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Advertising to Increase Bank Business

Habit of Ultra-Conservative Advertising Was Hard to Break—Banks Are Now Adopting Methods Successfully Used in Commercial Lines—Care in the Selection of Advertising Media—How Business May Be Held When Once Secured

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WITHIN the last thirty years general commercial advertising has made immense strides. A perusal of the magazines of 1890 will show that the advertising of that date was crude and elementary compared to the finished product of to-day. This, of course, is due in no small measure to the improvements in processes of reproduction, but most largely to the effect of intense specializing in the modern advertising art.

Bank advertising has not kept pace with the publicity given to the retailer or the manufacturer. The reason is not far to seek. Until very lately all the banks, in Canada at least, seemed to indulge in the same flat, stale and unprofitable method of advertising, which invariably consisted either of a bald statement of the bank's name, birthday, address and resources, or an imposing statistical table of figures, elucidating the recent position of its finances. This was not advertising. The man on the street or on the farm was little interested or did not understand, and these so-called ads received not even a cursory glance from all except perhaps a few senior bank officers (for whom they were not intended) or a stray interested shareholder or two.

Precedent Was Hard to Break

It appears that during all those years no one of the banks would venture to become a bold pioneer in advertising, and break the deadly monotony of business cards or balance sheets. We cannot believe that during this long period of joyous effusions of assets and liabilities that all the banks were dead to the value of their great article of stock-in-trade—service. So we must revert to the first solution and assume that the so-called dignity of past generations held in leash all the seductive inducements which now begin to show themselves to tempt the masses to brave the awe-inspiring bronze grille.

To use a slang expression, the man who has silk, socks, or sardines for sale, "has the bulge" on the banker in the advertising field. In the first place these are actual commodities, good to wear or to eat, and their very quality sells them or condemns them. Again the house that has a reputation for supplying a good article can sell on its reputation. In addition to the actual goodness of quality and the attractive appearance of certain goods and their containers, the wise vendor adds the main drawing cards of what banks have to offer—service and courtesy.

Reaching Different Classes of Customers

The chartered bank has really but one great big trump card service. There are several banks in Canada, strong, healthy and widespread. A cheque, a draft, a deposit, or a loan in any one is pretty much the same as a cheque, etc.,

in any other, but it is in the manner of the reception and the successfully expressed willingness to serve, that the choice lies; these are the deciding factors. I have already referred to advertising as an art, but I am now tempted to call it a science, so I will compromise and state that the art of the banks in bringing the general public to their wickets is developing into a science; just as general advertising has already achieved the distinction of having become a perfected science with correspondence schools to unfold its mysteries throughout Europe and America. In concrete form, successful bank advertising consists in representing in terms of publicity the methods adopted by successful bankers themselves. Thus the inducements offered to the different component parts of the general public seek to be applicable to their several lines of business and so couched as to arouse interest for "interest," is the bull's-eye of all advertising, and "attention" is the inner circle. A man's attention must be gained before he is interested. It is obviously incongruous to appeal to the average farmer with a booklet showing, say, tabulated statements of the imports of ship supplies with custom duties thereon, and very indifferent would be the shipbuilder to advertising matter pertaining to agriculture. In like manner the wise bank manager talks tin cans to the tinker, crops to the farmer, etc.

Catches Readers Off Guard

Mankind universally craves entertainment, not necessarily in the form of a theatre or a ball game, but something to amuse, to interest, to divert. Although the average man is busily occupied the greater part of each day, he instinctively turns his attention to some relaxation during his spare time. Apart from outdoor exercise probably the most popular pastime is reading, and right here is where the advertiser gets his innings. Even the golfer or the pedestrian is often driven indoors through stress of weather. By far the greater part of advertising then faces us when we are in the mood to receive and be interested, but it must be interesting or attractive, or both. And right here is where the bank must attract and interest, in the daily or the periodical; otherwise it will receive but scant attention.

Although I have accentuated service as the leading stock-in-trade of the banker in his publicity, there are other resolving factors in the angling for business through the press or by means of blotters or booklets. There are the elements of safety and efficiency, but these I regard as rather less desirable points to be used for advertising purposes, as it is possible to put such a construction upon them as to lead to invidious comparison. The bank of to-day that has a small and limited sphere of action may, and hopes to be, the Gibraltar of finance of to-morrow. Rome was not built in a day, and all the great financial institutions once occu-