Long before America was colonized, commerce flourished in the Old World where various methods were used to promote trade. Notice boards placed outside houses indicated what could be had within. Wine sellers gave free samples in the streets. And actors paraded in the streets attempting to entice onlookers into theatres. The idea of commerce is very old indeed, and the means of inducing others into exchange relationships was not far behind in its development.

Once transplanted, advertising eventually flourished in the United States to rival other countries in prevalence and economic importance. Although some forms — radio and television commercials and Internet advertising, for example — are uniquely American, the history of advertising must begin in Europe.

This unit surveys key moments in the development of modern American advertising practice. It focuses on two key themes: the development of advertising techniques, and the story encoded in advertisements about the society that produced them.
This history of advertising technique chronicles the movement from face-to-face selling messages to the stilted, repetitive, printed advertisements of early newspapers to the dynamism of mass communication by radio and television to the re-personalization of messages via cable, Internet, and direct mail. It is a story of sellers struggling to find the best means to attract buyers, and a parallel story of the public's reception, resistance, amusement, and annoyance.

The social history preserved in advertisements is like an archaeological record. It is not a simple, faithful chronology of society but an assortment of bits and pieces on which the passage of social life is inscribed. By their very nature, advertisements are fleeting and ephemeral. Once they serve their intended purpose, they are typically discarded and quickly replaced. But some ads survive, preserved in old newspapers and magazines, on wire and tape recordings, and in kinescopes and videotapes. These preserved advertisements can be studied in the present for what they reveal about our collective past. From them, we learn not only about the techniques of past advertising but also about the society that produced them and the lives of the people who wrote, read, and heard their messages.

1. European Precedents

We begin our story in the 1600s. Like the present, it was an age of globalization. A world that had seemed very grand and unknowable was being made smaller through exploration and discovery in the Elizabethan age. Sailing ships in unprecedented numbers set out from London to distant ports around the world — a conquest that would eventually lead to the development of the British Empire. At its height, British colonies around the world would form an empire on which, it would be said, the sun never set. This expansion included colonies in the New World that would later become the United States of America.

There were many reasons settlers would decide to leave home and strike out for a new life abroad — religious, political, and economic being among the most important. But whatever specific reasons motivated colonial settlers, it must have required courage or desperation to give up home and family and cast your lot in an unknown land. Advertising played its role in fueling these dreams and aspirations. To promote colonial ventures, sponsors placed ads in British newspapers: ads that promised solutions to nagging problems, ads that offered the fulfillment of dreams and the realization of hopes.
In addition to this outward expansion, the world came to England as well. Strange, unusual, and wonderful things were brought from far away ports: spices from India, carpets from Persia, tobacco and tomatoes from the New World, porcelain from China, and coffee from Arabia. Each of these commodities had to be introduced to the consuming public and integrated into their lives — and advertising was one of the means of doing so. The handbill in Figure 2 announced the availability of coffee in London in 1657.

A careful reading of the text provides a window on 17th-century advertising techniques and tells a story about the social life and cultural beliefs of the England into which coffee was introduced. The ad explains what coffee is, how it grows, and where it comes from. Most contemporary advertisements do not introduce new products but serve instead to encourage current users to continue and those who are not yet current users to purchase the advertised brand. An advertisement for coffee today might argue for the merits of the promoted brand and proclaim its excellence over the competition. In this announcement from 1657, it is generic coffee that is advertised. Brands as we know them did not exist. It would be many years before branding emerged in the marketplace.

...and drunk generally throughout all the Grand Seigniors Dominions.

The ad explains that the upper classes (the grand seigniors, or lords) drink coffee. Endorsement by high-status consumers is also often used in contemporary advertising, but celebrities rather than feudal lords are held up as models to emulate.

It is a simple innocent thing, composed into a Drink, by being dried in an Oven, and ground to Powder, and boiled up with Spring water, and about half a pint of it to be drunk, fasting an hour before, and not Eating an hour after, and to be taken as hot as possibly can be endured; the which will never fetch the skin off the mouth, or raise any Blisters by reason of that Heat.

The long copy of the ad gives more details. Coffee is simple to make, and here's how to consume it. Do this. Don't do that. It's better hot and on an empty stomach. Except for the quaint language, what is said here is hardly distinguishable from today's ads. It is easy to imagine a TV commercial for coffee moving through the similar steps: roasting the beans, grinding the coffee, adding fresh water, brewing it, and sitting down to enjoy a steaming mug of coffee. The Brazilian commercial for Nescafé coffee in Figure 3 is typical of contemporary
coffee commercials. In it, two planters discuss their ideas for roasting and milling beans to make the best coffee. Meanwhile, in the kitchen a woman prepares Nescafé's new toasted and milled coffee. As she serves them, the men have a good laugh when they discover their idea has been taken, and enjoy a pot of coffee on the verandah. 

![Fig. 2.3 A Recent Brazilian Commercial for Nescafé Coffee](source)

The Turks' drink at meals and other times, is usually Water, and their Dyet consists much of Fruit and the Crudities whereof are very much corrected by this Drink.... It is observed that in Turkey, where this is generally drunk, that they are not trobled with the Stone, Gout, Dropsie, or Scurvey, and that their Skins are exceeding clear and white.

The narrative moves on to reported benefits for those who already drink coffee. Turks, unlike the English, have a diet high in uncooked fruit. The ad claims that coffee will alleviate gastric discomfort, and that other problems known in England are absent among coffee-drinking Turks. In a modern advertisement, similar information might be given in the form of testimonial comments from satisfied users.

The quality of this Drink is cold and Dry...
It neither heats nor inflames...
It closeth the Orifice of the Stomack and fortifies the heat...
It's very good to help digestion...
It's of great use about 3 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon, as well as in the morning...
It quickens the Spirits...
It makes the heart Lightsome...
It is good against sore Eys (better if you hold your Head over it and take in the Steem that way)...
It supplieth Fumes exceedingly, and therefore good against the Head-ach...
It will very much stop any Defluxion of Rheums...
It will prevent and help Consumption and the Cough of the Lungs...
It is excellent to prevent and cure the Dropsy, Gout, and Scurvy...

Coffee, like tea, in this period was thought of more medicinally than today. Indeed, it almost seems that every known malady would be alleviated by coffee. After these claims about the benefits of coffee to anyone and everyone, the advertisement moves on to target specific kinds of consumers.

It is known by experience to be better then any other Drying Drink for People in
years, or Children that have any running humors upon them...It is very good to prevent Mis-carryings in Child-bearing Women...

And finally the claims return to the general.

It is a most excellent Remedy against the Spleen, Hypocondriack, Winds, or the like.

It will prevent Drowsiness, and make one fit for busines, if one have occasion to Watch, and therefore you are not to Drink it after supper, unless you intend to be watchful, for it will hinder sleep 3 or 4 hours.

Modern readers might be skeptical about many of these claims, but the warning about the stimulating effects of coffee works well today. "Drink it to stay awake, and don't drink it if you want to sleep." And finally, the ad includes a brief warning about the (few) things coffee cannot do as well as a notice as to where it can be found.

It is neither Laxative nor Restringent. Made and Sold in St. Michael's Alley in Cornhill, by Pasqua Rosee, at the Signe of his own Head.

2. Colonial America

Ships brought English goods and African slaves to colonial America and took raw materials (cotton, sugar, and tobacco) home on the return trip. These raw materials were in turn processed and either used in England or re-exported. Early settlers in the American colonies produced most of what they consumed at home, but a few precious goods were bought in stores. Newspapers were scarce — the first in America were published around 1700 — and the ads they carried were few, often appearing from issue to issue, and tended to carry messages in the form "Just Imported — A Variety of Goods." These ads contained few illustrations and seldom mentioned price. Brands were still unknown.

A key figure in colonial American advertising was none other than Benjamin Franklin. As publisher of The Philadelphia Gazette and Poor Richard's Almanac, he changed advertising style by including simple illustrations (for example, a woodcut of a sailing ship or a spinning wheel) to accompany the words in ads. He

FYI: Following the story of a commodity like salt, sugar, coffee, or cod is a way to learn about society, culture, politics, and the economy.

Fig. 2.4 A Simple Woodcut Like This Illustrated Some American Ads in the Late 1700s [Source]

began also to provide more details about benefits and uses than many of the ads that
preceded him. He promoted his own famous stove in this way:

Fireplaces with small openings cause drafts or cold air to rush in at every crevice, and 'tis very uncomfortable as well as dangerous to sit against any such crevice.... Women, particularly, from this cause (as they sit much in the house) get colds in the head, rheums, and defluxions which fall into their jaws and gums, and have destroyed early, many a fine set of teeth in these northern colonies. Great and bright fires do also very much contribute to damaging the eyes, dry and shrivel the skin, bring on early the appearance of old age.¹

Ads that appeared in Franklin's newspaper, the *Philadelphia Gazette*, give a virtual description of life in Pre-Revolutionary America. All of the following appeared on a single page on 1735:

![A Page of Advertisements from Franklin's Philadelphia Gazette, 1735](http://0-muse.jhu.edu.janus.uoregon.edu:80/journals/advertising_and_society_review/v006/6.3unit02.html)

ODRAN DUPUY, next Door to the Bell in Arch-street, on Monday Feb. 10 opened a FRENCH SCHOOL. Where whoever enclines to learn the French Language, may be taught it on reasonable Terms. His Wife also teaches young Ladies Needle Work.

Mr. Dupuy and his wife offer their services to the affluent readers of Franklin's newspaper. He can teach French, and she does needlework. He also repairs watches. Literacy was not widespread in the population, much less the desire to learn the French language — although Franklin himself might have been interested as he later was Ambassador to France. Needlework was much admired among "refined young ladies" who were expected to stay at home managing households and families. Nor would the services of a watch repairer have been for everyone. Owning a fine watch was the mark of a man of means. Laborers by contrast would have listened for town clocks, church bells, or other public markers of the passing hours. This ad gives us some sense of who read newspapers in Philadelphia in 1735 and what their lives were like.

A SERVANT Man's Time for 3 Years and Four Months, to be disposed of. He is a likely hearty young Fellow. Enquire of the Printer hereof.

Indentured service was a way for poor Europeans to earn the price of one's passage to America. Today it seems incredible to offer to sell a servant's time for 3 years and 4 months,
but that is what is on offer. We know only that the servant is a young man and is hearty. There are no details of his skills, if any, and no price is mentioned. Just as we know today that Thomas Jefferson owned slaves, this ad suggests that it was Franklin himself who was selling the servant's time.

Antigua Rum, St. Kits Mellasses, Chocolate, Cotton, Ginger and Pepper, and sundry other Sorts of Goods Sold by wholesale or Retail, by William Graham, at the House where Henry Hodge lately dwelt.

The triangular trade (England to West Africa and on to the Caribbean and North America then back to England) was at its height in the 18th century. European ships picked up slaves in West Africa, transported them to the Americas, and returned to Europe with raw materials (sugar, cotton, and other products of the plantation system). The ad reflects this widespread system. In this case, rum from the island of Antigua, molasses from St. Kitts, and other imported goods from the West Indies are offered for sale in Philadelphia where they could not be grown or produced. These goods may have been dropped in Pennsylvania where other items (like timber for building and pulp wood for making paper) might have replaced them in the hold of an English ship in the cycle.

Still lacking any mention of price, the ad directs interested buyers to a Mr. William Graham, now resident in the house where Henry Hodge, deceased, had lived. Street names and numbers were still unknown, and directions in both Europe and America at the time were given in relation to well-known landmarks.

The advertisement names the things available from Mr. Graham but lacks the hyperbolic adjectives and brand names that would come later. This was an age when rum was rum, sugar was sugar, and pepper was pepper. Branding began a hundred or so years later when manufacturers began stamping their names into the products like bars of soap, crackers, and other manufactured goods. And it would be well into the 20th century before marketers took the further step of placing brand names on such things as bananas, meat, and water.

When branding did emerge as a part of marketing, it opened the door for a new kind of advertising — arguing not simply the virtues of the commodity itself but also for a particular brand. Modern ads speak of Bacardi rum, Grandma's molasses, Hershey's chocolate, Cannon Mills cotton products, McCormick ginger, and Sauer's pepper. They extol the virtues of the named brand, sometimes even comparing it specifically with the competition.

RUN away on the 11th Day of November past, from Rees Pritchard of Whiteland, Chester County, an Irish Servant Man, named Lawrence Keron, aged about 22 years, a well set man, freckled Complexion and mark'd with the Small Pox, fancy curl'd Hair, brownish Cloth Coat, Buttons of the same, and Breeches of the same Cloth; Cotton and Linnen Shirt, blue and white mixt Yarn Stockings, footed with dark-coloured Yarn a good deal above the Shoe; an old
Felt Hat, with a Piece cut out of the Brim, and cock'd up so as to hide it, wooden heel'd Shoes, and a Pair of old Shoes that have been mended and cover'd. Whoever takes up and secures the above mentioned Servant, so that his Master may have him again, shall have Forty Shillings Reward...

A reward is offered in this ad for a run-away Irish indentured servant. The ad not only describes the man in terms of physical characteristics and age but also details at length the clothes he was wearing — the colors of his shirt, pants, socks down to the tear in the brim of his hat. Although odd by contemporary standards, describing people in terms of their clothes was common in a society where clothes were hand-made, hard to come by, and worn over and over again. As today, clothes help identify a person, but in an economy of mass production and widely available consumer goods such a description would apply perhaps only to the day the man ran away.

Just imported, another Parcel of SUPER FINE CROWN SOAP. It cleanses Fine Linens, Muslins, Laces Chinces, Cambricks, etc. with Ease and Expedition, which often suffer more from the long and hard Rubbing of the Washer, through the ill Qualities of the soap they use than the wearing

Benjamin Franklin’s father and brothers were soap makers in Boston, and Franklin sold the family’s soap in Philadelphia. This ad has many of the features of a modern advertisement. It tells what kind of soap is for sale and in what form, describes how it works, spells out its advantages over alternatives, and tells of its many uses in washing and by barbers. Many of the ads that appeared in the Philadelphia Gazette presage the form and content of future advertisements.

READY MONEY for old RAGS may be had of the Printer hereof.

Paper was hard to come by in colonial America. Rags were added to wood pulp to increase the quality of the resulting paper. Franklin, ever the printer, offered to buy rags that would eventually make their way into paper, supplying an essential ingredient for publications of all sorts.

After the American Revolution, Franklin went off to Paris where he was ambassador from 1776 to 1785. Newspapers, although important in helping mobilize anti-British sentiments that led to the war, were stifled in their growth by an America that could not import newsprint from England. It was well into the 19th century before local production of newsprint could meet the demand. It was then that American journalism began to flourish.

There were, of course, others besides affluent colonists of British origin living in the American colonies. And these other immigrant groups often published newspapers in languages other than English. But the story of American advertising is

FYI:
Benjamin Franklin’s The Philadelphia Gazette was the most successful newspaper in the American Colonies and his Poor Richard’s Almanac is the source of “A penny saved is a penny earned.”

FYI:
Early American society was multilingual and multicultural.
primarily a story of the development of the traditions of the more powerful English-speaking settlers and the traditions that developed around the use of the English language to advertise. Minority languages and traditions, if studied, would tell their own fascinating stories of trade and commerce in other immigrant communities.

Following American independence, more newspapers sprang up across the new country. One estimate claims that there were 35 newspapers in 1775 while there were 532 by 1820. As newsprint became more readily available, the newspaper flourished, becoming the first mass medium in American society.

3. The Age of the Newspaper

James Gordon Bennett, publisher of the *New York Herald* from 1835 to 1867, is one of the most flamboyant characters in the history of American mass media. Born into an already wealthy family, he made another fortune selling newspapers. Bennett's approach was as ingenious as it was insistent. He latched onto the idea of raising the cost of advertisements to lower the cost of newspapers, a practice that continues into the present. He put an end to the seemingly endless repetition of ads from issue to issue that had characterized American newspapers from the colonial period well into the 19th century.

Bennett first limited an ad's run to two weeks, and then later to a single day, giving readers cause to read ads more carefully. He also began printing ads throughout his paper, even on the front page, thus treating ads like news. To ensure readers and thus sales of his newspaper, Bennett did not shy away from the sensational — in either news or ads. He broke with the typical focus of other editors on political news and included stories from police files, courts, sports, theatres, and other events that had mass appeal. It was Bennett who underwrote the cost of sending Stanley to find Livingstone in Tanganyika in 1871, serializing the saga and keeping his readers entertained for months.

Bennett also understood the entertainment value of personal want ads for his readers. Lacking radio and TV and having only a few magazines, a newspaper would have been savored and mused over. Personal ads in particular delighted readers who were yet to be weary from media bombardment and advertising clutter. Ads like these appeared in the pages of the *New York Herald*:

Dear Charles — Should such a triffe as a handy hat-brush sever true love?
Come home to your ruffled LuLu.

Wanted — A situation as son-in-law in a respectable family. Blood and breeding no object, being already supplied; capital essential. No objection to going a short distance into the country.

Although many forms of mass media compete for our attention today, the personals continue to intrigue readers. Here are some that appeared more recently in *New York Magazine*:

FYI:
It was the *New York Herald* that reported Henry Morton Stanley's words as "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" when he encountered the missionary-explorer David Livingstone on the shores of Lake Tanganyika in 1871.
Shrimps In My Cocktail Only Please — Need tall, leggy, lovely who can wear heels with ease and handle herself in the same manner. Travel in the US and abroad, theater, great food and just plain fun in the offing. Economy fares not in my itinerary; good education and a sense of humor a must. I am 6'5", 55, and looking for a relationship with a little solemnity and no strings.

This Man Can Bark — But he's no dog. Well-trained, smart, good-looking, athletic Jewish male, 31, seeks Jewish female, 26-30, with intelligence, wit, spontaneity and good looks. I'm 5'9" on my hind legs, 155 lbs, brown hair, blue eyes. Send papers and photo.

And these ones appeared in a recent Valentine's Day edition of a college newspaper:

Chip, chip, chipper! Have a Happy Valentine's Day, Giraffe Woman and a blast in Florida. Just don't lose anything I wouldn't (especially panties). — Your "Little Brother."

To my only BOO: Thanks for five wonderfully "warm and gooey" months! I hope this Valentine's Day is the first of many we'll share! You are the most amazing male! YUM!!!

Molly —
Cupid's arrow pierced my heart,
Friday night our romance will start,
On your toes I'll try not to tread,
You've really turned this country boy's head.
Randy

Bennett understood the human interest appeal that such ads could have. By requiring ads to conform to a uniform style and without illustrations, he capitalized on the news value of single insertions. It was not long, however, before such techniques as iteration, unusual layout, and manipulating white space were used by advertisers to get around the restrictions. The mid-1800s was indeed the age of the newspaper but it was also the age of the newspaper advertisement — the most effective and cost efficient method of advertising the world had known.
4. Meanwhile in the Small Towns

While Bennett and other newspapermen were developing the newspaper in large Eastern cities as a mass medium for advertising, direct selling messages remained common in smaller towns all over America. Store clerks continued to deal face-to-face with their customers, discussing the uses and benefits for the products they sold. However, by the mid-1800s itinerant salesmen had also become a part of American commerce. By 1900, there were an estimated 350,000 traveling men doing business in America. Some served as the middlemen between manufacturers and wholesalers and local stores all over America. Others sold directly to consumers door-to-door or in impromptu displays set up on street corners and other public venues. From the mid-19th until well into the 20th century, traveling salesmen filled a critical niche in American marketing.

Fig. 2.7 A Traveling Salesman and His Audience in 19th-Century America [Source]

A mythology grew up around the "traveling man" who could arrive, set up shop, hawk his wares, and be gone again as quickly as he had come. Vast numbers of such men made their livings this way in the 19th century. These commercial travelers (as historians often term them) were typically white men without families who traveled by public transport, stayed in rented rooms, and skipped town fast. They became the stuff of jokes and mythology — perhaps because their work and personal lives contrasted so strongly with the lives of those who lived in small-town America.

Salesmanship entered the English language only in the 1800s (according to the Oxford English Dictionary) and it differs from advertising in its use of face-to-face rather than mass-mediated communications and selling techniques. The promotional and selling methods of salesmen are the important elements in the history of advertising. Whether to a merchant, an assembled crowd, or just a single customer, a salesman displayed his merchandise and adjusted his pitch to the needs and interests of his audience. Holding a mythical bottle of "snake oil" in his hand, he could look out into a crowd and say to an old lady that his product could cure arthritis, to a young man that it would grow hair, and to someone else that it was a toothache remedy. Whether largely alcohol or cocaine or a medicine that really worked, the product was offered through a specially tailored message unlike the generalized pitches in mass advertisements.

Some scholars see salesmanship as a stage in the evolution of the modern persuasive techniques used in advertising, although this is not usually emphasized as a part of the history of American advertising. There are no audio recordings or videotapes of 19th-century
salesman at work, but the depiction of "Professor" Harold Hill in Meredith Willson's musical, *The Music Man*, suggests how salesmen are often remembered. The linking of salesman with con-man in this depiction reflects the public's frequent suspicion of a forceful salesman whose "guarantees" and wild promises are unenforceable unlike they would be with local merchants who would still be around if something goes wrong.

By the beginning of the 20th century, an incipient consumer movement protesting the outrageous and unsupported claims of both the traveling salesmen and mass media advertising was developing. When Arthur Miller famously wrote about the failed Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* in 1949, his play captured the pitfalls of sales work for those who do it and the demise of the social niche of the salesman in the face of the evolution of mass, impersonal advertising techniques.

5. P. T. Barnum and the Age of Excess

It is doubtful that Phineas Taylor Barnum (1810-1891) ever made two famous remarks attributed to him: "There's a sucker born every minute" and "You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time." The frequent attribution of these remarks to Barnum, however, reveals a great deal about the public's lasting opinion of him. He was without a doubt one of the greatest showmen the world has known, but in the end he seems to have left more lingering doubts and suspicions rather than respect for his promotional methods.

Barnum's place in advertising history is in the realm of half-truths, exaggerations, and outright trickery. He seems to have had few scruples for doing whatever it took to attract an audience and make money from it. Deception was his game. In his famous museum in New York City, Barnum put up a sign that read, "This Way to the Egress." Visitors to the museum, often fooled by this antiquated word for "exit" and thinking they were headed for another fantastical exhibit, passed through a door and found themselves instead in the street! Barnum had enticed them inside. He had entertained them a bit. And then he needed them out of the way to make room for others.

Barnum used advertising to lure crowds to his museum and traveling exhibits. In his early career, he focused on freaks and oddities that the public would pay to see. One of the most famous of these was known as the Fiji Mermaid (exhibited in 1842) — which his ads and posters claimed to be half human, half fish. In actuality, the so-called mermaid was a hoax.
consisting of the head of a monkey attached to the body of a fish.

Fig. 2.9 A Sideshow Banner for the Fiji Mermaid [Source]

In his later years, Barnum moved on to develop his famous three-ring circus, which he advertised as "the greatest show on earth." Animals, trapeze artists, sword swallowers, and a goodly share of freaks and oddities were used to draw crowds. Although Barnum is spoken of today as an artist of deception, he was not alone in using such techniques to lure the public. The later 1800s were an age of vastly exaggerated claims — medicine shows, exhibitions of the unusual and strange, and unregulated advertising. Little wonder that a generalized suspicion of advertising developed around such tactics.

The historian Jackson Lears argues in *The New Republic* (2001) that such deceptive tactics hardly originated in antebellum American society.\(^4\) Both deception and suspicion may, in fact, be traceable to what he calls "the primal scene of market society" — an atmosphere of suspicion surrounding the interchange between buyer and seller. Certainly, this is the meaning of the Latin phrase *caveat emptor* — "let the buyer beware." And such an attitude characterized much public opinion about promotional culture in 20th-century America as well.

6. Advertising Agents Come on the Scene

As America recovered from the Civil War (1861-1865), commerce and newspapers once again took their place in the fabric of society. In the 1860s and 1870s, the forerunners of modern advertising agents came on the scene. First offering to physically take ads from the shops of busy tradesmen to the offices of newspaper publishers, ad men provided a service that business found desirable. Two of the earliest agencies were N. W. Ayer in Philadelphia and J. Walter Thompson in New York. These agencies collected circulation figures of newspapers and magazines and based their commissions on readership.

Fig. 2.10, 2.11 N. W. Ayer and J. Walter Thompson Founded Two of the Earliest American Advertising Agencies [Source]
It was a short step from media placement to another service that indeed marked the beginnings of modern advertising. The agents offered to write the copy that would be placed in newspapers. By the turn of the 20th century, several advertising agencies had set up business in cities across America, marking the beginnings of a shift away from direct sales techniques to mass-communicated advertising.

What are the similarities and differences between salesmanship and advertising? Although both are persuasive techniques encouraging consumer purchasing, one is interpersonal in nature whereas the other is mediated. The consequence of this difference is a shift from individually tailored messages, to those that must be relevant to a broad and diverse audience. Both the unregulated sales tactics and advertising claims of the 19th century engendered watchful suspicion on the part of consumers, making many people wary of the actual truth in the communications. Both salesmen and advertisers work as intermediaries between sellers and buyers — a role not much appreciated in American society where dislike of all sorts of intermediaries (advertisers, lawyers, brokers, and agents) is frequently a part of the culture. A final important point of comparison is that both salesman and advertisers must attempt to understand the consumer's viewpoints, needs, and wants in order to do their jobs well.

7. The Birth of the Slogan

Advertisements consisting of a central catchy phrase or slogan became the mode in the 1890s. Kodak advertised its camera with the phrase: "You Press the Button, We Do the Rest" in 1891. Other famous slogans that were used during this period were "Absolutely Pure" for Royal Baking Powder, "Eat H-O" for Hornby's Oatmeal, and "99 and 44/100% Pure" for Ivory Soap.

Fig. 2.12 Kodak: "You Press the Button, We Do the Rest" [Source]
Sapolio, a household cleaning product, was given a distinctive name and a personality through the invention of "Sapolio Town" where everything and everyone sparkled clean. A series of twelve rhymes (ghost written by the author Bret Hart) appeared in newspaper advertisements and on streetcar posters. These ditties, together with the images of the vaguely Dutch town and its contented inhabitants, were repeated so often that Sapolio cleanser became one of the best known cleaning products on the market. Sapolio also used one-line slogans that included "Used every week-day, brings rest on Sunday" and "A clean nation has ever been a strong nation."

The use of slogans as the focus of poster and newspaper advertising represented a break with the earlier technique of using long, wordy copy to explain the product and why the consumer should purchase it. Slogans focused instead on a single big idea expressed in the form of a memorable phrase, and ads using them often did not give "reasons why" to consumers. Nonetheless, "Do You Know Uneeda Biscuit?" sold crackers quite well.

Fascination with slogans continues into contemporary advertising. FTD reminds us to "Say It with Flowers" while Hallmark's pitch is punctuated by "When You Care Enough to Send the Very Best." Especially memorable phrases of recent years include "Where's the Beef?" and "Leggo My Eggo" — which were so catchy that they were easily remembered, sometimes parodied, and frequently repeated.

8. The Emergence of Brands

Throughout most of the 19th century, customers took their own containers to stores where they bought generic sugar, rice, coffee, molasses, salt, and other products. The advent of packaged goods — a box of salt, a bag of rice, and a pound of coffee with a brand name on it — changed marketing forever. Rice was no longer just rice, and coffee wasn't just coffee. Proctor & Gamble, perhaps the world's best known maker of package goods, began selling Ivory Soap in 1879. Soon Uneeda Biscuit, Campbell's Soup, Quaker Oats, Royal Baking Powder, and Lipton Tea were on the shelves as well.
What exactly is a brand? Marketers tell us that brands have material markers — names, logos, and unique packaging and designs. But beyond these essential physical attributes, over time a brand acquires a history, a reputation, and a meaning to consumers. In other words, it takes on a “personality.”

As brands emerged in the late 1800s in America, advertising played a significant role in imbuing commodities with specific meanings. Ivory soap was no longer called “white soap” but had its own name. It had a distinctive appearance, logo, and package design that hasn't changed much over the years. Other soaps and cleaning products were also some of the earliest successful brands. Pears' soap, a competitor to Ivory, was promoted with romantic images of perfect people in a dreamy world.

Today, advertising is largely the business of promoting brands. On some few occasions, advertisements introduce a new brand. Most of the time, however, contemporary advertising promotes an established brand — by encouraging loyalty among current users and attempting to persuade those who aren't users to switch brands.

9. The Origins of the Consumer Movement

Around the turn of the 20th century, public dissatisfaction with quackery and unregulated advertising increased. Letters to the editors of magazines and newspapers and occasional articles challenged the false promises directly and called for regulation and change in marketing practices.

In The Toadstool Millionaires: A Social History of Patent Medicines in America before Federal
Regulation (1961), James Harvey Young describes some of the devious and notorious methods used to promote patent medicines.

A pitchman who battled against catarrh planted one of the company in his audiences to step up when an appeal was made to test the potency of the salve on sale. "My friend, have you catarrh?" the doctor would inquire. "Yes, sir," the shill replied in a snuffy voice. "Please put a small application of this salve in each nostril," the doctor directed. The shill did as he was bade. Finally the pitchman handed the sufferer a spotless handkerchief. "Now blow your nose hard," he said. The noise could be heard hundreds of feet away. What the audience did not know as they were shown the revolting result was that the doctor's anonymous assistant had earlier stuffed a nostril with stiff custard (McNeal 1947: 118-19, quoted in Young 1961:197).

By the turn of the 20th century, the public had grown increasingly weary of such promotion techniques. In 1905, Collier's magazine began publishing a series of essays entitled, "The Great American Fraud." These essays captured the spirit of consumer discontent.

Gullible America will spend this year some seventy-five millions of dollars in the purchase of patent medicines. In consideration of this sum it will swallow huge quantities of alcohol, an appalling amount of opiates and narcotics, a wide assortment of varied drugs ranging from powerful and dangerous heart depressants to insidious liver stimulants; and, far in excess of all other ingredients, undiluted fraud. For fraud, exploited by the skilfulest of advertising bunco men, is the basis of the trade. Should the newspapers, the magazines, and the medical journals refuse their pages to this class of advertisements, the patent medicine business in five years would be as scandalously historic as the South Sea Bubble, and the nation would be the richer not only in lives and money, but in drunkards and drug-fiends saved (Samuel Hopkins Adams, 1905:14, quoted in Young 1961:219).

Early steps in an incipient consumer movement in America led to more profound changes. The Federal Trade Commission with its regulatory powers was established by Congress in
1914. The advertising industry established its own self-regulatory board, the National Advertising Review Council, in 1971.

Several popular books also called attention to advertising and marketing excesses. Vance Packard's *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957) alerted the public to "secret" motivational and psychological techniques used by advertisers. Ralph Nader's *Unsafe at Any Speed* (1965) took on the automobile industry and is frequently credited with having led to several significant design changes and regulations. More recently, exposés by Michael Moore (such as the film *Roger and Me*, released in 1989), the magazine *Adbusters* (which began publishing in 1989), and Naomi Klein's *No Logo* (2000) have continued to voice concerns about advertising, marketing, and large corporations on behalf of consumers.

10. Advertising to Women

*The term consumer has a gender in the English language and it is feminine* became the operating principle of advertising in the early 20th century. Along with this went the knowledge that 80 percent or more of consumer purchases — except for big ticket items like appliances, automobiles, and homes — were made by women. Most key employees of advertising agencies until about 1950 were (white, protestant) men while women held jobs like receptionists and secretaries. Today, more than half the employees in American advertising agencies are women.

In these early years of stricter gender roles, men were *advertisers*, and women were *consumers*. Thus, when advertising spoke to consumers, it usually did so with the voice of male authority. Stuart Ewen, who explored the role of advertisers in the early 20th century in *Captains of Consciousness* (1976), tells how advertising offered women labor saving devices like washing machines and at the same time instructed them in their proper domestic roles as mothers and homemakers. It was not until the rebirth of feminism in the 1970s that advertising began to let women speak for themselves, use women as authority figures, and employ women in decision-making and creative roles in the advertising industry.

Fig. 2.18 Ads Speaking Directly to Women Proposed Labor Saving Devices as Well as What To Do with the Extra Time [Source]

11. Broadcasting Advertisements

Although Guglielmo Marconi received the Nobel Prize in 1909 for the invention of radio, it was World War I that accelerated...
for the invention of radio, it was World War I that accelerated the technological developments that led to its becoming a medium of mass communication. Radio stations were up and running in the world’s major cities by the late 1920s. The initial policy of some countries — Great Britain, Canada, and Australia, for example — was for government to control and manage programming and content. The United States, by contrast, rather immediately allowed radio to become a commercial medium with minimal governmental regulation. Few innovations transformed the nature of advertising as fundamentally as radio. Only television and the Internet would prove so revolutionary.

Radio liberated advertising from its relationship to literacy by communicating through music, jingles, and the spoken word. Advertising agencies were skeptical at first, but soon radio became their newest medium and advertisers explored its seemingly endless possibilities. Even programs were branded — Lux Radio Theatre, Kraft Music Hall, and the Hallmark Hall of Fame — giving advertisers an additional boost.

Advertising agencies reinvented themselves, often writing both commercials and the programming for their clients. Early radio stars frequently delivered the commercial messages during their shows. This merger of programming and advertising continued into the early years of television until the “talent” objected and the practice began to die out. The technique has reemerged more recently in the form of product placement in television, movies, and sporting events.

12. Depression and War

The Stock Market Crash in 1929 and the Great Depression that followed were trying times for advertising. Consumers had less to spend, advertising budgets declined, and agencies slimmed down. Advertising did not disappear during the Depression, but it was certainly not a period of prosperity or growth. That would come after World War II.

Advertising had to figure out its role in a wartime economy where a great deal of industrial production was redirected to produce war materiel instead of consumer goods. Advertising adapted in important ways — first, by supporting and promoting the war
effort and promising the delivery of consumer goods when the war was over. "Lucky Strike Green Has Gone to War" explained a color change in packaging due to scarcity of the materials used to make dye. "There's a Ford in Your Future" offered a shiny new car for delivery after the factories reverted to producing consumer goods. Advertisements during wartime focused on maintaining consumer interest and loyalty even though it was often impossible to satisfy consumer needs and desires.

Another role that advertising took on during World War II was promoting patriotism and support for the war effort. Some ads carried notices asking the public to buy war bonds and support the war effort. It was not uncommon for advertisements to link patriotism and shortages, substitutions, or delayed gratification. The New Haven Rail Road excused its overbooked trains in this ad about the Kid in Upper 4. Not complaining about standing and waiting, it was argued, was also a way to serve the country's needs.

13. Television and Commercials

Commercial television developed after World War II. By the late 1940s, cities like New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles had functioning local television stations. By the early 1950s,
three major networks (NBC, CBS, and ABC) supplied national programming. Most early broadcasts were live, in black-and-white, and aired only a few hours each night. It was not long, however, before TV antennas sprung up all over America. The country was fascinated with the new medium, although early television was often little more than "radio with pictures." Talking heads delivered the news with little on-the-scene reporting. Variety and quiz shows as well as many dramatic performances typically took place before live studio audiences. National commercials with high production values advertised widely-distributed products while local commercials were generally low-budget operations. Reception was often poor. Even passing cars and household appliances generated static on early TV sets. Despite all this, the magic of TV was entertainment on a scale unknown before.

![Fig. 2.23 A National Commercial from the 1950s with High Production Values](source)

![Fig. 2.24 A Local Commercial from the 1950s](source)

### 14. Advertising Globally

American advertising took an international turn around 1900 when American businesses looked to advertising agencies to help them sell their products abroad. Both N.W. Ayer and J. Walter Thompson had Spanish-language departments that translated English-language ads and sent them off to newspapers and magazines in Latin America. Lack of reliable information about local consumption habits and media opportunities made it difficult to manage advertising abroad in this manner. To remedy the problems, some American advertising agencies opened offices abroad to create more culturally appropriate ads and to manage media placement more effectively. However, most of these offices were forced to close during the Depression.
After World War II, major American agencies were on the move again — typically driven by their clients at home who wanted to do effective marketing of their products in foreign settings. Not only in Latin America but also in Australasia, South Africa, Western Europe, and the Middle East, American agencies opened branch offices. Top managers were frequently Americans, but copywriters, artists, and most other staff members were locals. This trend has continued and now involves more agencies and countries (for example, Russia, Eastern Europe, and sub-Saharan countries). Corporate mergers of the 1980s and 1990s resulted in some mega-agencies, all of whom operate international and domestic offices to service their clients.

The push-and-pull of agency-client relations in the international arena has continually focused on the option of using the same ad everywhere (with only minor adjustments such as language spoken) versus the benefits of adjusting, even rethinking, strategies to better fit local customs and practices. Today markets cross national borders and international advertising is commonplace. Some corporations have used their advertising to create truly global brands — products whose identities bridge cultural and linguistic gaps on a wide scale. Coca-Cola, McDonald's, and Sony are examples.
15. Commercializing Cyberspace

The Internet became an essential part of American society in the 1990s. Computers replaced typewriters and email established itself as a necessity. Today, instantaneous communication with people everywhere is simple, and information on almost any topic is just a few keystrokes away.

Mass media began to decline with the advent of cable television in the 1970s. Until then, viewing options were limited and audiences were broad. Ads on cable, because of the proliferation of specialized programming, created more targeted groups of viewers with more narrowly defined interests. Broadcasting became narrowcasting, and advertising became more focused as well. Home and Garden channel viewers get advertisements for paint and other building products while Travel Channel viewers see ads for airlines and vacation spots. The Internet narrows the aim further, not reaching households but targeting individuals. Marketers use Internet surfing habits to establish the interests and buying habits of individuals, making advertising more efficient. A *repersonalization* of messages is occurring — ironically bringing advertising back around to speaking more individually to potential customers.

But what does the future hold for advertising? As the world of corporations and advertising charts its future, the search for new advertising venues goes on. Advertising has been very innovative in the past in finding ways to communicate promotional messages. As technology has evolved, it has revolutionized advertising techniques as well as changing the social landscape. There is no reason to suspect that advertising will not continue to reinvent itself, discover new media, and develop new techniques. Advertising as we know it may be at its end, but the culture of consumption is alive and well.
Fig. 2.29 This Woman Sold the Space on Her Forehead as a Billboard. (The Web Address Is a Permanent Tattoo.) [Source]

Notes


2 Fleming, p. 5-8.


6 Young, p. 219.


Media Credits

Fig. 2.1 Presbrey, Frank. The History and Development of Advertising. Doubleday, New York: Doran & Co., 1929. p. 114.

Fig. 2.2 Presbrey, p. 49.

Fig. 2.3 Courtesy of McCann-Erickson, São Paulo, Brazil.

Fig. 2.4 Presbrey, p.147.

Fig. 2.5 Presbrey, p.134.

Fig. 2.6 Presbrey, p.199.
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