"WAD YE DENY P-R-R-RINT?"

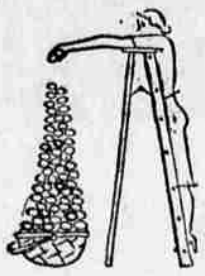
BY BERNICE FITZ-GIBBON famous retail store advertising director—creator of Macy's slogan "It's smart to be thrifty" and "Nobody but nobody undersells Gimbels."*

• **First, perhaps, I should explain the title of my talk—"Wad Ye Deny P-r-r-rint?" That is the Scottish brogue for "Would you deny print?"** I once knew an old Scotsman, and when he wanted to prove that something was positively, absolutely, indubitably, without-a-shadow-of-a-doubt true, he would crown his arguments with, "And I myself saw it in the newspaper. Wad ye deny p-r-r-rint?"

I got to thinking about that, and it occurred to me that nearly everybody feels the same way. It isn't merely the simple soul or peasant type that believes with gospel certainty that it's true because he saw it in the paper. I am not saying that something is true because it was printed in a newspaper. I am saying that *it's easy to believe that it's true.* There's a difference. It seems to be true.

And, because something seems more credible, more believable when you see it in a newspaper than when you read or hear it from any other source, doesn't that make the newspaper the best advertising medium on earth or in the air? I believe it does. So this little talk will be a pitch for the papers.

You may think that it's unnecessary to make a pitch for papers, that surely every store already knows that the newspaper is its best advertising medium. True. But many stores, right now, seem to be dipping a tentative toe into television. Others, save the mark



Don't let any eggs go astray!

and to change the metaphor, are actually sneaking a few eggs into the baskets of radio, magazines, direct mail, billboards, car cards, house-to-house throwaways, sky writing, telephone solicitations, sandwich men, sound trucks that tour the town, and what have you.

I believe that all advertising toes and eggs (to mix the metaphor again) should go into the newspaper basket. I believe that the newspaper is the only constant medium that will bring daily traffic and sales to a store; it's foolish for a store to dissipate its budget and diffuse its selling message by spending appreciable sums in these other frail and (to a department store) feeble areas.

Of course, I don't think any great harm is done by an occasional direct mail piece (to use up the weight allowance in the charge bill envelope). But I do not think that a personal letter establishes any rapport between the store president and the customer. I do not believe that a customer is thrilled to death to receive an envelope with her very own name and her very own address on it. I do not believe that she is flattered and fluttered with this "me and you stuff"—the big store president talking to little me and chatting things over just like old friends.

But, you may say, a newspaper is short-lived. Nobody wants to read yesterday's paper. That's true. *Today's masterpiece wraps tomorrow's fish.* And is that bad? That's good. The paper's being so very dead when it's dead is a reasonable result of its intense vitality and liveliness when it's alive. Only something *very* new can get so very old so quickly. Other media, that theoretically die more slowly, never have that hot-off-the-press aliveness.

And when you run an ad in a paper, you don't have to call in the figure boys to make a penetration study and reader analysis to find out if your stuff sold. You jolly well know, by looking at your cash register.

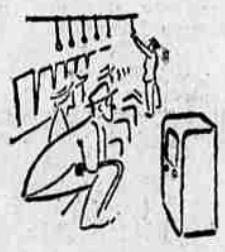
As Dorothy Kilgallen put it the day after the newspaper strike ended: "There is nothing like sitting in an easy chair or on a subway seat or a railroad station bench or a porch rocker and unfolding a fat, crisp, wonderful-smelling, ink-damp, aggravating, satisfying, incomparable, indispensable daily newspaper. There is just no substitute for curling up with the evening editions or waking up to coffee and the morning's."

Miss Kilgallen continues: "You can read on a train crossing the desert or on a plane 17,000 feet above the Atlantic—no static, no fading, no blips. You can read in the bathtub or while hanging onto a pole in a crowded bus. You can read as much or as little as you want, as fast or as slowly as you want.

"And if you read something you like you can tear it out and save it to read again some day. I enjoy radio and television, and I am gainfully employed by both, but I must admit they have their drawbacks. Did you ever try to clip a television program and paste it in your scrapbook? And if you got caught in a sudden rainstorm, would Lowell Thomas' newscast keep your hat dry?"

Of course, some newspapers are better than others. Editorial integrity and vitality and prestige are important. That's a definite carry over into the advertising columns. But any newspaper, good or bad, is still the store's best bet.

And one reason that any paper is the store's best bet is that the reader has paid good money for his paper and his number 2 reason for spending that money is to read the ads — the commercials. Newspapers are bought first for news, second for advertising. Interest in advertising comes ahead of interest in amusements, art



Can you take it with you?

notes, auctions, books, the bridge column, comics, editorials, fashions, food, lost and found, obituaries, cross word puzzle, radio, real estate, society, sports, television, and everything else.

How very different a climate this is from the one in which the ads or commercials on television find themselves! There the commercials are an intrusion, an outrageous interruption in the entertainment which is the primary business of TV. The commercial is the grim penalty that one pays to hear I Love Linda or Brad Faring.

Imagine how distressing it would be to have your New York Times snatched away by, say, Geldun's Mustard who would say, "No, you can't read Meyer Berger or Arthur Krock unless you listen to a mustard commercial for 3 minutes." Suppose you had just settled down with a Walter Kerr dramatic review when a shrill "better buy Dove's Eye" would beat in upon your ear drum. Or when you're in the middle of Walter Winchell to be switched to a woman with a flat voice saying to a young man all souped up in a white coat and stethoscope to make believe he's a doctor, "But how, Doctor, can Brown's little brown pills break the laxative habit?" Tell me, would that be a good climate in which to send out your selling message?

See how much better a climate your selling message finds in a newspaper than on the tortured air. The obvious weakness of these commercials is proved by the fact that the sponsor feels that it's necessary to force the star performer in his show to go into rhapsodical eulogies over the product. Imagine Anne O'Hare McCormick jumping in and writing the ads on Gimbels White Sale.

Jack O'Brian in the (N.Y.) Journal American tells of one actor who objected to the sponsor's idea of integrating him into the commercials. I quote: "As the moment arrived for the sales pitch, all huckstering intentions stuck in his artistic craw. What came out were a few derisive remarks about the sponsor's product. Upon witnessing this startling and sudden freedom from inhibitions, the producer blew an executive gasket, at which the actor gazed in his direction and — triumphantly — thumbed his schnoz."

Let's get down to some facts and figures and some concrete examples. I'd like to read you part of a very interesting article that came my way via the Toledo Blade's promotion department. I'm quoting, now:

"Radio has its Hooper Ratings, Hollywood has its box-office polls, but if the television industry wants to keep tabs on the popularity of its programs, let it consult the Toledo waterworks.

"George J. Van Dorp, water commissioner in Toledo, claims he can measure the appeal of a TV show by means of the fluctuations he has found in the water pressure during the evening. The pressure remains high during a television program, while everybody is sitting quietly watching, but suddenly drops at the end of a program because—guess what—so many persons get up and go to the bathroom at the same time.

"Back in 1951, the water department in Toledo began to be troubled seriously by sharp, sudden and unexplainable variations in the demand for water during an evening.

"Consumption would fall off to an unusually low level for a while and then, in three or four minutes, it would zoom upward. Pressure in the mains would fall accordingly.

"When this happened, the alarmed and puzzled crew at the pumping station would throw another big pump into action. Minutes later the use of water would unaccountably drop below normal again, and the extra racing turbine would have to be turned off.

"By the summer of 1952, the trouble had become acute. It was costly in wear and tear on water department equipment, nerve-wracking for the pumping station crews.

"For weeks the cause just couldn't be localized, but with further study of the records, truth dawned on the water officials.

"'We had found the culprit at last,' Water Commissioner Van Dorp related. 'It was television.'

"What happened was that families all over Toledo would stay close to their television sets while a good program was on—and of course would use no water. When the program was ended and the commercials came on, they would get drinks or give the last of the dinner dishes a hasty scrubbing or rinsing before the next show. But the largest use, unquestionably, Commissioner Van Dorp says, is that of bathroom facilities which use an average of eight gallons for each operation.

"At Toledo's Collins Park pumping station, a needle moving over a slowly rotating disk traces throughout the day the rate, in millions of gallons, at which water is being pumped to keep mains full. It shows with fascinating accuracy the public reaction to a program, right down to the commercials.

"For example, on a recent evening, gallonage dropped off at 10 P.M. when a boxing bout began, but spurted upward when the fight ended well before 11 P.M. instead of on the hour.

"Water consumption, however, was generally low during an hour long dramatic telecast on a recent Sunday night. But about 9:20 and at about 9:40 water consumption shot up.

"'Those were the commercials,' the commissioner explained. 'People left their sets while the commercials were on and used water in various ways.'

"Using the data available from the department charts, Commissioner Van Dorp has worked out his own rating of TV shows. Like the true pollster, concerned with medians and weighted averages and variable factors, he has devised a formula which can be applied by waterworks engineers in other cities with the same problem. His formula checks 'Program Popularity through Pumpage Pressure,' which Mr. Van Dorp has shortened to 'P Rating'."

So let's put all our retail eggs in the newspaper basket. You don't have to call a repair man to replace a newspaper's electronic tube or tinker with its antenna. No irritated neighbor ever asks you to tune down your Herald Tribune volume.

Yes, the strike certainly taught millions of news-starved New Yorkers that a newspaper was a living throbbing part of their daily lives, that the daily habit of reading a paper is a hard one to break, that radio and television newscasts just can't fill the gap. One desperate society matron complained that she was forced to read the Wall Street Journal and the Harvard Crimson.

Yes, television commercials are resented as penalties inflicted on the viewer who has turned on his set to be entertained. But commercials in the newspaper's advertising columns are understood, accepted, and welcomed. Indeed, the reader would be furious if the ads were not there. For remember, her number two reason for buying the paper in the first place was just to read the ads.

Now, even though the newspaper is the best of all media, although it provides the best mental and emotional climate for a selling message, the paper still has only space to sell. Space isn't advertising. It merely provides an opportunity to advertise—a place to insert a selling message if the store knows how to prepare one. The advertiser has to breathe life into that white space. He must attract and inform and convince. And this brings me to the subject that I was really asked to talk about today—"How to make newspaper advertising more productive."

A subject like that is so vast (rather like the title of the sophomore's composition—"The World and All it Contains") that I am going to confine my remarks to a discussion of that new advertising agency term that has recently poked up in the trade. The term is "hard sell"—two words—"hard" and "sell".

"Hard sell" can best be explained by the story of the psychiatrist and the mule. A man owned a mule who had become uncooperative. So his owner took him to a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist, after hearing a detailed account of the mule's mulishness, picked up a wagon tongue and hit the mule across the nose. The shocked owner demanded to know why he had done anything that drastic. The psychiatrist answered, "I was just trying to get his attention." The psychiatrist was using "hard sell."

Noisy braggadocio is "hard sell". Bullying, exaggerated claims clothed in huge hysterical type aimed at hitting the reader between the eyes is "hard sell." When retail business is a little hard to get, merchants say, "Now don't give me a pretty ad—I want to do business." They love ads that pound and yell and try to command attention by multiple display lines and many different kinds of type faces. Mixing up type faces has been called German band typography; because all the different fonts seem to be trying to blow one another out of the piece.

Now, the only trouble with this big bold vehement "hard sell" is that it doesn't sell hard. *"Soft sell" sells hard.* A Fortune Magazine analysis has proved that "hard sell" boast and brag headlines were only 60% as effective as "soft sell" consumer headlines. Buckshot attention getters seldom get attention. You have to woo the reader. And you can't woo a reader or a mule with a wagon tongue.

Cliches, exaggerated stock expressions, and stereotypes are a block to communication. Great areas of black ink tend to repel rather than to attract. This bludgeoning type of advertising goes in one eye and out the window. Probably it never even gets in one eye. The mind excludes it by "selective inattention"—a term coined by the famous Harry Stack Sullivan who was called "the poor man's Freud."

Since only about 20% of a store's merchandise is sold directly from advertising, it behooves the advertiser to make a crystal-clear, complete sales pitch in every ad. Price emphasis should follow, not precede, creative selling. First and foremost comes honesty. There must be no muddy grey zone of half truth, no sly distortion. Honesty is like pregnancy—there's no half way. Either you is or you ain't.

Exaggerated claims like "best in the world" and "greatest value in our history" are just not credible. I have often wondered why advertisers don't know how smart it is to tell the entire truth about an offering. Tell one little bad thing along with a lot of important good things. A little bad makes the good believable.

A recent Ford campaign admitted frankly that cars that cost much more had better upholstery and finer appointments than the Ford. This was smart selling. In the first place, everybody knows that it's true. And the easiest way to make a person believe what

Sometimes a whisper is louder than a shout

you are going to tell him is first to tell him something that he already knows is true.

If "hard sell" technique is unsuccessful in moving goods out of a store today, and tomorrow, and the day after tomorrow (as every ad should do—otherwise it does not pay to advertise) "soft sell" can be fantastically successful. Soft silken selling influences the reader; and "influence" is defined by Webster as the act of producing a result without apparent force. Copy must persuade. And persuade is a warm word that fairly purrs with sweet reasonableness. Sometimes a whisper can be heard more easily than a yell in a boiler factory.

What are some of the great "soft sell" successes? The Man in the Hathaway Shirt. The Holiday campaign—remember the "America is off its rocker" and the last one—"Be it ever so humble there was no place *but* home." The copy in that last one went on merrily—"It's a lucky thing that home was sweet in the good old days because that's where people were stuck most of the time."

The Sanforized ad that showed a girl inside a shrunken dress with a caption "When it's too little it's too late." The Ladies' Home Journal slogan—"Never Underestimate the Power of a Woman", Tide's "You never had it so clean." The small all-copy Wallach campaign. Inside the front cover of the current Saturday Evening Post, there's a Life Saver ad with this engaging doggerel:

"Why reeks the goat on
yonder hill
Who daily dines on
chlorophyll?"

Young and Rubicam is the great "soft sell" agency. Remember the Arrow campaign? And, overall, Lord and Taylor has done the best "soft sell" retail job.

Bishop Sheen with his "Come in and get your faith lifted" is a past master at "soft sell". How much more successful than hard sell-hard shell, fire and brimstone evangelism. And of course the Lee's heavenly carpet campaign, a whisper of soft fantasy, has catapulted Lee's (a name that scarcely anyone knew 6 short years ago) into a famous household word.

The best of the Gimbel ads have been "soft sell." I remember in particular an ad we ran on a commonplace little doll Muffie who was offered sans wardrobe. Our copy read, "Muffie comes to you in panties and a hair ribbon. Muffie's much too much of a lady to come to you altogether in the altogether." Orders poured in. Some of them said: "Please send me the little doll too modest so appear in the altogether."

And one of the best of the "soft sell" campaigns is Burma Shave. (Did you know that Gertrude Stein was impressed only by two things she saw in America—the dime stores and the Burma Shave campaign.) I liked this one:

"My job is keeping
faces clean
Nobody knows de
stubble I've seen."

You'll notice that humor and lightness go right along with "soft sell." You know I get pretty sick of those sober pontifical denunciations of advertising copy that is fresh, bright, light, clever, or witty. I think it's a case of sour grapes. The critics criticize clever ads because they are not clever enough to write clever ads. *A good ad should be good reading.* It should entertain as well as inform and propagandize. In fact, it *can't* inform or propagandize unless it *does* entertain. You know it was the Jesuits back in the 17th century who made that startling discovery that is the foundation for modern progressive education—namely, that you cannot learn unless you're interested.

You can't be interested until something stops you or stirs you or tickles your fancy. No ad is ever sought out and read by anybody except the person who wrote it or the one who paid for it. Copy must cut across the reader's complacency and rivet his attention.

Let's just take these adjectives one by one. The opposite of fresh is stale. The opposite of bright is dull. The opposite of light is heavy. The opposite of clever is stupid. The opposite of juicy is dry. The opposite of exciting is humdrum. The opposite of witty is solemn. Now, I ask you, would you rather run advertising that is fresh, bright, light, clever, juicy, exciting, and witty, or copy that is stale, dull, heavy, stupid, dry, humdrum, and solemn.

Louis Kronenberger has summed-up this whole matter of the witty versus the solemn in his introduction to "Cavalcade of Comedy", a book that Simon and Schuster published yesterday. Mr. Kronenberger says:

The opposite of bright is dull

"The truly insane (because utterly unsound) theory that what is amusing must be less significant than what is ponderous or grim; or that what is witty must be more superficial than what is sententious or sober; or what is fanciful contains less truth than what is factual—all this is part of an age-old conspiracy whereby those who plod rather than leap, who ponder instead of react, seek to discredit their betters. It was one such plodder, I feel pretty sure, who first circulated the fable of the hare and the tortoise."

And now that we have wrapped up the newspaper as the best store medium, and proved, I hope to everybody's satisfaction, that "soft sell" sells harder than "hard sell", we still haven't peeped about the most important matter of all in selling merchandise. And that of course is the merchandise itself. You may think that that is no concern of the advertising department's and no concern of the paper. That, you may say, is wholly the merchant's affair. I dunno. I dunno.

I feel about merchandise the way Clemenceau did about war. "War," he said, "is much too important a thing to be left in the hands of the generals." Another day—another N.R.D.G.A.—we'll take that up.

*Bernice Fitz-Gibbon is one of the best known women in all advertising. From 1940 until April 1954 she has been advertising director of Gimbels, New York. Previously, she began her reputation at Macy's and John Wanamaker's of New York and Marshall Field & Company of Chicago. Fitz is the originator of the famous slogans "Nobody But Nobody Undersells Gimbels" and "It's smart to be thrifty" (Macy's). She has opened her own advertising and merchandising consulting service in New York City.

In January, 1954, she addressed the convention of the Sales Promotion Division of the National Retail Dry Goods Association in New York City. Her subject was advertising. Her audience was retailers. Her words are now famous and are reproduced here exactly as they were delivered for the benefit of all local advertisers.

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