

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 will also 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.

ADVERTISING AND SELLING PROBLEMS OF DRUG STORES.

DIRECT ADVERTISING.

BY PAUL C. OLSEN.

Direct advertising includes a variety of media. When advertisements are sent by mail by a drug store, they may be in the form of letters, postal cards, booklets, folders and even magazines or newspapers published in the interest of the store.

The same forms of direct advertising can be distributed from house to house, or they can be handed to customers when they come in the store. Another form of direct advertising frequently used by drug stores is through samples, novelties, literature, booklets, blotters, etc. A pharmacy cannot afford to use literature that misinforms, or samples that bring the establishment into a class beneath that desired by the owner.

As is the case with newspaper advertising, the advantages and limitations of which were described in the preceding article in this series, effective direct advertising is prompt in the results it produces. Wrap, for instance, a sample tube of cold cream with each purchase by a woman customer. If the product is a meritorious and appealing one, and none other should be used, the pharmacist soon begins to receive calls for larger quantities of the cold cream. Similarly, a letter is sent to physicians in the neighborhood of the store saying that it now has on hand an ampul that has been given publicity in medical publications. Almost immediately, orders begin to be received by the druggist for this ampul.

A second advantage of direct advertising is its flexibility. Much is written and said, for instance, about the waste of sampling. When samples are passed over the counter of a pharmacy it is not a very difficult matter to confine their distribution to the customers who appear to be most likely to make purchases of the product being sampled. It is much easier to do this than is the case, for instance, when coupons from newspaper and other periodical advertisements are presented at the store to be exchanged for samples.

The flexibility of direct advertising permits special advertisements to be sent to different kinds of customers. Physicians receive one kind, dentists another, and veterinarians and nurses still other forms. When direct advertising is used, special advertisements can be written and their distribution confined to mothers

* Lecturer on Business, Columbia University and Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science.

with young babies, for example. It might be well to follow up advertisements for foods and other items in medical journals.

Because direct advertising is flexible, it is possible not only to confine the distribution of particular advertisements to the persons most likely to be interested in them, but also to insure their arrival in the hands of these persons at the most appropriate times. If a druggist, for instance, is attempting to interest the barbers of his community in the purchase of some of their supplies from him, he would not call nor send direct advertisements to reach them on a Saturday, the day on which barbers customarily do more business than any other three days of the week.

In efforts to obtain the interest and good-will of physicians, for example, it should be remembered that direct advertisements reaching them on Mondays and Saturdays have to face a much greater competition for attention than is the case with direct advertisements received during the middle of the week. Therefore, it follows that greater returns per dollar expended in direct advertising by retail druggists may be achieved if the advertising is received at a time when the recipient is likely to be able to give the most attention to it.

A great deal is written about the waste involved in direct advertising. There is no use denying that waste does exist in direct advertising. I wrote a letter one time for a publisher of a pharmaceutical reference book. This letter was sent to the proprietors of 50,000 individual drug stores in the United States. Of these 50,000 drug store proprietors, 49,000, or 98 per cent, apparently cast the letter aside without even reading it or, perhaps, without even opening it. The 1000, or 2 per cent, who did read and act upon the letter, however, ordered enough books to make the total expenditure on the entire 50,000 letters produce very satisfactory profits.

That's the thing to remember about direct advertising. It's not the 98 per cent or 90 per cent who don't respond that should be considered but rather it is the sales and profits produced by those who do answer. If these returns are enough to make the entire cost of the advertising profitable, what does it matter about those who don't respond?

Critics of direct advertising are fond of calling attention, as I have in the foregoing, to the fact that most direct advertising goes straight to the waste basket, oftentimes without even a passing glance. Naturally, every user of direct advertising wants to increase the return he gets from it. The fact that only a 2 per cent or 5 per cent return is received from direct advertising, should not deter anybody from using it, if the 2 or 5 per cent return is sufficient to produce a profit from the money expended.

I get a little out of patience sometimes with all this talk about the wastebasketing of direct advertising. Some of it comes from proponents of other advertising media who should know better. One might think to hear this talk that while direct advertising follows a straight route to the waste basket, all newspapers are carefully filed and perennially perused.

It is true that people do keep magazines longer than they do newspapers and, consequently, magazine advertisements have a longer life than newspaper advertisements. Coupon returns from magazine advertisements prove, however, that the great bulk of the response is received, in the case of monthly magazines within thirty

days from the publication of the advertisement, and in the case of weekly magazines, within seven days from the publication of the advertisement.

Every form of advertising has its advantages and its limitations. No one is best for all purposes. The wise advertiser recognizes the peculiar advantages and limitations of each form and chooses for the advertising of a particular project the form or forms of advertising which are best adapted to that special situation.

The profitable distribution of samples as a form of direct advertising rests upon the well-known principle that the product itself is its best advertisement. National advertisers spend millions of dollars each year to produce in magazines realistic reproductions of their product, recognizing that while the product itself is its best advertisement, a realistic reproduction of it is the next best substitute. The ancient Chinese proverb is correct, "One picture is worth ten thousand words." Carrying this Oriental wisdom a little further, it is plainly to be seen that the product itself, as a means of advertising, is worth far more than any picture of it, possibly more than 10,000 pictures of it.

There are, of course, dangers and pitfalls to be avoided if sampling is to be a profitable means of direct advertising. White women want wavy hair and colored people, both men and women, want straight hair. Madame Walker needed to know no more than this plain fact to build her widespread, successful business. La Gerardine wave set appeals to an entirely different group.

Samples of medicines should not be distributed indiscriminately. On the other hand it will be recognized that samples of medicines placed in the hands of physicians and other professional people may lead to a profitable series of prescriptions for these preparations. Drug stores advertising by samples should control the distribution of them by distributing them exclusively over the counters of their stores or as a part of personal visits to physicians and other professional people. In many cities, local ordinances prohibit the indiscriminate distribution of medicinal samples from house to house or by mail.

Novelties are used by drug stores as a means of direct advertising because of the long life these novelties may have. For instance, a message to mothers of young children about the importance of diphtheria inoculations for their children may be printed on a postal card, letter or in a newspaper advertisement. In most cases, the message receives a glance, if that, after which it is discarded. If, however, the same message is printed on a blotter, the blotter is not likely to be discarded as quickly because the blotter is obviously a useful article. It may remain on someone's desk or writing table for quite a while, and thus greatly increase the likelihood of the message on it being read and acted upon. What is true of blotters is true of other means, if properly selected.

There is danger, though, in having too much hope about the length of the effective life an advertisement attached to a novelty is going to have. A druggist, for instance, may spend a dollar each on very elaborate calendars and justify his expenditure in the belief that the calendar advertisement will be seen and read for an entire year. The truth is, though, familiar things soon lose their novelty and gradually are forgotten, even if they are in plain sight and in use every day. Most of the people who have hung this expensive calendar in their offices or kitchens won't be able a few days after it is received to say from memory whose calendar it is.

If you don't believe this, try to remember, without looking it up, who supplied your kitchen calendar this year.

It should be remembered, too, that novelties chosen for direct advertising of a drug store should be appropriate and in keeping with the character of the business. If they are otherwise, they may attract attention, but the attention won't be favorable and the reaction thus produced upon customers and prospective customers will be decidedly negative. For example, there are many women, and men, too, who are violently opposed to the use of tobacco. There could thus be a needless risk of antagonizing a group of important customers. What applies to cigarettes may also apply to other items, pictures, reading matter, etc.; in other words the selection of advertising requires careful consideration and study.

ACETYLSALICYLIC ACID AND ITS SOLUTION IN POTASSIUM CITRATE SOLUTION.

BY A. H. CLARK.

Frequently we have seen published statements or heard discussions regarding the solubility of aspirin in potassium citrate and similar salts. For some time it was thought that such a solution was an ideal way to dispense acetylsalicylic acid. Leech¹ has shown very clearly that acetylsalicylic acid in such a solution hydrolyzes rapidly and that after about four days fifty per cent is broken down. Snidow and Langenhan² have reviewed the literature of this decomposition quite completely as well as the hydrolysis of the acid by water alone. All the evidence presented in connection with the hydrolysis of acetylsalicylic acid by water, either with or without alkaline citrate, is very easy of confirmation. All that one needs to do is to carefully titrate a given volume of a newly prepared solution with standard alkali, half normal preferred, using phenolphthalein as indicator. From time to time titrate the same volume in the same way and note the increased volume of alkali required. When this volume has doubled complete hydrolysis is indicated. Leech plotted a curve, volume of alkali used against time of standing, which is very interesting and a similar experiment is plotted below.

After listening to numerous discussions of this subject by pharmacists and physicians, I became much impressed with the insistence of many that such solutions were therapeutically effective for some time after preparation. Even though, as Leech points out, fifty per cent of the acid is decomposed at the end of four days, the decomposition is progressive and for this four-day period such a solution might be very effective. Several "favorite prescriptions" of doctors have been mentioned in the writer's presence in which acetylsalicylic acid is dissolved in potassium citrate solution and sugar or syrup and flavoring added. The often repeated statement that such solutions retained their therapeutic activity excited the writer's interest to such an extent that experiments were started to determine whether or not something had remained undiscovered in connection with this question.

It was surprising to note that some of the prescriptions containing flavored syrups did not show the rapid rate of hydrolysis that Leech found in his aqueous

¹ *Jour. A. M. A.*, 78 (1922), 275.

² "A Pharmaceutical Study of Acetylsalicylic Acid," *JOUR. A. PH. A.*, 14 (1925), 694.