



FROM CAVE ART TO SCREEN MEDIA

by Tracey Bagshaw, MD, Service Innovation Group.

Advertising isn't a science," as the leading 20th Century American advertising executive William Bernbach once famously declared, "it is persuasion. And persuasion is an art." Indeed, the concept of commercial advertising, a form of communication intended to persuade an audience to purchase or take some action upon products or services, can be traced back to the Indian artistic tradition of wall or rock painting in 4000BC. History tells us that the Egyptians used papyrus to create sales messages and wall posters, while similar commercial and political campaign displays have also been discovered in the ruins of Pompeii and ancient Arabia.

It was not until the 17th Century that advertising first began to permeate the United Kingdom. Early print advertisements were used chiefly to promote books and medicines and began to appear in weekly English newspapers, which had become increasingly affordable following the advances in the printing press. However, it was the eminent French newspaper *La Presse* which was the first of its kind to include paid advertising within its pages, allowing the publication to lower its price, extend its readership and therefore, increase its profitability. Understandably, it did not take long for this formula to be swiftly applied across the world.

The rapid urbanisation of Britain, which had come as a result of the Industrial Revolution in the late 18th Century, saw the UK economy widely expand with a proliferation of goods and services and, during the following decades, advertising grew alongside. It soon became apparent that, highlighted by the crucial part that advertising had begun to play in business, it should be left to the craft of creative experts. Unlike other industries which offered very little career opportunities for women at the time, however, advertising agencies also recognised the value of feminine insight. Acknowledging that the purchase of household products was a responsibility that largely fell to women, advertisers were eager to draw them into the artistic process.

Almost immediately advertisements appeared encouraging consumers, through the clever combination of words and images with technical layout and language, to 'Drink Cadbury's Cocoa' or buy 'Kodak - The Camera that Takes the World (no previous knowledge of photography necessary)' and soon became widespread in society. Indeed, most of the advertising agencies which continue to dominate today's market were founded in the latter part of the 19th Century.

Perhaps at odds with Bernbach's illustrious assertion, psychology is also considered to perform a vital role in the 'art' of advertisement. It certainly experienced a growth in stature as a scientific discipline during the 20th Century and advertisers were quick to catch on to the key ideas it proposed. Promotions

for domestic products were designed not only to stir the human desire to 'belong', but also to encourage the insatiable need for bigger and better.

Meticulously described in Vance Packard's 1957 analysis of *The Hidden Persuaders*, merchandisers have created "the drive to...psychological obsolescence by the double barrelled strategy of [first] making the public style conscious, and then switching [to superior] styles". The introduction of colour, for example, was seen as the cheapest and simplest way to create appealing new variants in the ever expanding consumer market.

The unprecedented developments in modern technology that the world has witnessed over the past few decades have enabled advertisers to reach consumers, globally, via a wide variety of media. The rise of cable television in the 1980s led not only to dedicated commercial breaks but also to speciality channels devoted entirely to shopping. Similarly, the phenomenal availability and accessibility of the World Wide Web has opened wholly new frontiers for Internet based marketing. At the turn of the 21st Century, a number of websites such as the search engine Google, instigated a revolutionary change in on-line advertising. By emphasising unobtrusively placed adverts, contextually relevant to the subject of search, advertisers are able to help rather than overwhelm users.

Reflecting methods acquired through the ages, from the artistic endeavours of the ancient Egyptians to the town criers of the Middle Ages, potential opportunities for advertising in the 21st Century can be found, well anywhere. Take a typical trip to your local high street, or indeed any public place and commercial advertising appears on wall paintings, billboards, printed flyers and shopping trolleys, bus stop benches, sides of buses and taxi-cab doors. Subtly dominating train platforms and public bathrooms 'everyday' adverts appeal to the consumer's subconscious, using honed techniques and celebrity endorsement.

Typified by the supermarket giant Tesco's notable collaboration with the American multinational corporation, Apple, the latest advertising phenomenon to sweep our screens culminates in the clever combination of famous faces with a highly desirable product. The advert depicts a well-known 'couple' in everyday scenarios - in a restaurant, at the cinema - demonstrating the ability to scan desired items using the Apple iPhone into a virtual shopping list, to be delivered by Tesco to your door.

It is hard to predict where technological innovation will lead the world of advertising next. However, as the digital age becomes increasingly more sophisticated, advertisers will doubtlessly rise to the challenge with sparkling ingenuity. "The future is bright" as they say, "the future is Orange!"

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