

# DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

CONDUCTED BY PAUL C. OLSEN\*

## HOW MY SHELVES HELP ME SELL STAPLE ITEMS.

BY JONATHAN S. WRIGHT.<sup>1</sup>

"More than once I have heard it said that goods well displayed are half sold. In 20 years' experience in the retail drug business that statement has proved itself many times to my satisfaction. My purpose in this article, however, is not to discuss the many ways in which window and counter displays help to sell merchandise. I merely want to explain here a method which I feel has made my shelf space sell more merchandise.

"In addition, this plan gives me such a control over stock that rare indeed is the day I must say to a customer I am temporarily out of this or that item. In Bristol it is important to keep a complete stock. Although we are only 25 miles from Philadelphia, it is usually 48 to 72 hours before we can receive an order from the wholesale houses there, as opposed to deliveries within 24 hours in most parts of Philadelphia. What is more, the cartage charges on small orders are quite an item. Under these conditions it is especially necessary to keep a careful watch of stock. Here is the plan:

"The store I own was established in 1844 and the building and wall fixtures have been in use continuously since that time. The wall shelves are plain, soft wood, spaced 6 to 10 inches apart and about 8 or 10 inches deep. The shelves themselves are about  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch thick. I keep the shelves looking fresh and clean by having them painted white every year.

"If you were to walk into my store the first thing you would notice would be the fact that all the shelf stock is classified. One section holds dentifrices and tooth brushes. Close by are shaving creams, face and hand lotions, vanishing and cold creams, ointments and similar toilet articles. Another section is stocked with ready-filled bottles of household remedies—tincture of iodine, witch hazel, castor oil, etc. Another section has the insecticides and germicides. It is unnecessary to detail how all the stock is arranged. These few examples will give you the idea.

"I have tried to group on the shelves, in a logical way, my stock of staple items which sell steadily, but not necessarily in large volume. For instance, I have to carry 9 brands of tooth paste to meet the demands of my trade. In order to make any profit on this wide variety it is necessary to keep careful watch of the stock to hold it down to a minimum and still not miss any sales. To do this, each item has its own particular place on the shelf. The amount of space varies with the size of the package and the amount of stock carried. On the edge of the shelf under the space assigned to this item I tack a card the exact width of this space. On this card is lettered the name of the item occupying that space and the retail price.

"For instance, a half dozen bottles of soap liniment can be placed on a shelf

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length of less than 3 inches by putting the bottles one behind the other. On the edge of the shelf under this space is a card which says, 'Soap liniment, 25c.'

"It is surprising how many uses this simple little idea has. No claims for originality are made; I saw it first in a chain grocery store and realized there was no reason why the idea could not be used in a drug store, with its even more complicated problems of stock-keeping.

"First of all, this idea of a place for everything and marking that place makes for much quicker service in waiting on people. I know this is especially true in my store on Fridays, when I have a relief man all day. He knows where to look for all the staple items and what price to charge for them.

"Secondly, I can tell at a glance when my stock of any item is exhausted or running low, which enables me to order in time. Again, it is now a simple matter to make up my weekly order for the wholesale house. I merely walk along the shelves and jot down the things needed as shown by the condition of the shelves, adding new or special goods to the order.

"Before adopting this system I have stood in front of a vacant space on the shelves and racked my brain for minutes at a time trying to think of the item that belonged in the vacant space. The little card tacked to the edge of the shelf now tells the story at a glance.

"This system also saves the time and labor of pricing every single item that goes on these shelves; the shelf card takes care of that.

"But I haven't told you yet what is really the most important value of this idea of grouping related merchandise and marking its name and price underneath on the edge of the shelf. It helps to sell more goods and this is why. My customers read these identification cards and prices and make use of them just as much as I do.

"Every day instances like this occur—A woman comes in and asks for the 25-cent size of some preparation. Her eye naturally follows my hand as I reach to the shelf for it. Then she remarks, 'Oh, I didn't know they made a 50-cent size. That looks about 3 times as large. I believe I'll take that.' My little identification card has made the sale. I have added 25 cents to the day's sales without my saying a word, and because of the economy of the larger size. I have done my customer a favor.

"Most merchants know that people are timid about asking questions. This display and identification of merchandise answers many unasked questions, such as the one just quoted, and thereby helps sales. The man who comes in for shaving soap sees the tooth paste he almost forgot to buy, because when I get the shaving soap he is almost certain to see and, perhaps, want other related goods on the shelves nearby.

"You may think that this standardized arrangement of goods on the shelves gives my store an unvaried appearance, week after week. I realize that people like to see new and different merchandise, even in a drug store. I try to accomplish this by regular and frequent changes of my window displays. In the store, constant changes are taking place in and on the perfume case, the stationery case, the rubber goods and sundry case, and the special rack for displaying books. I further vary the interior appearance of the store by changing the arrangement of merchandise on the soda fountain and back bar. In addition, a bargain table

is featured which contains, from time to time, various slow-moving items that I want to push.

"As far as that goes, the appearance of the shelves themselves is constantly changing. New goods are being added and others are being dropped as the demand for them falls off. With the flexible arrangement just explained it is easy to carry a complete stock at all times and display it on the shelves in a way that I know helps to sell it."

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### TOO MUCH SALESMANSHIP.

"Well, I certainly am never going in that drug store again. All I wanted was a 25-cent can of talcum powder, but I couldn't even get my change until I had listened to a long explanation about some lavender toilet water the girl was trying to sell me. Now anybody with half an eye could see that I was in a hurry when I went in there; yet she kept right on talking and now I have to sit here in the heat for half an hour because she made me miss the 2:30 interurban.

"That's always the way in that store. You buy shampoo cream and they want to sell you hair tonic. Even the boy at the soda fountain tries to sell you a box of candy to take home, when all you want is a chocolate ice cream soda."

Unfortunately, the increasing propaganda for "companion" sales is producing more and more reactions of the kind just quoted. Customers, for fear of being annoyed by this so-called "selling" talk, are literally driven away from the stores which encourage or permit such practices.

The original idea of the "companion" sales was this. Any purchaser of stationery, for instance, ought to be a good prospect at that moment for ink, a fountain pen and similar related goods. The fact of the matter is some people are good prospects and others are not, and it takes keen judgment to discern which are which.

The little girl with one dime clutched in her tiny fist obviously can't be sold anything but the 10-cent copy book for which she came. The person in a hurry is only aggravated by "selling" talk. What impresses the customer in a hurry most favorably is quick, intelligent service. The man or woman who asks for what he wants in sharp, incisive tones is irritated by suggestions from salespeople. The woman who comes inside merely to wait for a street car isn't going to keep up the practice if every time she does so she is solicited by over-anxious salespeople. These are only a few illustrations to show that indiscriminate attempts at "companion" sales are apt to be disastrous to anyone who is trying to build up a permanent business.

The way the 5- and 10-cent stores handle the problem of "companion" sales is interesting. In some of these chains the salespeople have strict instructions not to speak to a customer unless they are first addressed by the customer. How are "companion" sales made under these conditions? It is a cardinal rule in many 5- and 10-cent stores that *every* item in stock must be displayed and accessible to the customers.

A woman comes in to buy pen points. As she selects a few, her eye wanders to the display of pencils. She remarks to herself, "These would be just the thing for Junior's school work. We never have enough around the house. I believe

I'll get a half a dozen so as to be sure to have plenty. And we do need a tube of mucilage. Here it is—only 10 cents."

No salesperson has said a word. The displays alone have made the additional sales. Any intelligent druggist can employ his displays to make similar additional sales for him and make them without the risk of offending and driving away his customers.

This idea of letting the customer make the first advances is not confined to to the 5- and 10-cent stores. Some of the finest stores in the United States forbid their salespeople to approach a customer until the customer speaks to them. The reason is obvious. People don't shop or "look around" in stores in which they feel salespeople will be over-solicitous. The displays should be allowed to begin the work of arousing interest in the merchandise; then the salesperson, when he does talk, is assured of an interested hearer.

SEASONABLE DISPLAYS FOR AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER.

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|--|--------------------------------|
| Cameras and films                          | Soaps and bath supplies        |
| Developing, printing and enlarging service | First aid kits                 |
| Vacuum bottles                             | Sunburn and ivy poison lotions |
| Week-end candy and tobacco supplies        | Stationery and school supplies |
| Telephone and mail order service           | Fountain pens                  |
| Soda fountain Packaged ice cream           | Gold and silver pencils        |
| Travelers' toilet articles                 | Spices and extracts            |

*Doct. Lyman Spaulding.*

*New York Sept 13<sup>th</sup> 1810*

*Dr.* Your favor of - 20<sup>th</sup> Ult<sup>o</sup> was duly recd. and was mislaid. in reply - we put on board the ship *St. Louis* Capt H. M. ... for your part 4 July aft. Term. at 75 ... like ... before we recd yours of - 6<sup>th</sup> - price of  
 37 1/2  
 of Vitrol - 22  
 Chalk - 100 or 125 Cts  
 hot bottle Corks - 75 -

*We shall be happy to receive your order however immediately attend to it. and remain*

*Yr Obedt Servant  
 Geo Robert Brock & Co*

*J. H. Smith*

Letter to Dr. Lyman Spaulding  
 "Father U. S. Pharmacopœia."