

ADVERTISING THE PRESCRIPTION DEPARTMENT.*

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Publicity is absolutely necessary to the success of a prescription business.

The old idea that a prescription department or case should be a place of mystery, bad odors and dirt, probably shut off in a badly-lighted and ventilated corner of the drug store, should be a thing of the past. Such places, I am sorry to say, still exist and are generally found in a so-called modern, up-to-date pharmacy, which consists largely of a lunch room with department store trimmings, decorated from ceiling to floor in glaring colors, yellow predominating, with flaming advertisements and a complete line of infallible cures for all the ills that the flesh is heir to. The real drug and prescription part of the business is of so little moment that they are pushed back out of sight and nearly out of mind. On investigation you soon learn from the owner or manager that the prescription department, in most instances, is conducted at a loss. The reason is they feature cheap prices to attract the innocent, thoughtless and penurious, and are forced by their general policy to price prescriptions so close that it is impossible, even with cheap clerks and cheap competitive drugs, to make a profit.

The other kind of store where you find an indifferent prescription department usually has a lazy or incompetent druggist as owner or manager. They belong to the "ne'er-do-well" kind; think the world owes them a living and sit down and wait for it to come. Unfortunately, there are lots of these fellows. You have seen them. The atmosphere in their entire store is bad, nothing to inspire confidence. They, of course, have not a prescription business of any moment; and I might add here that it is these two classes of drug stores that cause physicians to dispense, and, by their methods, shake the confidence of the public in the druggist, thus causing the professional and ethical side to be made ridiculous.

However, I am straying from my text, "Advertising the Prescription Department." I can only cite my own efforts along this line, which have been productive of very satisfactory results, as our prescription business has grown continuously and without sacrifice of principle or price.

In every community there is a large element of people who want the best both in materials and service, particularly is this true with medicine. As they know absolutely nothing about drugs and prescription service they drift to the neighboring druggist, unmindful of whether he is competent or not, to have their prescriptions filled. If results from the use of the prescription are not what was expected, the doctor is blamed. These are the people you can and do reach by straightforward advertising explaining the difference. I do not believe in sensational advertising, yet it must be sufficiently strong and individual to attract attention.

Before a druggist attempts to advertise his prescription business he must put himself in a position to make good; in other words, his material, equipment and service must be what he advertises, else his advertising will react and do him more harm than good.

*Read before Section on Commercial Interests, San Francisco.

We equipped our prescription department as hereafter described, before advertising. We have two large rooms on the second floor for prescription and laboratory work, with excellent light and ventilation. This department is connected with the salesroom by two dumb waiters and speaking tubes. Both rooms are finished in white enamel cases, ceiling and walls, and all work tables and shelves are of white Belgian glass; special ointment case; special refrigeration. Our laboratory is furnished in white, the same as our prescription room; in fact, we have worked out every detail so as to make our department complete and the best to be found.

We consider this one of the best advertisements for a druggist who desires to do a prescription business. We made it a point to take every physician in our city up to our department and explain its details thoroughly; we have also taken newspaper men and some of our appreciative customers.

We had photographs taken of the room and from them good engravings made. We then issued a small illustrated booklet, descriptive of our equipment, material and service. These we mailed to each physician of our city and vicinity. Many complimentary remarks followed. Since then we have printed a small-sized edition and wrap one in every prescription we fill. We find this a most excellent advertising medium and one that brings results.

Now a word as to the character of the men entrusted with prescription work. We select good men, pay them well and demand efficiency. Our men are all graduates in pharmacy, three of them being honor men of their graduating classes. Our head prescriptionist is a competent chemist. He has general supervision of the prescription room and does the laboratory work, particularly the assaying. Owing to our having competent men and equipment in this department, we supply virtually all of the physicians' laboratories in our city with their stains, reagents, special sterile solutions, etc. We find this is not only remunerative but also an excellent advertisement, thus securing the co-operation of the physicians for a good, profitable prescription business. A word from him to his patient carries more weight than anything we might say.

This brings us to the third and a most important consideration in developing a successful prescription business; that is, the material. We have for years and do now feature the chemicals and pharmaceuticals prepared by well-known manufacturers. This is not written as an advertisement for that firm, but I am trying to show what I believe has contributed largely to the growth and success of our business. This firm has been known favorably for years to the medical profession and their name is an asset; and as they market only one grade of products of highest purity, we feature this fact in our advertisements, both to the medical profession as well as the public. We say in our advertisements that when a physician does not specify a particular make of chemical, we use the best, which means a definite dose and definite results.

Now, as to advertising your prescription business to the laity. We do so without jeopardizing our standing with the medical profession. Some of our newspaper advertisements may border on the sensational, but experience has proven that it takes strong, well-spaced paragraphs to get pronounced results. We use three of our daily papers once or twice a week, three or four columns wide and from eight to twelve inches long. We try always to get the top corner

of page devoted to local society, believing that advertisements are read more by women than men. While the nature of our ads were such that there were no immediate results, yet in a short time we were getting prescriptions from all parts of the city. I attribute this largely to publicity by newspapers. I will give a few of the leading paragraphs we used in talking to the public through the paper; the headings indicate the character of reading matter that followed:

"It is better to have Newman fill your prescriptions than wish you had."

"Newman's rigid inspections assure purity and strength in their Drugs."

"Purity, Accuracy and Promptness—our three watchwords."

"Reason with yourself. Did you ever get something for nothing that was of real value?"

"Are you giving the sick one the best possible chance for recovery?"

"Suppose a cheap, ignorant drug clerk gave you Morphine when you asked for Quinine. Newman's skilled men can fill your prescriptions no matter how difficult others may find them."

"Highest Quality and lowest prices are as congenial as fire and water."

"Why do you go to your favorite Doctor?"

"Your life or the life of some loved one may depend on the man behind the prescription counter."

"A heart to heart talk on a subject that concerns you."

"You insure against fire, wind and water; also your life against death and accidents, then why not get prescription insurance at Newman's?"

"Confidence after all is the keynote to any successful business."

"Don't juggle with your health."

"Block signal service at Newman's with our checking system."

Newman's white enameled prescription department is as spotless and sanitary as a hospital or operating room."

"Attention to detail—NO SUBSTITUTION—These factors have made our prescription department famous."

"See your Doctor, then see us."

"We fully realize that every minute counts in time of sickness—that is why we use Motorcycle Delivery."

The following are a few paragraphs we use both in the body of counter booklets, as well as newspaper talks:

"Our prescription department is furnished with every scientific apparatus known for insuring accuracy and rapidity in preparing prescriptions, highly sensitive scales, electric sterilizing closet, tablet machine, suppository moulds, cachet machines, and numerous other modern appliances to facilitate and improve prescription work."

"All prescriptions filled by us are delivered in sealed packages, be they liquids, powders, pills or capsules; sealing strip is placed around each, thus insuring to the patient that it has not been opened or tampered with from the time it leaves the prescription department until it is opened by the owner."

"Instant dismissal is the penalty for substitution by any of our clerks; every man in our employ understands this thoroughly."

"Our guarantee label which is affixed to every prescription prepared at our place means just what it states. Kindly read it."

"All directions on prescriptions prepared at our place are typewritten, leaving no doubt in the mind of the patient as to the doctors's instructions."

"All pills, capsules, powders and suppositories are dispensed in hinged-top boxes, thus preventing the interchanging of covers, which lessens the liability of a serious error."

"The price of a prescription depends on the nature and purity of the drugs that

go into it, also the character and qualifications of the man who dispenses it. Our prices are based on the highest quality of ingredients and the most competent service. It is worth the difference; ask your doctor."

"All ointments or salves dispensed by us are placed in antiseptic collapsible tubes and the tubes in a substantial box, thus insuring freedom from exposure, which frequently causes ointments to become rancid and inert. Also protects the ointment from dirt or other foreign substance which may cause re-infection."

"Every one knows how sensitive the eye is—that if the least particle of dirt or dust gets into it, particularly if it is affected, how serious it is. To avoid just such thing occurring, we dispense all eye drops in a strong box in which the medicine and dropper can be perfectly protected."

"New bottles, new corks, new boxes, new labels, all scrupulously clean, are used for each prescription whether it be a re-fill or not."

"With us, prescription compounding is the most important work we do and we exercise every care and precaution to do it right."

"The Newman Drug Company's prescription department is located on the second floor, absolutely away from the noise and interruptions found in the sales department of all stores, and our prescription clerks do nothing else but fill prescriptions."

"We employ only highly educated pharmacists to compound prescriptions, men who are absolutely dependable, clean morally and physically, whose entire time, mind and energy is concentrated on their work; no distraction, no interference, as they are away from all possible interruption. This is an added safeguard against errors."

"Every United States Pharmacopœia and National Formulary product we manufacture in our laboratory has the Government tests for purity and accuracy applied. A record is kept with a control number, so we know, and can positively state, that all of our products are up to the required standards of strength and purity required by the National and State Pure Food and Drug Laws."

"Our firm buys and dispenses nothing but the best, irrespective of cost. We never substitute one product for another, claiming that it is 'just as good.' We never misrepresent an article, nor do we attempt to divert a customer from what he wants and asks for. We cannot and do not recommend patent medicines. We do not counter-prescribe, for that is absolutely the physician's field, not the druggist's. We do not permit our name or our place of business to be used to endorse or exploit fake medicines."

In conclusion would say perhaps I have offered no new ideas or thrown any light on this much-discussed subject, yet what I have written and have accomplished in this field is based on my own experience. I have pride in my calling and it has been my ambition to develop the professional and ethical side, thus to command and demand the respect of my fellowmen.

DISCUSSION.

Mr. Osseward: This paper again goes to show that it is possible to combine adequate pharmacy, and, as I call it, applied commercial pharmacy with merchandising. There seems to be a wrong idea prevalent that because a man runs a purely prescription store he should be opposed to commercial pharmacy. Such is not the case. If one man wishes to run a commercial pharmacy, so-called, if he wants to do merchandising, that is his business. All we ask from our side is that they give at least as much attention to the prescription department as they do to the merchandising, and they will find if they are persistent in giving it the right attention that they will get fully as much profit out of the prescription department as they will out of any other departmen. That is my contention.

Mr. Nitardy: One thing I was pleased to note is that the firm uses collapsible tubes for ointment. That is one of my hobbies. We do that in Denver.

Mr. Thiesing: Do you make an added charge for this?

Mr. Nitardy: Yes; we get a better price. It costs us from five to ten cents for the package. We use quarter ounce, half ounce, two ounce, three ounce and four ounce collapsible tubes, and our tubes are labeled on the sides. Some are red, some are yellow and some are blue, and the hinged boxes are labeled with corresponding colors of paper, so when two ointments of the same quantity are prescribed, the patient will readily distinguish between the two and not put the ointment back into the wrong box. You cannot put the label on collapsible tubes that will remain for any length of time. At first it is all right, but later they begin to roll up on the tube and the label becomes obliterated or destroyed, and we use that color scheme as a precautionary measure.

Mr. Thiesing: How much do you ask for a one ounce prescription of an inexpensive ointment?

Mr. Nitardy: It would be very difficult for me to answer that question, because I am not in touch with the prescription department sufficiently to know. But I know it was decided by the firm to increase the price of ointments all the way through in view of the higher price of the package, and we have had no complaints so far as I know. Take a one ounce tube in an ounce hinged lid box—it looks larger than a one ounce jar of ointment. The patient thinks he is getting more for his money because it is a larger package. It also looks more "classy," to use a slang expression.

I want to make another statement: On the inside cover of the box we have printed a little matter regarding the reason for using collapsible tubes, stating that the ointment jar is not a very sanitary container, and the object of the tube is to furnish a cleanly package, and that the tube affords better protection against air, dust, other contamination and light, than a jar.

Mr. Thiesing: I have always been of the impression that druggists, as a rule, do not charge enough for ointments dispensed, that is, ointments properly prepared that are put out as pharmaceutical preparations and that you would offer for inspection. We have given that a great deal of thought. We add from ten to fifteen cents and for an ointment of that kind we get fifty cents.

Mr. Nitardy: That is what we get.

Mr. Thiesing: And that covers overhead. I read your article about the prescription and the 27 percent profit.

Mr. Nitardy: Those were answers received from 10,000 prescriptions in ten different stores, and they represent, I imagine, an average of the profit made by Colorado druggists on prescriptions.

Mr. Thiesing: It seems to me so remarkably low, in view of the average cost of the work.

Mr. Osseward: In connection with that, it takes a great deal of time to prepare ointments properly, and I believe the pharmacist is entitled to a good profit. Take it in eye ointment, if we get a two drachm eye ointment with a collapsible tube and hinged box, we cannot charge less than fifty cents. If the ingredients are the same, it is the skilled labor you have to charge for. You are paying for it, and you ought to make a profit on your labor. We had an instance of that the other day. A doctor ordered some ointment, and he even directed it to be put in a tube; but the druggist failed to comply with the request, even was careless in the preparation of the ointment. The physician discovered the defect and by rubbing a little on the palm of his hand showed the patient the reason for the irritation that had been caused. Then the patient came to us. We charged, I think, fifteen cents more than the other store did, but we got that extra money for doing it right. This goes to show that you can get the extra price if you do the work. The physicians stand behind you.

Mr. Se Cheverell: The Chairman made a statement referring to our Colorado prescription prices, that your scale runs a little bit ahead. Have you ever made a systematic check on the prescription business the same as we did in Colorado this year?

Mr. Thiesing: No.

Mr. Se Cheverell: I venture the assertion—not that I am questioning your judgment—that on the positive, right-down-to-the-cent check, that you will be as greatly surprised as many of us were in Denver when we finished our final checking; and as a result of that the

most of us have added five to ten and in some places fifteen cents more to our prescription prices right straight through. We thought we were charging enough, but when we got right down to bedrock, figuring every item of expense, we were very much surprised at the small margin of profit on which we were carrying our prescriptions.

Mr. Nitardy: I would like to add one word. We found that while there was uniformity in prices charged, there was a great deal of discrepancy in the estimation of overhead expenses. We found the men that were the most careful got the highest figure on overhead for some reason or other. I believe that the average druggist does not take the time to calculate what it costs him for rent and telephone service and light and heat and waste and cost of investment, and such waste as is included in buying the preparation and then never selling any more of it, after the first prescription, and the skilled labor that you have to employ, and your breakage of glass ware, and the equipment you have to carry to run a respectable prescription department, and consider that on the basis of the number of prescriptions you fill. If you consider all those items you will find that the overhead amounts to a great deal larger percentage than the average cost of doing business.

Then there is another consideration I believe the average pharmacist overlooks. When you figure all that overhead of the prescription department—you only arrive at the cost without the running expenses, for the reason that when the prescription is filled, when you have paid the expenses of the prescription department, you have only a finished, salable article of merchandise just like a patent medicine on the shelf that your customer comes in for, and you hand to him. There may be risks of accounts in the prescription department, and the losses on the prescription department accounts are greater than at any other end of the store, for the reason that we are all human, and when a hard luck story is put up, we will let a man have a prescription where we would not let him have anything else. It takes study to figure out what it really costs you, and you will be surprised if you calculate what it costs you to fill your prescriptions. You will find that you make an average gross profit just like the people in Colorado, of about thirteen cents a prescription.

Mr. Thiesing: There is much in what Mr. Nitardy says, and no doubt it would figure out that way. In regard to part bottles of preparations, I had occasion to rearrange that part of our stock a month or two ago, and I was surprised to find that we had 327 bottles of patent medicine or proprietary medicine open. That does not take in the malt preparations.

Mr. Cody: I would like to ask a question in regard to pricemarks. We have pricemarks in several states, and I would like to ask if the eastern states would adhere to those prices.

Mr. Osseward: I am glad the gentleman brought that question up. I find in ten cases where we get a prescription, the price is marked on two. I find, as a rule, that the prices charged east are ridiculously low; you could not make a living; you could not pay the help and put up prescriptions for those prices. I had a lady the other day who came from the east, and when she asked me what the prescription was worth put up, I told her, and she replied that she paid half the price at home. I said, "Lady, you take it back, take the train, and have it filled."

Mr. Nitardy: There is a resolution before the House of Delegates this year, requesting that the American Pharmaceutical Association appoint a committee of five to investigate the cost of prescriptions in various parts of the country, and the retail prices received for these prescriptions on a somewhat similar basis as was done by the Colorado Pharmaceutical Association this year. A similar request has been sent to the N. A. R. D., so that all over the country a campaign of investigation can be carried on during the coming year in regard to this very vital and important subject, this committee to report back to this Association next year with a statement of what the committee believes should be the proper gross profit made on prescriptions. When that is done, we will have a basis on which to work in harmony all over the country as to what we ought to get for prescriptions. I am sure that most druggists that have only a moderate prescription business are losing money on every prescription they fill. Only those with large prescription businesses make a fair or small percent of profit or break even. There are very few druggists in this country today who are really making any profit on prescription business, and that is one of the reasons why the

drug profession, as a whole has such poor financial strength. We are not placing any value on our service; we are trying to charge a profit on the material we supply. I know from experience that the average druggist figures this way: He takes an article, say a certain amount of drugs that cost twenty-five cents, and he doubles that, figuring he wants to make 100 percent; he throws in gratis the container, the label, the work, whatever is necessary to his service, overhead expenses and everything else. That is all free. As a result, he never figures out that the things he gives free reduce his profit on the material that he is selling.

Mr. Osseward: There are not very many prescriptions on which you are making money. My average prescription, with the man I had in my store two years ago, cost 23½ cents expense. Last year, it cost me 23 cents. Every year I learn what it costs. When I take stock, I figure up my result. I find that I have filled so many prescriptions. I deduct a certain percentage for biologics, and things like that, but my total expense of the year is divided by the number of prescriptions that have been dispensed, and I call it my expense account. In other words, the expense of doing business with us this year will be based on 22 cents for each prescription.

Mr. Cody: Physicians are largely to blame for this condition. I now speak more of country stores than city stores. City stores are large and you have a transient trade. In the country you don't have that. They will pay fifty cents for a prescription here and pay another price somewhere else. A patient will say to a doctor, "What do you think that ought to cost me?" The doctor will say, "Oh, that ought not to cost you more than so much." And the doctor is just as liable to order something that costs us ten or eleven dollars a bottle, and tell the patient that he ought to get it for a dollar. That is a condition which has an effect on us.

Mr. Osseward: I would advise you to try a little education among the physicians. I think a heart-to-heart talk with the physicians about giving prices to their patients would improve matters. Just ask the doctor to tell his patient that he doesn't know anything about prices. I have a physician now who invariably will prescribe proprietary medicines. Whenever he prescribes he will tell the patient, "You will have to pay a good deal for that because it is expensive." It makes a good feeling all around. The patient expects to pay a good price, and he does not complain.

Mr. Cody: If the doctor writes for a bottle of any patent medicine, sarsaparilla, or anything else, and says, "Use according to the directions on the bottle," I simply pass over the bottle and charge the same as if there was no prescription; but if it needs a new direction on it and we have to wash off the label, we charge an additional amount.

Mr. Nitardy: The service is worth that, but we don't want to get the wrong deal on it. Our firm has always looked upon that as not very good business policy. When we sell a proprietary medicine in the original bottle, and the patient will know what it is, we get the same price as if they simply called for the preparation. As a matter of policy, we have always done that. If the doctor prescribes a pint bottle of mineral oil, just that way, so the patient will know, and our price over the counter for a pint is fifty cents, that is what we get for that prescription. We make no extra price because we don't like to have the people think we charge more just because the preparation is called for on a prescription.