

History of advertising in the USA

Over a century ago, Harper's Weekly commented that advertisements were 'a true mirror of life, a sort of fossil history from which the future chronicler, if all other historical monuments were to be lost, might fully and graphically rewrite the history of our time'. Few if any historians today would claim that they could compose a complete history of an era from its advertisements, but in recent years scholars have creatively probed advertisements for clues about the society and the business environment that produced them. The presence of many excellent online collections of past advertisements provides learners as well as established scholars with the opportunity to examine these sources in new ways. The experience can be tantalising and frustrating, since advertisements don't readily proclaim their intent or display the social and cultural context of their creation. Yet studying advertisements as historical sources can also be fascinating and revealing.

Despite or because of its ubiquity, advertising is not an easy term to define. Usually, advertising attempts to persuade its audience to purchase a product or a service. But 'institutional' advertising has for a century sought to build corporate reputations without appealing for sales. Political advertising solicits a vote (or a contribution), not a purchase. Usually, too, authors distinguish advertising from salesmanship by defining it as mediated persuasion aimed at an audience rather than one-to-one communication with a potential customer. The boundaries blur here, too. When you visit a major online retailer, a screen often addresses you by name and suggests that, based on your past purchases, you might want to buy certain books or CDs, selected just for you. A telephone call with an automated telemarketing message is equally irritating whether we classify it as advertising or sales effort.

In the history of the United States, advertising has responded to changing business demands, media technologies and cultural contexts, and it is here, not in a fruitless search for the very first advertisement, that we should begin. In the eighteenth century, in colonial America, advertisements were most frequently announcements of available goods, but even in this early period, persuasive appeals accompanied dry descriptions. Benjamin Franklin's Pennsylvania Gazette reached out to readers with new devices like headlines, illustrations, and advertising placed next to editorial material.

Despite the ongoing 'market revolution', early and mid-nineteenth-century advertisements rarely demonstrate striking changes in advertising appeals. Newspapers almost never printed ads wider than a single column and generally eschewed illustrations and even special typefaces. Magazine ad styles were also restrained, with most publications relegating advertisements to the back pages. Equally significant, until late in the nineteenth century, there were few companies mass-producing branded consumer products. Patent medicine ads proved the main exception to this pattern. In an era when conventional medicine seldom provided cures, these manufacturers vied for consumer attention with large, often outrageous, promises and colourful, dramatic advertisements.

In the 1880s, several industries adopted new production techniques that created standardised products in unheard-of quantities, and sought to find and persuade buyers. National advertising of branded goods emerged in this period in response to profound changes in the business environment. Along with the manufacturers, other entities also turned to advertising. Large department stores in rapidly-growing cities, such as Wanamaker's in Philadelphia and New York, Macy's in New York, and Marshall Field's in Chicago, also pioneered new advertising styles. For rural markets, the Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward mail-order catalogues offered everything from buttons to kits with designs and materials for building homes, to Americans who lived in the countryside – a majority of the US population until about 1920.

While advertising generated modern anxieties about its social and ethical implications, it nevertheless acquired a new centrality in the 1920s. Consumer spending was fuelled in part by the increased availability of consumer credit on automobiles, radios, and household appliances, and leisure-time activities like spectator sports and movies gained popularity in the generally prosperous 1920s. Advertising promoted these products and services. The rise of mass circulation magazines, radio broadcasting and, to a lesser extent, motion pictures provided new media for advertisements to reach consumers. Advertisements, as

historian Roland Marchand pointed out, sought to adjust Americans to modern life, a life lived in a consumer society.

Questions 1–4

Choose the correct letter, A, B, C or D.

1 What is the purpose of the first paragraph?

- A To state that advertisements can teach us a certain amount about the past.
- B To tell us about the magazine which first printed advertisements.
- C To explain how much advertisements have changed in the last 100 years.
- D To introduce the idea that advertisements have a long history in business.

2 In the first paragraph, what point does the writer make about advertisements on the internet?

- A The internet helps people who are studying historical advertisements.
- B The constant advertisements on some internet websites can be annoying.
- C The internet is a good medium for advertising any product.
- D Internet sources can help us to understand the cultural significance of advertisements.

3 According to the second paragraph, it is difficult to

- A sell products through advertisements alone.
- B put advertisements into one neat category.
- C buy advertising space for political means.
- D produce an advertisement that appeals to everyone.

4 What connection does the writer make between major online retailers and telemarketing?

- A Both offer a cheap means of selling a product.
- B Both offer a less personal way of advertising.
- C Both show that advertising can be as annoying as salesmanship.
- D Both have overtaken print advertisements in popularity.

Questions 5–13

Complete the notes below.

Write NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS for each answer.

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18th Century

- advertisements told of goods available in a basic way
- as well as placing ads next to text, one newspaper introduced 5 _____ and 6 _____ for the first time

Early – mid 19th Century

- advertisements still basic
- adverts in magazines generally appeared on the 7 _____

Late 19th Century

- only advertisements for 8 _____ were bold and eye-catching
- modern 9 _____ meant more products could be made
- the first time 10 _____ products were advertised all around the country
- businesses such as 11 _____ began to advertise
- customers living in remote areas could order products from 12 _____

1920s

- 13 _____ was easier to obtain so spending increased
- new media became available (e.g. radio and cinema)

3.1 Read the passage below and decide which sections (A–D) the following ideas are from.

- 1 techniques to encourage online shoppers to stay loyal
- 2 different concerns online shoppers may have
- 3 negative impact of the internet on businesses
- 4 responding when customers are not positive

A In a recent study, Swinda Janda and collaborator Hong-Youl Ha of South Korea's Kangwon National University explored how businesses can cultivate and keep loyal customers and how relationships between businesses and customers mirror human relationships.

B Janda was not surprised to find that in order to create a relationship, consumers have to perceive it will pay off, monetarily or otherwise. The study found that promotional events designed to counter customers' negative attitudes can significantly enhance the customers' likelihood of engaging in a long-term relationship with the business. For a car dealership, Janda said this could mean promotions that don't focus on a hard-sell approach but rather on providing relevant information such as the availability of rebates for the customer.

C In terms of online retailers, in order to enhance customer loyalty, they should focus on enhancing customer perceptions of their trustworthiness. This can be accomplished by providing assurances that personal and credit card information is secure. Janda's research shows that it takes more than satisfaction with a product for customers to return to a retail website, and suggests that online retailers use positive reinforcement like providing customers with discounts on future purchases, or free merchandise to increase the probability of future site visits. They should also bear in mind that customers judge online retailers not just by the quality of their products but also by whether the website loads quickly, and the frequency of pop-up windows.

D With the prevalence of social media, Janda said it is now more important than ever for companies to implement systems that are geared towards managing unhappy customers. As an example, he points to the more than eight million views for a video clip posted online by the dissatisfied customer of an airline. 'With social networking, it's very easy for one dissatisfied customer to post on his or her blog that a company messed up,' Janda said.