

NEWSPAPER ADVERTISING IN PRE-REVOLUTIONARY RUSSIA: A RESEARCH ESSAY

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ABSTRACT

Historians have documented the birth of Mother Russia and the rise and fall of Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Sovietologists and marketing scholars have dissected the concept of Communism in politics, economics, and foreign relations. But little research has been directed at uncovering and contextualizing the entrepreneurial spirit of the advertising industry in Pre-revolutionary Russia (prior to 1917)¹. From the reign of industrialist Peter the Great, to the Romanov autocracy, to the 70-year Communist Interlude, to *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* in 1985, advertising has in fact been an institution of social and economic influence in Russia. This essay highlights some milestones in the development of Russian newspaper advertising in Pre-revolutionary Russia.

MESSENGERS AND MESSAGES

The first newspaper advertising section, *For News*, appeared in a March edition of the St. Petersburg Gazette that began publishing in 1728. Keeping pace with economic and trade development, newspaper advertising continued when the Moscow Gazette began publishing in 1756. In the late 19th century, after the 1861 economic reforms, it proliferated. During that period advertisements were adorned with more creative typefaces, illustrations and attention-getting elements to differentiate it from simple information, buy/sell announcements, government proclamations and acts, and bank statements. Advertisements became an important component of newspapers as well as a source of revenue for them.

Editors became concerned about the interdependency between editorial content and advertising. "In order to increase editorial material, we must first reduce the number of advertisements and then consider whether to allocate more or less space for articles"². Soon the appearance of newspapers changed. Advertisements placed on the front page were overpowering editorial content. News articles were split and continued on inside pages to make room for ads and satire on the front page. That change was not difficult for the Russians. They simply adopted the newspaper style and "effective" advertising that had evolved in the United States during the same period of time. In 1909, V.A. Anzimirov announced in Moscow that his progressive daily newspaper Day would be a "new kind of newspaper similar to American newspapers," like the Daily News. Quickly, Russian newspapers began to follow the style of the so called *penny press*³ with other variations such as *For the Streets*, *the Most Read*, and sensationalized news about murders, robberies, and muggings.

ADVERTISING OFFICES, THE PREDECESSORS OF FULL SERVICE AGENCIES

Advertising offices had its own specialization and offered selected services for only one medium. Placing ads in newspapers and magazines was difficult in part because of geography and inadequate postal services. Initially, there were only 11 offices in Moscow and six in St. Petersburg. By 1917, more than 100 offices were offering a variety of services, including placement of ads on hotel and restaurant bills.

Ludwig Moritsovish Metzl pioneered and opened the first full service agency. His slogan was, "Advertisements are the engine of trade." It was later modified to "Advertising is the engine of trade."⁴ He had offices in Moscow and St. Petersburg, Russia as well as a branch in Warsaw, Poland, and had contracts with newspapers having the most provincial and rural editions with a clause that would not let them accept ads from competitors. Metzl initiated perhaps the first contracts with newspapers that guaranteed them a predetermined volume and revenue from advertising. But the 1917 Revolution put to an end to Metzl's enterprises as well as to the advertising industry in Russia.

The archives of Russia and the AVRORA Museum of Russian Advertising are rich with historical advertisements, packaging, direct mail pieces, and trade cards, but are accessible only with great difficulty and are not well organized. Still, they provide vivid evidence of the rapid growth and influential role of the advertising industry in Russia's developing economy and expanding international trade prior to 1917. The industry parallels between the United States and pre-

Revolutionary Russia are striking. Contrary to what many American advertising scholars and practitioners seem to believe, Russia's advertising industry has a rich history and tradition of entrepreneurial enterprises on which to build a in the post-Communist era.

ⁱ With permission, the historical information for this research essay, translated from Russian by the author, was drawn from the personal archival research notes and writings of Sergei Cherednichenko, Curator and Director of the AVRORA Museum of Russian Advertising, Moscow. Reconstruction of his source citations was impossible.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Michael Schudson, Discovering the News (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 14-31.

^{iv} Ludmilla Gricenko Wells, "The Socioeconomic Culture and the Advertising Process in the Soviet union," in Proceedings of the American Academy of Advertising Conference in Reno, Nevada, April 1991, edited by R. Holman, 203-212.