

BIRTH OF THE BRAND: THE MODERNIZATION OF ADVERTISING, 1870-1920

Coordinators: Stewart Alter and Howard Menikoff

Our study group looks at how late 19th century American advertising was transformed into the familiar brand and consumer lifestyle focused business that is now a pervasive presence across pop culture and the media. Between 1870 and 1920, dramatic changes in American society altered the requirements and practices of advertising. Larger companies involved in high-volume, capital-intensive production needed a way to generate sales on a more continuous basis. The development of transcontinental railroads and the telegraph spurred the growth of a national market. Shopping behavior changed with the rise of large-scale retailing and department stores. By the turn of the century, manufacturers were actively involved in creating mass markets and launching major brands in new consumer categories—brand names that are still around today.

Stewart Alter has long been an observer of advertising, as a journalist (*Ad Age*, *Adweek*), as a PR director and corporate historian (McCann Erickson), and as a researcher into advertising history (NYU PhD).

Howie Menikoff has coordinated over forty study groups. He is highly over-educated (NYU PhD). Yet, he consistently enjoys buying things he does not need. Maybe he will find out why.

Type of Study Group: Presentation, followed by discussion.

Readings and other Materials/Online Services: Email attachments.

***** **SYLLABUS - A WORK IN PROGRESS** *****

WEEK 1

TOPIC: The age of patent medicines and the rise of mail order

READING:

The Mirror Makers: A History of American Advertising and Its Creators (1984) by Stephen Fox—Ch1: "Advertising Prehistory: The Nineteenth

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Century" (28 pages);

The History and Development of Advertising (1929) by Frank Presbrey—
Ch 33: "Patent-Medicine Wave at its Crest" (13 pages);

Printers' Ink: A Journal for Advertisers / 50 Years 1888-1938— Ch 1-3 (11 pages).

QUESTIONS:

What do these patent medicines and their exaggerated ad approaches say about America in the 1870s-1880s? What would explain why these ads were so effective? Has today's mail order changed that much from what it was?

WEEK 2

TOPIC: The turning point: the first major copywriter John E. Powers and Wanamaker's

READING:

The History and Development of Advertising (1929) by Frank Presbrey—
Ch 34: "John E. Powers Introduces Sound Methods" (8 pages)

& Ch 37: "John Wanamaker Shows the Way" (14 pages);

Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture (1993) by William R. Leach—sections on Gilded Age rise of the department store.

QUESTIONS:

Why did the department store represent as a major a break with the past as it did? What made John Powers' "honest" approach to copywriting as significant a turning point as it was? Does the fact that Powers was a transplanted Brit explain how he could introduce change into American practices?

WEEK 3

TOPIC: The rise of the advertising agency

READING:

Advertising Progress: American Business and the rise of Consumer Marketing (1998) by Pamela Walker Laird—Ch 5: "Early Advertising Specialists" (28 pages);

The History of An Advertising Agency: N.W. Ayer & Son at Work, 1869-1949 by Ralph Hower (1949) from Harvard Studies in Business History series.

QUESTIONS:

What was happening in the American consumer market that would explain the rise of advertising as a specialized business? How did ad agencies

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evolve from being just sales reps for newspapers to creating advertising copy? How did the growth of ad agencies reflect overall changes in how corporations handled marketing?

WEEK 4

TOPIC: American business gets big and needs more selling

READING:

The Making of Modern Advertising (1981) by Daniel Pope—Ch 2: "Industry's Demand for Advertising" (45 pages);
The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business (1977) by Alfred D. Chandler, Jr—selections.

WEEK 5

TOPIC: The 1890s: birth of the ad jingle and the Great Bicycle Craze

READING:

The History and Development of Advertising (1929) by Frank Presbrey—Ch 44, "The Great Jingle Period" (8 pages);
"The Great Bicycle Craze" (1956), *American Heritage* magazine article.

WEEK 6

TOPIC: Trust consolidations and product/package standardization

READING:

1898: The Birth of the American Century (1998) by David Traxel—Ch 13, "The New American Way" on Uneeda Biscuits (9 pages).

WEEK 7

TOPIC: The psychology of advertising

READING:

The Psychology of Advertising: A Simple Exposition of The Principles of Psychology in their Relation to Successful Advertising (1908) by Walter Dill Scott, PhD., Director of the Psychological Laboratory of Northwestern University—selected chapters: "Human Instincts" (28 pages), "Suggestion" (13 pages), "The Habit of Reading Advertisements" (14 pages).

WEEK 8

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TOPIC: "Reason-Why Advertising" vs. emotional ads: the two competing approaches at the turn of the century

WEEK 9

TOPIC: Enduring images of beauty, of family, of food and of the home

WEEK 10

TOPIC: Trademarks, new products and new categories

WEEK 11

TOPIC: Creating the mass market

READING:

Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market (1989) by Susan Strasser—Ch 1 (25 pages.)

WEEK 12

TOPIC: Debate—Advertising, a controlling force or reflective of society?

READING:

Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture (1976) by Stuart Ewen;
Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion (1984) by Michal Schudson.