

MEDIA PLANNING CRITERIA
IN NINETEENTH CENTURY BRITAIN

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the information available to advertisers and their agents for making media decisions, and the criteria they employed. Although the picture is distorted by the effects of the Stamp Duty and the chaotic system of newspaper space rates, the evidence suggests that decision makers were strongly influenced by the need to direct messages to a defined target audience.

The Planning Process

By the early decades of the nineteenth century the trade of advertising was already well established in Britain. In London alone some 50 advertising agents were in business at various times before 1850, acting as a link between the commercial and manufacturing interests concentrated on the capital, the embryonic national press centered on Fleet Street, and the hundreds of small local newspapers which were springing up all over the country. These agents differed in a fundamental respect from their early counterparts in the United States in that they were agents of the advertiser and not of the newspaper. Since they owed no allegiance to publishers, they would accept advertisements for any newspaper published in Britain and often also for the foreign and colonial press.

Inevitably the advertising agent became involved in a rudimentary form of media planning, and there is evidence that advertisers would ask the advice of agents as to which papers were most suitable in a particular case. In 1829, for example, the General Steam Navigation Company wrote to their agent, Charles Barker, asking whether to include the Public Ledger on their schedule (Barker 1829). Even if the advertiser had sufficient information on which to base such decisions - unlikely given that he might be dealing with small-circulation papers in remote districts several hundreds of miles from London in an era of uncertain communications - there remained the problems of negotiation on price, position, dates of insertion, and terms of payment. These then became the responsibilities of the advertising agent who was thus drawn once again into the planning and buying of press advertising.

Agents' activities were confined largely to the press until the end of the century. It was the medium where their knowledge and expertise could be of most value to their clients, and since it was the only one to pay them commission, the use of their services in any other context would have involved their clients in extra expense. It may therefore be assumed that advertisers dealt direct with media other than press, and so were the makers of inter-media decisions.

Cost

It appears strange at first sight that in the early decades of the nineteenth century, information on newspaper advertising costs should be absent from the very places where one would expect to find it; namely newspapers' own advertisements and the press guides produced by various advertising agents. The reason probably has less to do with commercial secrecy than an assumption that rates were so widely known as not to be worth repeating. There were in fact two general rate levels, one applying to the London papers and one to their country counterparts. In the 1820s the cost of a normal length advertisement was six shillings in London newspapers and five shillings in the provinces, both inclusive of duty which was levied at a flat rate of three shillings and sixpence. In both cases the only criterion of basic cost was the number of lines. Although circulations of newspapers were widely quoted in the first half of the century, and were reasonably accurate since they were based on the official returns of Stamp Duty, they had virtually no influence on rates charged by publishers.

Beyond this each newspaper seems to have had its own rules and regulations regarding extra charges for specific categories of advertising and special positions within the paper. Some, for example, charged double the normal rate for election notices (Parliamentary Debates 1815), and births, marriages and deaths were often charged at a higher rate, as were advertisements on page one.

Even by the end of the century there was little attempt by papers to link their advertisement rates to circulation. Although a few leading advertising agents such as S.H. Benson were beginning to talk in terms of cost per thousand copies sold, the concept was not widely adopted since most publications went to great lengths to conceal their circulation figures. Even the much respected Times did so on the grounds that advertisers would not understand them and would be misled (Advertisers Protection Society 1912).

Cost nevertheless became an important factor in media selection in the second half of the century. In the early 1850s the Government abolished several taxes which had been holding back the development of British newspapers (see Table 1).

TABLE 1.
Newspaper Taxation in Britain

<u>Newspaper Stamp Duty</u>		<u>Advertisement Duty</u>		<u>Paper Duty (per lb.)</u>	
1789-97	2d.	1789-97	2s. 6d.	1803-36	3d.
1797-1815	3½d.	1797-1815	3s. 0d.		
1815-36	4d.	1815-33	3s. 6d.	1836-61	1½d.
1836-55	1d.	1833-53	1s. 6d.		
1855	abolished	1853	abolished	1861	abolished

(Source A.P. Wadsworth, "Newspaper Circulations 1800-1954," Proceedings of the Manchester Statistical Society, 9 March 1954).

As the number of newspapers and magazines increased, so did the competition for advertising revenue. In earlier years some of the leading newspapers had enjoyed waiting lists of advertisers wanting to take space. By the

1880s and 1890s this was true only of a very few, such as the rapidly growing Daily Mail. There was thus a pressure on publishers to compete in terms of rates. In addition, there appeared on the fringes of the business a number of dubious operators who purported to offer advertisers lower advertising rates than were offered by newspapers themselves. Sometimes their methods were the result of hard bargaining. The "farmer", for instance, simply contracted for a large volume of space at a cheap rate on a long-term basis and then resold it in smaller units to advertisers and agents. Alternatively he might offer a lower reduction on a "farmed" publication but to use the saving to make a reduction on the rate of a prestigious national paper such as the Times, which was known not to cut its rates under any circumstances. Sometimes a less than scrupulous advertising agent would quote his client a blanket rate for a long list of publications, a number of which would be worthless, without giving specific rates for any of them. Or a schedule might be submitted showing cut rates for every publication, the agent in this case relying on at least one of the publishers not inserting the advertisement as per contract - for example on the wrong page, in the wrong position, or badly printed. In this case he would negotiate a reduction or refuse to pay, while still charging his client the quoted rate. If this ploy failed he might well overcharge for creative work and blocks in order to cover the extra cost of space, or cut out pages from publications so that a client's advertisements appeared to be facing an editorial page instead of another advertisement, a page facing matter normally being charged at a higher rate. Or he might simply book less space than his clients were actually charged for (Maxwell 1904, p.12-13, Moran 1905, p. 70-72).

Cost could therefore be an important factor in deciding between newspapers, the situation being complicated by the activities of this unwholesome substratum. It also had a considerable influence on intermedia decisions, particularly before 1833 when the high rate of advertisement duty more than doubled the cost of an average insertion in the provincial press. The high unit cost of newspaper advertising forced many advertisers to use alternatives ranging from the illegal "unstamped" press to peripheral media such as advertising cards, handbills, and sandwichboard men. As one contemporary complained:

"The advertisement duty merely swells the number of placards and circulars, and compels the shopkeeper to have recourse to roundabout and less efficient methods of setting forth the merits and cheapness of his wares, instead of courting the attention of customers in the pages of a public journal." (R.K.D.1831)

Reach and Audience

In the early decades of the century there was interest in the number of copies a paper sold, not through any wish to relate this to the rate charged, but because the advertiser wished to know the coverage it gave of a particular town or district. Until the abolition of the Stamp Duty, the circulation figures of newspapers were surprisingly well documented. All newspapers (except those "unstamped" journals published illegally) were printed on stamped paper supplied by the Government Stamping Office, each individual copy being printed on a single sheet of paper folded once. The Government published returns of the number of sheets supplied to each newspaper in the country. Several leading advertising agents, working through these returns, produced handbooks showing the number of copies sold by each title on an

average day, and some publishers used the figures in their own publicity material. Though some papers undoubtedly cheated to try to boost their circulation figures - for example by selling stamped paper to other smaller newspapers or even to shopkeepers for use as wrapping paper - the statistics seem generally to have been reasonably accurate. The question of reach cannot be separated from that of audience because until 1853 the Stamp Duty on newspapers made them so expensive as to be beyond the reach of much of the population. The public response to this situation was to devise a number of ways of securing a paper at a reduced cost, which meant that the readership per copy was extremely high by the standards of today. In many instances people clubbed together, sharing the cost of purchase. In other cases they formed a chain with each succeeding member paying correspondingly less as the paper became older and less legible. The Times for example was said to reach its final reader on the second morning after publication (House of Commons Accounts and Papers 1851). Many readers simply resold their copies of leading papers, journals of the time frequently carrying advertisements from London readers wishing to sell their copies to people in the country. Newsagents might hire out copies of papers (although this was made illegal in 1789) before selling them, or even trying to return them to the publisher. The Secretary to the Treasury stated that a single copy of a newspaper could be hired out to as many as twenty or thirty persons before being sent to the country at a reduced rate, while the Times complained that papers which had been hired out were returned to it as unsold (Aspinall 1946). Reading rooms, coffee houses, and public houses also carried newspapers for the benefit of their patrons. It is not surprising, therefore, that estimates of the number of readers per copy go as high as eighty for a weekly paper (Westminster Review, 1829). This is by no means impossible, given the widespread demand for news. In public houses, for example, it was so great that reading time was limited to five minutes per customer per copy.

It is impossible to make a realistic estimate of the proportion of the population reached by the newspapers. We can say, however, that they were read by the vast majority of people in Britain. While the very poor and illiterate can be discounted, they were very much a minority. It is evident that newspapers were widely read even by members of the laboring classes, particularly in the rapidly developing industrial towns.

"At no time were newspapers beyond the reach of town workers. As long ago as the 1730s, Montesquieu, whilst in England, had been struck not only with the number and licentiousness of the London newspapers (the dailies and weeklies together being about twenty) but also with the ease with which their information reached working men. The very slaters had newspapers brought to them on the roofs of the houses on which they were working, that they might read them. Nor were newspapers beyond the reach of agricultural labourers, though there were doubtless many villages during the last decade of the nineteenth century which saw a newspaper only at irregular intervals." (Aspinall 1946).

Already, therefore, the newspaper was a national advertising medium. When the Newspaper Stamp was repealed in 1855 there followed an enormous expansion in the press both in terms of the number of titles published and the number of copies printed. In the five years following repeal, 120 papers were established in 102 towns where none previously existed. By 1864 the number

of dailies published outside London had risen from 5 to 52, and by 1889 the figure had reached 139. Although there were few reliable circulation figures in the second half of the century, the scale of circulations claimed by various papers give an indication of the rate of increase. The Daily Telegraph, for example, was claiming 27,000 per day in 1856 and 300,000 by 1880. Lloyd's Weekly claimed 1,000,000 in 1896 and the Daily Mail reached the same figure during the Boer War. The same was true of magazines such as Titbits, which was selling 900,000 per week in the 1880s, and Answers, which reached similar levels in the following decade (Wadsworth 1955). It used to be assumed that the reason for this publishing boom was a new literate public created by the Education Act of 1870. A more likely explanation, however, is the reduction in the price of newspapers to a halfpenny per copy, enabling people who had previously hired or borrowed a paper to buy one for themselves, especially since the trend was evident well before the passing of the legislation in question.

For a national campaign, the alternative medium to newspapers was the poster. In the early years of the nineteenth century, the London poster contractors employed "trampers" who travelled all over England for six to eight months at a time earning 10 shillings a day plus expenses (Dickens 1851). Poster advertising could, however, be used to disseminate information with amazing rapidity. As early as 1808 it was observed that "within six hours, by means of printed bills, the inhabitants of a great city can be advertised of a thousand things necessary to be publicly known; and in cases of fugitive robbers, traitors, spies, etc., the hue and cry, or notice of their apprehension, is circulated throughout the kingdom in four or five days." (Pyne 1808)

Posters probably constituted the most effective method of advertising a product with a mass consumer appeal. Used in towns, they certainly offered heavy coverage. It was estimated in 1850 that 150 bill stickers were working in London and they could post an average of 100 bills per day (Dickens 1851). This would mean that in a week they would post $150 \times 100 \times 6 = 90,000$ bills. Given a London population of about 2.3 million, this is equivalent to one bill per 25 people per week.

Another method of achieving mass coverage in towns was to distribute hand-bills. In 1861 William Smith, a theatrical manager, walked through London during Cattle Show Week and made a calculation based on the 250 bills he was handed en route. He reckoned that the average number of pedestrians passing the bill deliverers in those streets between 10 a.m. and 7 p.m. would have been about 40,000, and if only half of these took only half of the bills, the number distributed would have amounted in the nine hours to 2,300,000. In the course of a year, excluding Sundays and wet and foggy days, this would amount to some 575,000,000 bills. Smith then estimated that he had not passed more than half the bill-deliverers in London and accordingly doubled the number to give him a grand total of 1,150,000,000 (Smith 1863).

Target Market

Guided by basic entrepreneurial instinct, businessmen in the early decades of the century were trying to match what they knew about the purchasers of their products with what could be deduced about the audiences for the various media. Often they appear to have equated market potential with social class, which is by no means unreasonable bearing in mind the close correlation at that period between class and income. Newspapers often made much of the

concept, proclaiming their "quality" of circulation in an effort to divert attention away from advertisers' growing interest in the number of copies they actually sold. It is equally true, however, that there were many products appealing to a lower class, lower income market, and these were advertised in media likely to attract that type of audience.

This is well demonstrated by the tactics of the patent medicine advertisers. A national daily such as the Morning Chronicle and weeklies circulating in the more prosperous areas of the country carried advertising for fashionable quack doctors. Jordan's Cordial Balm of Rakasari, for example, recommended itself "To the delicate female enfeebled by the fatiguing routine of fashionable life, the careworn man of business, and those particularly whose constitutions sympathize with the effects of undue indulgences in early life..." (Bury and Suffolk Herald, 1 September 1830). Papers circulating in poorer agricultural or industrial areas on the other hand carried advertisements for such products as Dr. Roberts' Poor Man's Friend Ointment, "A certain cure for ulcerated sore legs, if of 20 years' standing, cuts, burns, scalds, bruises, chilblains, scorbutic eruptions, pimples on the face, sore and inflamed eyes, and cancerous tumours..." (Stamford Mercury, 30 November 1855).

By the last quarter of the century it was even more apparent that advertisers were using various newspapers to reach quite different audiences. The Daily Telegraph, for example, remained the paper for business and commercial interests, its advertisements being concerned with such matters as banking, insurance, business and property sales, and company announcements. By the turn of the century, while its tone was still generally commercial, it was carrying display advertisements in such consumer areas as soft drinks, carpet and fashion retailing, department stores, medicines, and foods and holidays. Meanwhile, an expansion of consumer choice and a general rise in demand derived from an increase in income levels coincided with the appearance of mass circulation popular newspapers. This was reflected initially in advertising for utilitarian products concerned with washing, cleaning and livening up food, and subsequently by advertisements for sets of furniture offered on credit terms, ready to wear clothes for men, and paper patterns and sewing machines for women (Berridge 1976). Advertisers also had a need to reach geographic concentrations of consumers. Even during the eighteenth century there had been a number of products with national distribution, and the number grew as the nineteenth century progressed. Judging from many of the advertisements, however, distribution was patchy. Where stockists are listed in national newspapers they are often widely spread, and for that reason many leading firms tended to advertise heavily in the local press, either instead of the nationals or to intensify coverage in selected areas.

Posters in theory offered geographic flexibility to an even greater degree, since particular districts or even streets where prospective customers lived could be isolated for posting. In practice, however, posting was concentrated in poorer neighborhoods since these had more derelict property and blank walls provided by factories, warehouses and the like, on which the posters could be pasted. Accordingly, poster advertising tended to be employed for consumer products in general use, or for those with a predominantly lower class appeal.

Creative Scope

This was certainly a major factor in any advertising media decision. In the first half of the century Stamp Duty was levied on each printed sheet, which effectively limited a paper to four pages - i.e., a single sheet folded once. No paper apart from the Times could attract advertising in sufficient volume to enable it to sell at the same price with an additional sheet. The result was a growing pressure of news and advertisements upon a fixed area of space, which led proprietors to adopt such expedients as reducing the size of type, increasing the number of columns per page, and stopping the use of illustrations. During the 1830s and 1840s illustrated advertisements are to be found only in a few small country papers, and even in these cases the illustration itself is usually very small and essentially emblematic, being used apparently to distinguish generic product categories rather than a particular manufacturer's goods. All advertisements were strictly confined within the column rules.

Although competition for advertising revenue increased considerably after the repeal of the Stamp Duty, publishers still resisted attempts by advertisers to draw greater attention to their advertisements, in the belief that to do so would be to ruin the appearance of the printed page. Even by the early 1890s it was virtually impossible to induce any leading London or provincial paper to accept an advertisement more than one column in width containing display type. Although the Times carried its first illustrated advertisement in 1892 and Punch in 1893, the rearguard action continued to be fought for several years. The leader of the advertisers in this campaign seems to have been John Morgan Richards, an American patent medicine vendor who set up his business in London in 1876 and brought considerable pressure to bear on British publications to allow the same degree of creative freedom as those in the United States. Eventually financial considerations obliged the publishers to give way, so that "...the year 1896 will be said to have witnessed the successful revolt of the advertiser from the stifling bondage in which he has been enchained for over a century." (Palmer 1897).

If the visual opportunities afforded by newspapers were limited, they were amply compensated by those of the poster. In the first half of the century posters consisted mainly of printed notices though illustrations were by no means unknown, woodcuts being used to portray emblematic and heraldic devices, and occasionally a striking scene of some theatrical event or exhibition. During the second half of the century there was a gradual evolution of poster composition with the woodcut developing into a colored design dominating the whole area, and the textual element diminishing until in some cases it was omitted completely. Selling messages were found to be capable of communication by means of visual symbols as well as by words.

These changes were made possible by improvements in printing technology. Although lithography was invented in 1793, it was not until the cooperation between the French artist Cheret and his printer Chaix in the 1870s that the process became practical for large-scale commercial use. By the end of the century photographic half-tones were also being used successfully. British advertisers made full use of the creative freedom which the medium offered. They allowed poster artists to produce work bearing little or no relation to the product. They paid large sums of money for "academic" paintings such as the celebrated "Bubbles" by Sir John Millais, used for so many years by

Pears soap. And on the eve of the First World War, Pears took the ultimate creative step of commissioning a series of original oil paintings to be displayed on London hoardings in place of the more humble poster.

Political Stance

It may seem strange to see this included in a list of media selection criteria, but it was undoubtedly a factor to be considered during the earlier part of the nineteenth century. A number of the newspaper guides produced by advertising agents list the politics of each newspaper in addition to other information such as number of stamps purchased. It is difficult to say whether the use of politics as a criterion represents prejudice on the part of the advertiser or some belief about the purchasing behavior of consumers of differing political allegiances. Charles Mitchell, a leading agent of the time, clearly believed that such considerations were irrelevant, and in his Newspaper Press Directory (1846) took advertisers severely to task for being concerned with such matters. His reprimand appears to have had little effect, since he continued to print it in ensuing editions.

Free "Puffs"

"Puffs" were advertising notices inserted in the editorial columns in the guise of news. In the early years of the century these were charged at a higher rate than that for normal advertisements. The rates were quoted quite openly and the paragraphs themselves often carried the designation "adv't" at the end of the last line. By the last quarter of the century, however, pressures were being put on newspaper publishers to omit this designation, to insert puffs free of charge, and even to present news in a manner which happened to favor a particular advertiser though it might be factually inaccurate. Thomas Holloway, a noted patent medicine manufacturer, provides a good example of how the puff was used in purchase negotiations. In 1878 he wrote to a newspaper offering four pounds for a year for the weekly insertion of an advertisement and a puff plus an editorial article of at least forty lines once a month. The advertisement copy was to stand for a year, the puff was to be changed every week, and the editorial to be different every month (Provincial Newspaper Society 1878).

Advertising agents, by virtue of the large expenditures they controlled, were in an even more favorable position to obtain free puffs for their clients. "It is, indeed, almost a necessary qualification for any agent who hopes to be a success, that he should, in the opinion of his clients, the advertisers, be in a position to control the Press by occasionally securing for them the circulation of judiciously worded 'news paragraphs'". (Provincial Newspaper Society 1888).

If the willingness of a journal to accept puffs could be a critical factor in selection, it was equally true that advertisers might be forced to advertise in certain papers which would not publish puffs as such, but which confined editorial coverage to products advertised in their columns. The Times accused some other London dailies of confining coverage of motoring news to those manufacturers who advertised with them (31 December 1907). This allegation was subsequently confirmed by a letter from "a Motor Manufacturer": "I can confirm the statements of your correspondent that certain daily papers do permit manufacturers who advertise in their columns to write editorial matter concerning their goods, and that certain motor papers practically ignore in their editorial columns the performances and claims of cars which are not advertised." (4 February 1908)

Effectiveness

As increased amounts were being spent on advertising, there was a natural tendency for advertisers to concern themselves with the relative effectiveness of the various media available. Usually these efforts were impressionistic though based on observation and logic. Newspapers were believed to be more effective than circulars because, although they would not reach so many people, they were more likely to be read. They could also be used to appeal to a particular class (Moran 1905).

The distributing of bills in the street was regarded as wasteful. It was difficult to make a passer-by take one. "Any man can stick a bill upon a wall, but to insinuate one gracefully and irresistibly into the hands of a lady or gentleman, is only for one who, to natural genius, adds long experience." (Weir 1843, p.34) Perhaps this is not surprising, given that the men handing them out were described as "the wretched sweepings of the workhouses" (An Adept 1875, p. 197). As an alternative, the bills might be tossed in bundles into passing carriages, which was scarcely likely to get them read. Bills delivered to the home inspired little more confidence. There were street directories published specifically for use by this section of the advertising trade, listing occupants, types of business, and the town and country houses of the nobility and gentry. The bills themselves, however, were slipped under the door or left under the door knocker, and many were taken by street urchins before the intended recipient could see them. Even those which survived were believed generally to go unread (Smith 1863).

Posters had the advantages of wide coverage and low cost, but were open to question in terms of effectiveness. "The effect of posting is often overestimated; in many cases the money had better be spent in other directions. The chief, if not the sole, effect of posters is to familiarize the public with a name; it is the dreary drip of constant iteration" (Shore 1907).

There are few attempts at quantitative assessment. Apart from Smith's calculation based on the number of bills he was handed (noted above), only two other instances have been discovered. One is in terms of the number of replies received when advertising a harp in three different publications - perhaps not the most relevant of examples in commercial terms (An Advertiser 1851). The other is an effort to estimate the effectiveness of the Times as an advertising medium. The writer multiplied the depth of the advertisement (one inch) by the number of copies sold (170,000) to arrive at a figure of 2 3/4 miles, exclaiming in triumph "Thus we have at a glance the real amount of publicity which is procurable in a great journal" (Quarterly Review 1855).

CONCLUSION

At a period long before the marketing concept had been enunciated, when businessmen are popularly supposed to have been guided solely by considerations of production, the media selection process provides unmistakable signs of a developing consumer orientation. The criteria which guided advertisers and their agents in the nineteenth century were of necessity rather different from those used by media planners today. The information available to them was obviously more restricted, and contemporary values led to the intrusion of such non-commercial considerations as the political stance of newspapers.

Nevertheless, they generally seem to have known whether their products enjoyed a general or a 'class' appeal, and to have selected media with this in mind.

Businessmen would presumably have known who their customers were through the process of selling their products. Given that they applied this knowledge to their advertising, could it not also be assumed that they would behave similarly with respect to such matters as product design, pricing and distribution? And if so, ought we not to be revising the accepted view of marketing history?

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