happened to be unusually dry and mild, few if any sales of the medicine would be made. As a result, the inference might be that this particular window display had little or no selling value. In fact, many druggists using this company's window displays did conclude that very thing and wasted no time in telling the company about it, often in very caustic terms.

If the week following the one in which the display had been in the window turned out to be cold and stormy an astonishing reversal took place. Sales of all cough remedies naturally increased, but the sales of the one displayed in the window the week before (which now was not displayed at all) were far greater than all of the others combined! The only possible conclusion could be that the casual glances of passers-by during the week of good weather had built up in their minds a familiarity with the name of this remedy. When they did need a cough remedy what was more natural than to ask for the one which already had been introduced to them by the window display?

Displays thus help to create both immediate and future sales. Although their most important and valuable purpose is to create sales immediately, never forget that they also have this secondary value.

Displays justify themselves, therefore, if they help to make sales, both at the time they are seen and later. A display can't do this, to be sure, unless it is seen and in order to be seen it must attract attention first and then hold this attention.

Therefore, the first thing to look into is the way by which a display can be made to attract people's attention. Entirely apart from the character of the merchandise displayed, there are some factors which help to attract attention to a display. These factors are called mechanical because in themselves they tend to attract people's attention, regardless of the kind of a display in which they may be incorporated.

The first of these purely mechanical factors which helps to get attention for a display is size. Anything which is much larger or much smaller than the usual thing attracts attention. A shoe store won unusual attention for a window because in it there was a real leather shoe fully as long as a man is tall. A Western department store blocked the sidewalks in front of a window by showing a man's straw hat with a brim a foot wide and everything else in proportion. Many druggists recall a successful display of tooth brushes, the central feature of which was a giant tooth brush, perfect in every detail but fully five feet long.

Objects much smaller than usual have the same attention-compelling force. The shoe store just mentioned drew attention to another of its windows by showing prominently a tiny pair of rubber boots not over three inches high. A prominent carpet sweeper manufacturer has delighted children's hearts as well as advertised himself by encouraging his dealers to display the toy size working model of his carpet sweeper.

Nature itself provides many animals with coats of a color which so harmonize with the landscape that these animals cannot be distinguished at a distance. Everyone knows that this serves as a protection to them; it keeps them from being seen by their enemies. A display is designed to do just the opposite—to be seen, to attract as much attention as possible. Therefore, anything which strikingly contrasts with its surroundings attracts attention by its very contrast.

Displays which employ the principle of contrast have the possibility of making themselves attract attention because they stand out with mountain peak prominence beside their surroundings. Some of the electric lamp manufacturers have advertised that a brilliantly lighted window display attracts more than its share of the passers-by because of its contrast with the surrounding streets and sidewalks and with the comparative dinginess of the usual window lighting effects. Dull black backgrounds by their very inobtrusiveness have the effect of increasing the attention which objects displayed in front of them receive.

Closely related to contrast as a mechanical factor in attracting attention to displays, and in many respects similar to it, is isolation. Many famous light-houses which seem impressively tall when approached from the sea would look insignificant if set down beside even a six-story building. Part of the illusion of height is created of course by the contrast of the light house with its low-lying surroundings and part by the fact that it stands by itself. A druggist who wanted

to draw just as much attention as he possibly could to a skin lotion he had developed put one bottle of this skin lotion on a black-shrouded pedestal in his window. The entire background and sides of the window display space were also covered completely with the same rich, dull-black draperies. As an attention-getter the effect of the druggist's display was magical. Attention couldn't help but be drawn to the one object in the window—the enshrined bottle of skin lotion—and that of course was the one thing that the druggist wanted this display to do—to draw attention to his famous skin lotion. There was nothing else in the window to see; that one bottle had to receive all the attention which was attracted to the window.

People experienced in display will recognize, however, that the occasions are comparatively rare in which a merchant can afford to have all the drawing power of one window concentrated on a single bottle of one item. It is as if an entire show case were given over to a single box of candy. To be sure, the item, whatever it is, gets attention due to its isolation plus the contrast this affords with its surroundings. The question is, will the single item get enough extra attention by its isolation to repay the loss of display value for other items which cannot be displayed in order to give the single article its desired degree of extreme isolation? For instance, the skin lotion display I mentioned may sell two gross a day of this item, but how does this return and profit compare with the returns from the display of a more varied assortment of goods? The answer usually results in a compromise; the article to be featured is given as much prominence as possible in order to take advantage of the principle of isolation, but at the same time advantage is taken of the display space to show in a less prominent way other goods, thus increasing the total drawing power of the display. Some little of the drawing power of complete isolation and contrast is sacrificed but the increased sales possibilities created by the display of additional items often more than overcome this loss.

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

SEASONABLE DISPLAYS FOR AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER.

Talcum and face powders	Vacuum bottles
Soaps and bath supplies	Soda fountain, packaged ice cream, bottled soft drinks
Travelers' toilet articles	Cameras and films
Sunburn and ivy poison lotions	Developing, printing and enlarging service
First aid kits	Flavoring extracts and spices
Telephone and mail order service	Insecticides and germicides
Week-end candy and tobacco supplies	

A HOSPITAL CONFERENCE.

Plans have just been announced for the holding of an international hospital conference, probably in 1929. The initiative came from the American group. The American Hospital Association has a committee on international hospital relations, under

the Chairmanship of Dr. S. S. Goldwater. It is planned to assemble at the conference the most up-to-date exhibits of hospital construction, administration and equipment. It is hoped by the discussions and exchange of ideas to help raise hospital standards throughout the world.