

SECTION ON COMMERCIAL INTERESTS

A LITTLE TALK ON CIGARS AS A SIDE LINE.*

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As a side line in drug stores, cigars are not only a clean but a profitable adjunct. If properly handled and well kept, you can feel sure they will yield a good return on the investment. There is practically no limit to what the business of your cigar department can be built up to, provided you adopt modern and up-to-date methods in conducting this branch of your business. No better illustration can be offered than the success enjoyed by the modern cigar stores. Why not study their methods, profit by observing their way of doing business? Incorporate as many features as you can of your own, all of which will enable you to compete on more even terms, with the ultimate satisfaction of seeing your sales increase, not alone in the cigar line, but indirectly in other lines, for the more popular you make any branch of your business, the more certain will it extend beneficially to other lines.

In the first place, your stock should be kept in an air-tight vault, preferably one with a cement floor, which tends to keep the cigars in a good condition. A humidity of between 70° and 75° should be maintained and proper moisture allowed. This can be done by installing in your vault one of the humidors which is run by electricity and dispels an equal moisture throughout the vault. It should be run at intervals about one hour at a time, and in this manner will keep the cigars in fine shape and your customers will soon realize that your stock is kept right. Of course, the size of the vault depends on the amount of stock carried. We have in our store a vault 16 feet by 24 feet, encased in double glass, cement floor and doors that shut air-tight. This vault has a capacity of 100,000 cigars. There is installed a humidor which, as stated before, is kept going during the dry weather and keeps the vault just right for moisture. Whenever the weather is damp we do not run this, but have instead a small gas stove which is run long enough to take out all superfluous moisture. The success of the cigar business depends largely on the way stock is kept, and if kept right there need never be any dead stock or dried-up cigars that are unsalable. Where the stock is small use a zinc-lined cedar chest of dimensions large enough to hold the stock, and at the same time leave space for moisteners, or a receptacle for a large sponge, which can from time to time be saturated with water.

The most important and necessary requirement is to keep in stock and offer for sale the best quality of cigars you can get and such brands as are popular and most apt to be called for. Select certain well-known brands among the five-cent, ten-cent, and two-for-a-quarter sizes and try to give your customer brands he knows about and which you can be sure will give satisfaction. Do not fill your case up with too many different brands, necessitating your customer's looking from one end of your showcase to another until he finds the brand he is looking for. As much as possible arrange your case with the five-cent brands by themselves, the tens by themselves, and the two-for-a-quarter together in one section.

Keep your showcase well filled, and do not allow any boxes with three, four, or five cigars in, to remain; take them out and replace with a full box. We

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usually close out the last row in the box to some one at a discount, for I find that the average customer is skeptical and will rarely select any cigars where there are only a few in the box. As one customer expressed himself to me, saying, "I don't want these, they have been picked over," so many have the same opinion. I have also noticed that a full box is rarely bought from until some have been sold out of it, and I generally make an effort to sell some out of a fresh box to get them started. I have had a box unbroken in the case in instances sometimes a week, and I wondered why. I asked one of my regular customers the reason, and he expressed himself, saying, "Why, they can't be good, or else some one would have smoked some out of the box long before." So it is well to either break into the box and smoke one or two yourself or give them to some one. You'll find the balance will sell much faster.

The selection of shades in cigars is an important factor, some preferring a dark oily wrapper, others the mildest kind of shade, and you must study your customers' likes and cater to them in this particular and you will hold them as steady patrons. Cigars are marked according to the color of the wrappers in Spanish terms and are as follows:

Claro or (C. C. C. abbreviated) means a very light shade.

Colorado Claro (C. C.) means a light red, a trifle darker than Claro.

Colorado (C.) designates a medium brown shade and is one that is mostly called for.

Colorado Maduro (C. M.), a much darker, mature, and ripe color.

Maduro (M.) means ripe and is the darkest shade usually sold, although I have in years gone by seen a very black, heavy-looking wrapper marked Oscuro, but this is rare and I do not remember seeing any cigar of late years of that shade. It is an erroneous idea among smokers that the Claro wrapped cigars should of necessity, on account of the light wrapper, be very mild. This is not always the case, as all cigars are sorted and packed in boxes by color of wrappers for the purpose of uniform appearance. However, the effect on the mind has a great deal to do with it, and we have customers who insist on a certain color marking in order to satisfy them that that cigar just suits their taste. Never dispute or argue with a customer, but favor him in his notions, and in nearly every case he will be better satisfied. Never try to dissuade a customer from taking the cigar he asks for, always hand out what is called for, but when he leaves the selection to you give him the best you have in the house and you will be sure to have him come back. I have in many cases guaranteed the box I have sold, telling the smoker to smoke five or six, and if they are not as good as I told him he could return the balance and select a full box of another brand, and I have never had a box returned where so guaranteed. It inspires the customer with confidence in the article, and that helps a great deal toward satisfying him.

Another great help to the cigar business is the window display. An attractive cigar display in your window will materially increase your business. Once a week, for instance, a certain popular brand can be displayed at a certain price for that day, say, for instance, a five-cent brand in boxes of 25, which retails at \$1 per box, can be featured at 89 cents, special, and will attract many customers who after smoking these special-price boxes will call for that brand later; but, above all, they must be a quality cigar to bring them back for more.

Always be pleasant and receive your customers with a smile, as cordial treatment and giving good value for the money will make cigars one of the most profitable side lines in the drug store. Watch what your competitors are doing, improve on their methods, lose no opportunities when away from home to get new ideas, new methods, and keep pounding away until you have made your cigar department a success in name and in fame, as well as financially a winner.

ABSTRACT OF DISCUSSION.

Mr. Fred I. Lackenbach: The paper to me is rather an interesting one. I am sorry that Mr. Berger is not here to read his paper. Mr. Berger has issued a little book telling the people how to sell cigars, and there is one little trick in it that is very, very good. There is a comic picture. It says the cigar is like booze, and that by taking a moistener and adding a little sherry wine to it, it increases the flavor and increases the sale.

A broken box that carries three or four cigars will hardly ever sell cigars. It is again true that a smoker will not take cigars from a full box. Why it is I don't know. I have laughed about it several times. We keep the case full and also break into a full box and take out some and smoke them ourselves. The psychology of that thing is rather peculiar. You would not think it true that a strong-minded man will not buy a cigar out of a full box. Again, the thought comes, have you ever noticed the window displays of the United Cigar Company? That display would be good for any kind of merchandising. They have a frame wherein which the literature can be changed; they use the same kind of frame and keep the window full. It is an easy window to dress. Personally I am attempting the same thing in my place, and I think it will be a success. It does not take very much stock to fill a window, and the window is very attractive. I try to get all the good out of these meetings I can, and I go from one place to another and see if I cannot pick up something. I have done it from New York to California, and all over the country I have been taking items for my own use.

Again, I cannot agree with cutting prices. I hold up the prices on all the merchandise I carry. That is the trouble with the pharmacist. He puts himself and his services and his goods to the public too cheaply. It does not sell any more goods to sell six five-cent cigars for a quarter. If you give the patron better value and sell him five for a quarter, he will buy just as many of them, and at the end of the year you will find that your profits are greater.

I do not believe in carrying large stocks of cigars. I think the turn-over is where you win. I think that is another mistake. I am going to speak about keeping up stock. It seems rather a source of pride to the average pharmacist that he has a very large stock. I think that is poor business. I am in the store very little and my head clerk does the buying. I tell him, "Don't buy too much stock, because it is the turn-over where you make your money." If you do a business of \$25,000 a year, which seems to me to be the average business, as was read in the paper yesterday—it may be more, but we will say they do \$25,000 a year of business, and supposing that is done on a \$5000 stock, how much more money will that man have at the end of the year if he carried a \$25,000 stock?

We who are in the cities are nearer the source of supply and it is absolutely unnecessary to carry more stock than is needed from day to day, and I have gone through the experience of filling up my place with a lot of stuff at 5 percent discount and having it so long that the discount is eaten up at the end of the year, and 5 percent off in 30 days and 60 days—take your pencil and figure out where you come out at the end of the year. It looks good, yes, 10 off looks fine. But when the 12 months are up, that does not pay. It is better to discount your bills 1 percent, as we do here, and keep the stock moving.