

# ADVERTISING

by

**Fr. Paul McLachlan (F.A.I.A. Dip)**  
**Director of Social Communications,**  
**Diocese of Brisbane, Australia**

*"Advertising never sold anybody anything:  
Advertising makes people want things"*

## INTRODUCTION

### **The naturalness of advertising**

Advertising is important because to work and live together humans need to communicate, so, in some way, everyday, everybody advertises. Man has always sought to exchange information, and the modes and intensity of this exchange have changed as he progressed over the years. The size, structure and function of our society has changed so drastically and with this change has come the complication in the exchange of information. As the complexity of our society increases, so the need for mass communication increases.

The North American Indian did not take up smoking because of a national advertising campaign and the worldwide sales did not result from television commercials. But tobacco was advertised; people heard about it and it sold because people wanted to try it.

Even negative critics of advertising, in an attempt to ban advertising, would have to advertise.

## COMMUNICATION

### **Information — a part of life**

We too often forget that advertising is a part of our life. We are too ready to consign it to the commercial world when, in fact, it is an integral part of the world around us. The beauty of nature is a three dimensional commercial. The man next door advertises and his commercials affect our daily life style. In the

bus he talks to us into joining his club, to vote for his party; he has sold something to us after having persuaded us to buy from him. He has advertised.

### **Information actuates**

The power of persuasion is so much part of us it simply means talking to one another. Advertising is just that, talking to people. We can persuade one another in many and varied ways: e.g., by dress, by tone, by gesture, by silence and by pause, by colour, by shape and size and we come to understand these many forms because we think about them. Conversation, persuasion, advertising are one and the same in the one aspect that they are two-way communication and have to be understood by both the sender and receiver. For advertising to be effective, it must talk to us in a language we understand.

Bertrand Russel's dictum that: most people would rather die than think and many, in fact, do! is contradicted by the very purpose of advertising. The copy writer must recognize that his reader, listener, viewer will most certainly think about what he claims. An advertisement must compel attention. If it is unnoticed, or ignored, it has failed.

### **Declaration — not necessarily information**

Having gained the attention of the prospective buyer it is clearly of vital importance to sustain it. Some advertisers fall into the trap of equating 'attention-getting' with the use of noise, printed noise and explosive sound effects. What a waste when the effect is lost in the welter of confusion and annoyance. Headlines that scream in a cacophony of sensation can attract immediate attention, but readers quickly lose interest. This is cheating and the consumer knows it. The whole purpose of advertising is to inform and to sell products and services.

### **ADVERTISING — AN ABUSE?**

People who fear advertising usually have faith in their own powers of resistance but do not trust those of other people. Were all targets of advertising like themselves, they urge, there would be no danger. Actually, research studies have shown that the public as a whole is alert to being advertised at and that resistance to advertising in general and in detail is fairly widespread. They also show that the people like, appreciate and remember advertising appeals that are useful to them.

Naturally the consumer will be misled, sometimes, by bad advertising; he will make mistakes; but these mistakes teach and build up a resistance which might be compared to that resistance which the human body develops to measles and other childhood complaints and ailments. As a result the average person is not so easily misled. The people for the most part are a good deal tougher than those who wish to protect them from advertising realise. And they are essentially human; their lives revolve around their homes; their families and their garden. They are full of plans for the betterment of their homes for providing good things for their children dressing better: striving towards an improved standard of living. They lay great store on what they possess and what they have achieved. In these matters they have a well developed sense of self proportion. They want to lead their own life in their own way and above all they want freedom of choice including the right to make that choice for whatever reasons seem best to them, whether they be emotional or icily rational. In this regard no money estimate can ever evaluate the contribution of advertising on our free way of life.

That the power of advertising is abused by far too many, is denied. It is a proven fact, by your rejection, that advertising can be tried as a lure to trap people and fool them. The slick operator can and does abuse peoples' desires especially the 'socially inadequate' person who, more times than not, cannot afford the object he is led to 'want'. Advertising is abused, by the too casual businessman who does not know what he is really doing and inadvertently misleads; by the 'confidence trickster' who deliberately sets out to mislead by the operator who works on emotive exaggerations. But to judge all advertising according to the criterion 'some cheat, defraud or mislead, therefore it is an evil' is the same as saying 'riding on buses is unsafe' because one bus was involved in an accident. Don't blame the bus, blame the driver.

#### REGULATED — NOT CONTROLLED

In Australia there are formidable regulations to curb exaggerated misleading or false claims in advertising, (i.e. the Trade Practices Act). There are various Federations, Councils and Associations with self-imposed codes, standards and ethics. These are the responsible advertisers — (the fact that they do belong to these associations, possibly is their best advertisement 'perhaps their product is good if they determine to inform rather than impel'). Abuse weakens credibility so in the long run it is the advertiser who loses.

Even if these organizations did not exist, such practice is totally undesirable as a business proposition, let alone, by professional responsibility to the industry. We can measure the validity of this statement against our own experience of life. If someone makes a promise to you and breaks it, you lose confidence in that person. An advertisement is a promise; moreover it is made publicly. If a man wants to stay in business he has to ensure that his promises are kept. A product must live up to its promise. All promises must be able to be substantiated; in fact, this is law.

If today all abuses in advertising were eliminated, many of the negative thinkers would still not be satisfied. To them all advertising — no matter what — is a social destroying agent. These people would accept that the greatest blessing to the early morning shave is the double bladed razor — for a company to try to inform people — to tell them of this fact and so, therefore, sell the razor is a crime. It would appear that to invent, devise, produce, in an attempt to be successful in business is something to be forbidden. Would we ask a carpenter to build a house and forbid him to use a hammer? There are people who want to do just that with advertising, reduce it to a point of complete ineffectiveness, so that it can no longer be a means of business communication. On the other hand there are those who would want advertising to confuse and delude people, appealing to their suppressed desires with emotive appeals in order to sell their product — which, nine times out of ten, is like their advertising — a fraud.

#### 'DESIRE' DISCRIMINATION

There is only one sure way of controlling advertising appeal and that is by the discriminating buyer himself. People themselves have to do something: they have to evaluate, discriminate and appreciate advertising. To evaluate, they will need to know what they require for life and what is practically possible for them to obtain. This has to be determined from the barrage of commodities presented by producers who try to influence the thinking process of the buyer to the extent where they will come to 'want' the object. Making the desire the drive.

Once a person can evaluate that person is well on the way to being able to discriminate. That is, able to say: 'this is good for me'; 'this is bad for me'; 'this is of lasting value'; 'this of passing value'. Selecting what is best for himself — a free and deliberate choice, not one forced on him by extraneous pressures. When he has reached this stage he is discriminating. He now appreciates.

Knowing what he wants and not being told what he 'wants'. Knowing why he makes his choice and being capable in himself of making his choice.

### **To appreciate — we need to be free**

To make a choice we need to 'know' and that we might know we need to be informed. Incidentally what advertising there is under totalitarianism is rigidly controlled and understandably so. It is dangerous to let a captive people choose freely their food, clothing or their homes; such freedom can only too easily expand to the ultimate goal of choosing their leaders and their own way of life.

Advertising is the means of industry communication, as such it is a necessary part of business. It is the means by which the manufacturer communicates with the consumer. More than that it is not just a means of business communication, advertising is an essential part of a free economy. Vast sums of money, time and thought are spent on the development and manufacture of goods, which it is believed, the public want. It would be foolishness, indeed, to stop short at this point and not tell the people what is available, the improvements and advantages. Without advertising as such, the consumer would often be hard put to make his free choice.

### **UNDERSTANDING — MOTIVATION**

Advertising is concerned with motivating people and to motivate people you have to understand them. We have all said: "I understand you" and in most cases it is a polite lie, for to understand someone we must look into their hidden needs and driving impulses.

As much as we admire the individual as an independent, we must admit that as such he exists as an ideal rather than as a fact. We are limited in our experience; we lack essential information; unconscious motives, (not only those implanted by the advertiser) sway our judgments. We are vulnerable to suggestion. Advertising does have success in stimulating wants and suggesting courses of action, but to say that advertising is automatically successful is a claim which can be fairly described as a delusion. Indeed its delusionary character is accepted by economic critics when they denounce advertising as wasteful; if wasteful it is, it is so precisely because it is ineffective.

## DRIVE — TO INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY

To have individual identity, recognition of self, status and the commensurate privileges which demonstrate the possession of it, is the fundamental desire. Human motivation, simply the drive toward the satisfaction of needs, can be divided under two headings.

Primary and Secondary human needs. These are:

**Primary — shelter, security, sustenance, sex.**

We must have somewhere to live and to sleep; we must have the security of affection, hence the family unit, and beyond this the Community for mutual self-protection. We must have food. We need sexuality not only for procreation but also as a fundamental means of physical and emotional expression. We all know this and little else need be said. They add up to the desire for life.

**Secondary --**

Social needs in contradistinction to the Primary (basic groups). The satisfaction of social needs is important; satisfaction of primary, basic needs is vital. Social desires are virtually the same in us today as they were in ancient Rome. Social status, individual recognition, material advancement, remain the same; what is different is the expression given to them in today's modern mass-consumption democracy.

**Concrete examples of human motivation**

These principal needs can be divided into four categories of human motivation:

All of us want to be something — attainment.

All of us want to achieve something — ambition.

All of us want to do something — action.

All of us want to avoid something — prevention.

**Examples:**

**attainment:** we want to be: healthy, attractive, successful (at work, as parents, as friends), capable, influential over others, admired by others.

**ambition:** we want to retain: our health, better appearance, more money, more security, popularity, prestige, greater convenience and comfort, pride of accomplishment, more free time (leisure).

**action:** we want to express ourselves at work, at leisure, acquire possessions, copy those we admire, to improve our social status. -

**prevention:** we want to avoid effort, anxiety, uncertainty, embarrassment, spending.

The advertiser can and does crystallize these elements into priorities. The scriptwriter and the creative team, after investigations and surveys by the market research team, identify the need relevant to the consumer and which can be satisfied by the product or service being promoted, and then express the benefits of the proposition in a way which is convincing and will be retained and recalled. Manufacturers know that the provision of product information alone is not enough in the present day intensity of competition. The avalanche of brands available make it necessary to 'sell' as well as to inform; hence the use of emotive advertising. Put together the complexities of society and the complexities of human nature and expose the result to an impact of emotive material deliberately designed to elicit a response and that response is or can be uncontrollable in many.

### NEEDS AND WANTS

#### **Advertising doesn't sell — it makes people want things**

The salesman is the point of sale and what, in fact, he is selling is simply — benefits. Therefore it is essential for the researchers to establish just what it is that the consumer 'needs' and 'wants' in relation to the product. 'How' and why will he product benefit the buyer. What is it the buyer desires? What is the 'purchase proposition'?

On the buyer's side, people are seldom interested in a product or service in itself. They ask: "what can it do for me?" It is irritating to the consumer if he is exposed to an advertisement for a refrigerator which makes no mention of capacity purpose and the principal benefit of advertising is the provision of information — that is, information relevant to the prospect's 'needs' and 'wants'.

What is it the buyer 'wants' from the refrigerator? The "puffery" (hyperbole), is expected and, I suppose, necessary in a free society. What is commercially (and morally) wrong are claims or promises beyond the product's capabilities. (Customer satisfaction is the 'life-blood' of any company). Any respectable firm would have a highly developed 'equality control' process through which a product would have to pass before any claim is made public.

### CREATING DESIRE — INDUCING ACTION

Taking into consideration then, the need to supply information, the "need" of the consumer for a certain commodity, the advertiser

has to devise some way of creating 'desire'. A desire for his product in preference to his competitor's. He has to sell the 'crispness' not the biscuit. He will try to sell the 'sizzle' not the steak. A slab of meat in itself is hardly likely to inspire, but cooked, served with colourful vegetables, steaming hot, makes an 'object' a 'desire'.

The desire is not created by the "steak" but by its relationship to a hot, tasty, satisfying meal — appetite appeal is activated, heading to a desire to possess.

The appeal to the base appetites is the simplest and easiest for the 'smart' advertiser to work upon. Posters, magazines, record labels, songs, even popsicles can activate and are in fact a potent means of creating desire. It is not the desire for the jeans, but the 'desire' for the pleasant feeling aroused by the appeal that sells the jeans. The stronger the appeal to the desires (especially the suppressed desires) the stronger the inducement to act. Most people are lazy. They have to be reassured and so the litany of outlets indicates clearly that no effort is required to fulfill the desire. We have all seen the list, obtainable from: "Smiths, Jones, Woolworths, and all other stores" — so action is not going to be difficult. "Go out and it is yours now — act before midnight".

The advertiser can select from any of the primary and secondary needs and can then aim his advertising appeal through any of the categories of human motivation. The challenge, not one to be feared but faced, has to be met by a thinking public. Evaluation as to the 'needs' necessary for life has to be appreciated by a discriminating public (people, buyer). Educators have to acknowledge the full import of this part of our way of life and make provision in the curriculum of studies available to students. In Brisbane the Australian Association of National Advertisers have introduced in recent years the "Company Game". A course for senior students introducing them to marketing and advertising in Commerce through participation in and active involvement with leading companies. Teachers should place before their students the profession of merchandising in its entirety and its proper place in the spectrum of career choices available to young people.

Listed here are perhaps those qualities most needed in the advertising man or woman:

**An interest in people:** Advertising is talking to people. Advertising is about people. The person involved in the advertising profession must know people if he is to communicate. To understand people he must be interested in them. We have said advertising is directed to thinking people, ordinary people, and the knowledge gained by the advertising man, of people and their



desires, must never be turned against them. To use this knowledge in such a way is to be concerned with things and not with people.

**A dynamic personality:** Advertising is fast moving in a rapidly changing society and market place. New trends and new needs must be quickly recognized and these adapted to the true requirements of the people. These speed and adaptability does not mean he has to forego ideals and values merely to adapt his ideas and method to mass audio-visual communication.

**Objectivity:** The diversities and complexities of society involve the advertiser in an operation aimed to people of diverse interests and education, status and tastes. Judgments must be objective—'not what you like or dislike', but the standards and values of the people must always be recognized. The advertiser is not aiming at changing social values, neither is his purpose to legitimize social changes opposed to the values of the community.

**Determination and Energy:** The rewards of good advertising are high. The demands likewise are heavy. Study in all aspects of business, commercial law, all social behaviour will demand dedication and long hard hours to prepare for success in communication. The cheat will not succeed in this profession any longer than a fraud in any other. The will to succeed must never be comprised by deceit or the fear of competition.

## CONCLUSION

Reputable advertisers, who are in the majority, do not fear control systems and these systems do not imply the existence of a battery of unscrupulous advertisers at the ready to mislead the public. People might be misled and persuaded to buy a product once on the basis of exaggerated, misleading claims, but if it fails to give the benefit promised, it will not be bought again. Advertising publicly identifies a brand. Advertising then is a two-edged weapon if it is misused, and most reputable advertisers readily recognize this. Reputable firms acknowledge that misleading advertising brings all down with it, so the short-term gains it brings are quickly cancelled out.

In point of fact, the most misleading advertising is perpetuated by the public itself and while newspapers exercise reasonable

vigilance over their columns, the classified ads are the public trying to deceive the public.

Nor can the control system operate against the 'fly-by-nighter', it does prevent the pornographers and snide operators from 'pushing' their wares in reputable media, but they still use the shop window and shelves, depending on public apathy to cover their operations.

The public has the strongest control on advertising. The voluntary control system is a powerful instrument both for protecting the public and ultimately, by helping to ensure that advertising is 'legal', 'descent', 'honest' and 'truthful' but in the end the result depends upon the discriminating public.

Impressions die hard, especially when they are derived by vivid audio-visual input. British life is not like that described in Charles Dicken's novels, neither is all advertising for "quack remedies".