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EC62-1165 What's Behind the ADS?

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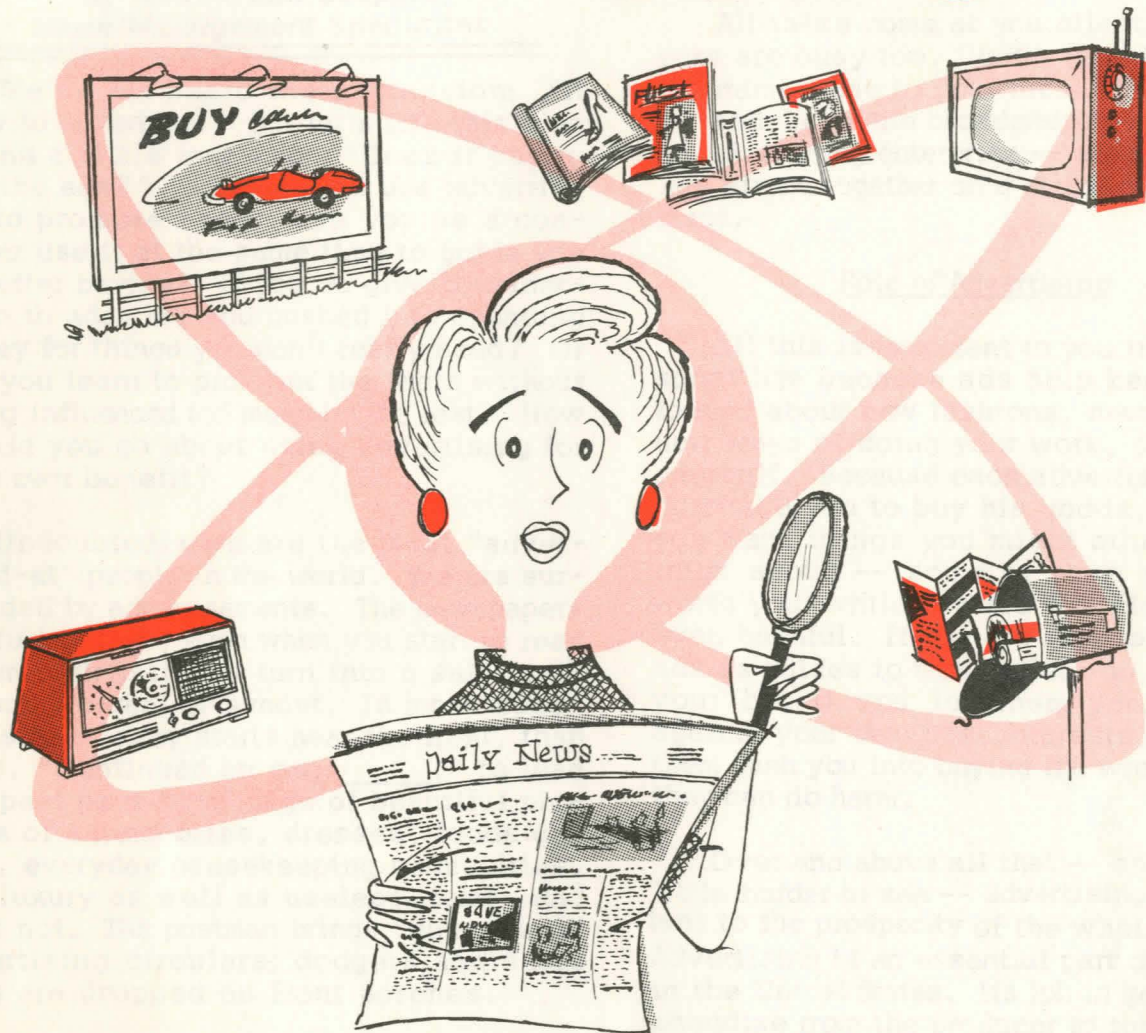
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WHAT'S BEHIND the ADS?



EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE
AND U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
COOPERATING
E. F. FROLIK, DEAN E. W. JANIKE, DIRECTOR



What's Behind the Ads ?

By Mrs. Clara Leopold
Home Management Specialist

We've all heard the expression: "It pays to advertise." But let's turn this idea around a little and say: "Does it pay to use the ads?" Businessmen use advertising to promote sales; can you as a consumer use it at the same time to guide you to better buying? If you do give consideration to ads, are you pushed into spending money for things you don't really need? Or can you learn to pick out the facts without being influenced too much by the rest? How should you go about using advertising for your own benefit?

Undoubtedly we are the most "advertised-at" people in the world. We are surrounded by advertisements. The newspapers are full of them; even when you start to read a comic strip it may turn into a sales talk for some cereal or syndet. In most magazines each story starts near the front, then says, "Continued on page _____," to lead you past page after page of beautiful pictures of automobiles, dresses, foods galore, everyday housekeeping necessities, and luxury as well as useless items, and what not. The postman brings "direct mail" advertising circulars; dodgers and sales bills are dropped on front porches.

The packages in which your goods are wrapped are designed to attract you. The glasses you drink from at the soda fountain carry an advertising message. The truck in which deliveries are made has an advertisement painted on its side; when you open your packages you may find sales talks for other goods sold by the same firm. Even the monthly statement from the store may include ads and the shopping bag you carry serves as a moving billboard for the firm whose name appears on the side.

In every city Main Street is brilliant with show windows and signs. Even the highways are lined with billboards and smaller signs; the telephone posts are picture galleries of last year's candidates; and it is not uncommon for a barn roof to proclaim the virtues of somebody's pills, powders or motor oils.

All these come at you silently but your ears are busy too. Radio (and television) programs come to your family free because by-and-large the broadcasting business is an advertising enterprise -- a succession of ads strung together on a string of entertainment.

Role of Advertising

All this is important to you in your personal life because ads help keep you informed about new fashions, new products, new ways of doing your work, of enjoying yourself. Because each advertiser aims to persuade you to buy his goods, ads make you want things you might otherwise not think about -- some of them very much worth your while, others worthless, a few even harmful. If you are able to use these ads as guides to right selection, they help you; but if you let them persuade you against your own best interests, if you let them push you into buying the wrong things, they can do harm.

Over and above all that -- and this is a little harder to see -- advertising is important to the prosperity of the whole country. Advertising is an essential part of business in the United States. Its job in getting merchandise from the producer to the customer is equally important to you as packing, transporting, warehousing, or any other steps in distributing goods. A manufacturer may produce an abundance of goods, send them to every corner of the country, but if no one knows about the items, few, if any sales will be made. People don't go out asking to buy things of which they have never heard. No matter how good and useful the item, if no one knows or buys it, the manufacturer will go out of business and with him, the workers in his business.

Advertising helps agriculture, too. Not many years ago oranges were a Christmas luxury to be found in the toe of a child's stocking. Today, through advertising, they are daily menu fare. This is true of other farm commodities -- Dairy Councils advertise the benefits of milk; Wheat Commissions offer new ideas to increase the consumption of wheat; fruit syndicates use tantalizing ads to encourage use of fruit; the American Meat Institute glorifies all forms of meat, and so on.



Recognize Advertiser's Appeals

Before you can learn to use advertising to best advantage you must understand that most modern ads appeal to basic human instinctive tendencies or character traits of individuals and are carefully planned to make you buy things without being aware of these influences.

Advertisers know that first they must get your attention. To do this they may use anything from a clever headline to a pretty girl or an exciting radio or television program. Brilliant colors catch and hold attention. Action pictures, certain kinds of comic situations or lines, and devices that arouse pleasant feelings (or sometimes sharply unpleasant ones) also attract attention. You can quickly pick out the attention-arresting device in an ad. It is designed to carry you easily and naturally to the advertising message.

If you were asked what you would like most in an ad very likely you would suggest buying information -- facts. But did you realize that many things beyond facts influence your buying habits? In the words of one advertising executive: "You have a lot of hidden desires and urges that have a

great influence on what you buy. You don't stick to information. Your emotions are much more powerful than your brains when it comes to buying, say, a shiny red sedan." One or more of the following appeals (little hidden desires and urges) can be detected in the ads of almost any magazine, newspaper, billboard, evening of television viewing or of radio listening:

... Fear -- health products, insurance, safety, etc.

... Desire to outdo neighbors and friends.

... Create a new taste -- tempting you to want something that you consider a little beyond your way of life.

... Arouse hope of glamour -- cosmetics, apparel, personal care.

... Natural cravings -- food ads appealing to taste, smell, beauty items, desire to be admired.

... Sex -- exemplified by person who has made self attractive to opposite sex.

... Parental -- love of children.

... Self-assertion or self-preservation -- desire for success, independence, or possibility of surpassing others.

... Vanity -- admiration of others.

... Fashion -- clothing, hair styles, furnishings.

... Pleasant associations -- play, resorts, sports items, parties, beautiful home.

... Curiosity -- teasers, often used for new model cars.

... Creative, construction skills -- do-it-yourself items - paints, home decorating.

... Bargains -- buying something for less, desire to save money.

... Temperament.

... Status -- society leaders, influential citizens, testimonials.

Getting the Facts from Advertisements

Since consumers are bombarded with the advertising appeals as well as the facts, let's learn to use advertising to greatest advantage by:

1. Getting information or guidance from the ads to the extent that they provide it.
2. Learning not to be unduly influenced by advertisements which do not serve our purposes.
3. Identifying the earmarks and lingo of the fake bargain advertiser.
4. Being alert to the regulations and laws designed to protect the consumer.



When you read the ads, read every word, not just the dollar sign and the figures after it. Forget the fancy adjectives. Ask yourself for some straight answers to some questions, remembering your own real needs and desires to avoid wasting the family's hard-earned money. Grocery and drug stores often advertise a few items below cost as "leaders" (sometimes called "loss leaders") to get more customers into the store. Be sure the price is a "special" and below the usual price before you buy. Too many consumers do not realize that the purpose of a "leader" is to get them into the store to buy other things, the price of which is often enough higher than the gain from the "leader" is more than lost. The best way to beat this problem is to stay with your regular store or to buy only the advertised bargain and to shun everything else. Remember, control for over-spending comes from the person doing the spending.

How many of these facts are clear in the ad and how many will you have to ferret out after you reach the store?

Kind of Merchandise

Is the item new or is it a discontinued model? Is it guaranteed? What does the guarantee mean? What quality? What colors, styles, sizes?

Quantity

Does the store have plenty of the bargain goods or only a limited supply? Is this scarcity theme only a trick to get you into the store?

Condition of Merchandise

Be sure to determine whether the items being offered are samples or are shop worn or damaged. Are they seconds or irregulars (these are often good buys)?

Price

Note whether the advertised price includes the "Federal excise tax" where applicable, delivery charges and extra charges for accessories, installation or service. What is meant by "no carrying charge"?

The consumer contest is deceiving. Gullible persons are enticed into spending their money for articles they neither need nor want in order to be eligible to enter these contests. In the more simple type of advertising contest or puzzle everybody wins and is sent a certificate to apply on a purchase that is usually over-priced, or poor quality and from an unknown manufacturer. The main idea is to get your name in order to advertise to you by mail or to send out a salesman.

Bargains are all right if they are really bargains. But you must hold yourself in check lest you buy "something you can't use at a price you can't resist." Beware of the "never-again" bargain. The ad says the item is low, low priced and never again will be sold so cheaply.

The temptation to take advantage of the opportunity is terrific. Maybe the article is a bargain. Maybe the price never again

will be so low. But so what, if the purchase deals a severe blow to a limited budget or you end up with something you wish you didn't have.

A true bargain is an item that is less expensive today than it was yesterday. It is something that you have given some thought to. Finally, it is an item that you will use, that you really have a desire for, and that you can afford. Nothing is a bargain unless you need it, no matter what the ad says about a low price.

Fake Bargain Earmarks

Perhaps no single sales practice trips up shoppers more than phony comparative price ads. This is one of the top advertising problems today, and comparative prices should be taken with a great big grain of salt.



Be suspicious of prices far below the "regular" prices, and not in line with the value of the product. Watch out for meaningless words -- price \$25 -- value (or worth) \$40. What do "value" or "worth" mean? Better know the original price and the real quality represented. Misleading claims show up in words and phrases like "selling elsewhere for;" "priced in other stores at;" "should sell for;" "made to sell for;" "verified value;" "manufacturer's suggested price;" "identical value" "now only;" "replacement price;" "below cost;" "list price;" "savings up to--;" "savings of one-half to one-third;" "lower than last year prices;" or "wholesale discounts."

The words "sale," "wholesale" and "discount" in any combination seem to have a charm for setting into motion the consumer's great desire to save money! Question dealers who offer fabulous trade-in allowances. You can probably get the same deal elsewhere without a trade-in. Don't fall for promises to refund the difference or the purchase price "if you can buy the same article for less elsewhere." It may take a lot of proving to get the merchant to honor such a claim.

Take heart! Not all comparative pricing is deceptive. Generally you can rely on ads that list "our regular price," "our former price" or "our usual price" along with the sale price. You can believe bargains advertised with such statements as "similar merchandise as sold in our store for" or "last price at which this merchandise was sold in our store was."

Bait advertising is another sly device to trap the unwary consumer. This kind of an ad offers certain articles at bargain prices when the advertiser has no intention of selling these articles, but desires merely to entice the customer into the store to sell him a substitute at the higher price -- probably an inferior substitute at an exorbitant price.

You'll know you are dealing with a merchant who resorts to "bait" if his ad offers merchandise at a ridiculously low price, the salesman isn't willing to show you or to sell you the advertised article, gives you an alibi that it is sold out (in an incredibly short time) or that there will be a long delay before delivery can be made. He will probably offer to show you something better.

Surely the word free must cause more people to part with their money than any other word in the American language. Whether it is a premium given for return of a designated number of coupons, labels, box tops or a gift that comes along with the purchase of a suite of furniture or a complete spring outfit, you can rest assured you paid for it. Without having given it a second thought you may have also bought yourself an "orphan article" -- it really doesn't fit your need, but you were lured into buying it to get that "free" gift!

Working for Truth in Advertising

Business recognizes the existence of the dishonest advertiser, and business leaders do try to stop his destructive influence.

Working with the businessmen is the Association of Better Business Bureaus, Inc. Although this is a national organization, each Bureau is financed by local businessmen, is completely autonomous and plans its own work to meet local needs. One of their chief concerns is to correct false, misleading advertising and other sales promotions that exist within a community.

A special advertising and selling guide, closely adhered to by thousands of retailers, has been published by the Bureau. The National Better Business Bureau performs a similar function on a national basis and has published a guide for national advertisers. They assist periodical publishers in elimination objectionable advertising from their columns.

Other advertising organizations and groups are engaged in voluntary efforts to maintain advertising on a high plane. Some trade groups encourage their members to submit advertising copy prior to publication. A large number of newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations, and other advertising media enforce their own individual regulations covering acceptance of advertising.

Almost from the beginning the Federal government has offered some protection against fraudulent advertising. There are Postal laws designed to control fraudulent "direct mail" advertising, The Federal Trade Commission (Wheeler-Lea Act) is empowered to prohibit unfair, deceptive, false advertising. FTC also carries on a nationwide program of spot-monitoring and recording of advertising to deter detrimental advertising; although it does not censor for good taste or prevent a reasonable degree of "trade puffing." If the seller makes no specific misstatement of fact, or gives no misleading impression, he is not barred from praising his goods.

The Food and Drug Administration requires that the truth about foods, drugs, devices, and cosmetics be told on the labels of such products. The Securities and Ex-

change Commission administers laws for the prevention of untruthful statements in connection with securities. Advertising of alcoholic beverages is handled by the Federal Alcohol Administration.

Federal agencies have jurisdiction only in inter-state commerce but there are state and local regulations too. Nebraska is one of the 24 states that has adopted the "Printers' Ink Model Statute" which makes a false or misleading advertising a misdemeanor.

To be an independent consumer today, we need to be more than just wary. We fail in our duty as good citizens unless we co-operate with the agencies that are trying to protect the consumer's health and pocket-book from hidden danger and cheats. Any unethical business practices we may observe, or by which we are victimized, should be reported to the appropriate agency.

Can You Use The Ads?

Advertising is a useful economic tool even for the consumer. In spite of the abuses by those who seek to misuse it (and sometimes succeed in doing so) the great bulk of advertising is honest and can be depended upon. Your best safeguard is to view advertising with both confidence and caution, to judge it in the light of common sense.

You can protect yourself by taking an especially long look at improbable offers on obscure brands. Advertising properly used can render a valuable service to you as a consumer when you realize that advertising is naturally partisan, and often unconsciously overstates its case. It puts its best foot forward when seeking to convince the public just as you, as an individual might do.

A valuable part of your training as a homemaker is an ability to understand advertising, to analyze it and then use the information gleaned from it, and be able to discriminate between the different advertising appeals - good and bad. As a consumer you have more influence on the course of advertising than you may think. Your purchases determine what shall be made and what shall be sold, and therefore, what shall be advertised.

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"Guides Against Deceptive Advertising of Guarantee," Federal Trade Commission, Washington, D.C.

"Guides Against Deceptive Pricing," Federal Trade Commission, Washington, D.C.

Changing Times, March 1956 - The Kiplinger Washington Agency, 1729 H St. N.W., Washington 6, D.C.

"Bargain Hunting," Hilda Frederick, Home Management Specialist, Extension Service, University of Idaho, Boise, Idaho.

"The Consumer Looks at Advertising," talk by Alexander Akerman, Jr., Executive Director of Federal Trade Commission, given to the Third Annual Conference of Council on Consumer Information, April 1957.

"How to Read the 'Amazing Bargain' Ads," by Albert Q. Maisel, Readers Digest, September 1955.

"Big Shift in U.S. Buying Habits - Why?" - U.S. News and World Report, July 4, 1958.

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