COMMUNITY ADVERTISING

Richard Germain, Oklahoma State University

ABSTRACT

The term community advertising, which appeared with regularity in Printers Ink between 1915 and 1930, referred to efforts by local, state and federal governments and non-profit institutions to attract to the community various publics and to promote goodwill. The publics included tourists, settlers, residents, homeowners, and investors. Because community advertising relied on modern marketing tools (such as research), commentators saw it as an improvement over boosting. In addition, they did not consider tourism advertising by railroads to be within the scope of community advertising. While neither boosting nor railroad tourism advertising are examples of community advertising, both are antecedents.

The evidence suggests that community advertising began in earnest during the 1910s. The Denver Tourist and Publicity Bureau and the All Year Club of Southern California respectively began operations in 1915 and 1921. The Associated Advertisers Club of the World formed the Community Advertisers Association in 1916, but it apparently had few members by 1924. By 1925, a considerable number of communities levied taxes or raised private funds through local civic associations (primarily the Chamber of Commerce) for promotional purposes. Some of these campaigns were directed to boundary spanning service personnel (tram operators, taxi drivers) to encourage courtesy and enhance their knowledge of local tourist attractions.

Commentators drew the analogy between advertising a product and advertising a community. For both, attributes could be listed and adjusted to better suit the needs of potential customers. Zoning bylaws, public works projects, transportation facilities, tax rates, land costs, labor availability and skill levels, and the attitude of residents toward industrial development, among others, were cited as attributes that could attract or deter potential users of community services. Of considerable importance was who paid for the campaign. By 1926, most states had enacted legislation allowing or barring the use of tax funds for community advertising purposes. Such legislation greatly affected the proportion of a campaign's budget derived from public sources.

Several communities designed special appeals and used special media for different segments. A 1921 campaign by the Seattle Chamber of Commerce, for instance, used "segregated appeals" reliant on distinct media vehicles and messages for attracting tourists and industry. And the Florida First Commission ran two separate campaigns in 1916, one for attracting farmers and one for attracting tourists and winter residents. Any given Florida community could subscribe to one or both campaigns.