

The Social Contribution of Advertising.

A statement by the Advertising Association in conjunction with the European Association of Advertising Agencies to promote the understanding on which Advertising and Consumer Organisations can work together throughout Europe.

The primary service of Advertising* is to the Consumer.

The service advertising gives to the advertiser is well recognised. It performs indeed an essential economic and commercial function as the means of communicating his marketing offers and ensuring a stable demand. Much less well understood is its social context, and the service it gives to the consumer in a modern community.

Its first objective is to serve the consumer better. Only if advertising can serve the consumer can it be of service to the interests of the producer and the media.

Advertising is a vital service to the modern community because, for the first time in history, the mass population has substantial *discretionary* spending power—the power to afford goods and services over and above the necessities of life.

Industry responds by marketing a wide range of such products, to meet every taste.

No one either wants, or could afford, them all. People have to choose. They need a service of suggestions about what is available. Without it, their new spending power would lose much of its value and enjoyment.

What kind of information do people want ?

People do not buy *things*: they buy the *satisfactions*, both objective and subjective, that those things are going to deliver to them personally. People are not so much interested in product descriptions and formulae, as in the promise of the product's performance, as it will affect *them*.

A shop window or counter can only display the goods; it takes advertising to display the satisfactions. Advertising is thus a kind of shop window of satisfactions.

Different kinds of people, different generations, different educational and economic levels, have different ideas about what are worthwhile satisfactions. It may well be, therefore, that the satisfactions which advertising offers to one sector of the population are disapproved by another.

But a free competitive market place depends on the principle that producers submit themselves to the choice of the public, and

that buyers can choose for themselves according to their personal preferences.

The alternative is a regimented state control of what people are allowed to want, and what producers are allowed to offer, and although some people seem to consider themselves capable of exercising such dictatorship, this is not the democratic way.

It is no surprise that the satisfactions offered in advertising are mainly marginal—*improved utilities, extra amenities, new products and experiences, modest luxuries*—because marginal values are the natural destination of marginal spending power. In this sense it is true that advertising "encourages unnecessary wants"; that is what the logic of the situation demands of it.

How can Advertising safeguard its Service to the Consumer ?

First, it is essential that advertising must be *honest in presenting the satisfactions it offers*. In any market place the seller is entitled to present what he offers in an enthusiastic and colourful way; this is the kind of market place most people want advertising to be, and they know an advertiser speaks as a partisan.

But this fact puts upon the advertiser a social obligation to ensure that he is honest in his promises and truthful in all his facts (and ready to substantiate them). This essential honesty will best be achieved by advertising voluntarily applying an accepted code of standards such as the British Code of Advertising Practice supervised by the Advertising Standards Authority.

Second, advertising must recognise that it has the job of *helping the consumer to make his choice*. It is entitled to be vigorous and persuasive, providing it leaves the buyer the capacity to choose fairly for himself. Its effect must be that of interesting people to consider buying, rather than of high-pressure selling.

Where detailed information is needed (as with more expensive durables) that cannot practicably be given in advertising, it should be readily available from other sources.

Third, it must conduct itself with *good taste, common sense, and concern for the public interest*. It must, in short, live up to the words of the International Code of Advertising Practice: "legal, decent, honest and truthful".

It is right that there should always be due emphasis on the function of advertising in "helping manufacturers to sell".

But advertising recognises that it only justifies this function by its other job of helping the consumer to buy.

* Advertising serves many purposes: government, local authority, financial and industrial information, charities, churches and small personal messages. In this statement the word advertising refers throughout to advertising of consumer goods and services.

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