

JULIAN LEWIS WATKINS

THE 100 GREATEST ADVERTISEMENTS 1852-1958

WHO WROTE THEM AND WHAT THEY DID



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By

JULIAN LEWIS WATKINS



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Preface to Dover Edition-1959

NEARLY ten years have passed since the first edition of this book (long out of print) came off the presses and literally startled me, and many others, with its instant acceptance, controversy, and success.

This was more than I expected, and more than I deserved. As a matter of fact, the book would never have been attempted, or completed, without the encouragement and assistance of Fred Kendall, long-time editor of the old *Advertising & Selling* which was a sort of bible to us struggling copywriters in the thirties and forties. Fred kept me at it when my spirits sagged — and sag they did, especially when some un-blithe spirit would tell me with great candor (and truth) that nobody but nobody could possibly pick the 100 greatest advertisements.

Of course not. As I wrote in the original *Author's Preface* “. . . the purpose of this book is to provide those who make, buy, sell, teach, or study advertising with a comprehensive reference work which can serve as a new, and I hope, exciting, stimulus to the continuing search for advertising effectiveness.”

Lofty aims, and I apologize for my inability to make them loftier. But they seemed to work, ably supported by Raymond Rubicam's wonderful *Foreword*.

And that is why this second edition, with 13 new additions to the original “100 Greatest” came to be.

JULIAN L. WATKINS,
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS.
JANUARY 19, 1959

Author's Preface-1949

AS I sit here in my office on the twelfth floor of the Statler Building in Boston, Massachusetts, I can see across the rooftops some sixty different advertisements:

Three gasolines, two beverages, a school of dancing, a newspaper, a public utility, and a mayonnaise, are among them.

They look good to me! And in this upset, trembling world too few of us realize that these familiar clarions of commerce are actually the last strong line of free enterprise.

If you switched on your radio this morning or your television last night — you heard and saw them. And in your newspaper or magazine, you face repeatedly some of the finest salesmen in the world.

Jack Cunningham, a distinguished copywriter and executive for Cunningham & Walsh in New York, made a snapshot of an average New York cross-street. He said this about it to a group of advertising men last year:

“I want you to notice the following things — all within forty or fifty feet of the camera: there staring up from the sidewalk, is a handbill announcing that brakes will be relined nearby for \$16.90. Next to it is a discarded matchbox telling you to insist on Gillette Blue Blades. Tucked under the man's arm is a newspaper which presents to view the current Macy offerings in furniture. Nearby on the sidewalk is the torn half of the familiar brown Hershey chocolate bar wrapper. The windows on the left are full of advertising. Hanging signs reach out to intercept the vision. A railway express truck goes by with a passing reminder to chew Wrigley's.

“Even the cars parked alongside the curb flaunt their familiar advertising trademarks.

“Here, in a few square yards of city street, are many corporations, big and

little, striving and crying for success through their printed voices-advertising.”

Well, out of the rumble and thunder of the millions of presses — out of the billions of whispering, shouting, exhorting, cajoling advertising words that have been written over the years — *which ones stand out?*

And what are the stories behind them that will help you appraise their stature and their power?

Now the peculiar thing about advertising is that nowhere do personal opinions differ more widely than in the estimation of advertising copy, and this is especially true among advertising men themselves.

Many a man has challenged me already with this sixty-four-dollar question: “What makes an ad ‘great?’”

What it sells? Certainly — in most cases that’s what the man who paid for it had in mind, believe me. And as an instrument of sales, advertising has fulfilled its first glowing promise fabulously. Many an advertisement — especially in the mail order field — has produced enough traceable sales to be rated “great” in anybody’s book.

But as advertising comes of age, even the diehards of the rockum and sockum school of hard-selling copy, are beginning to agree that there’s much more to it than sending you to “your favorite store.” Charles C. Mortimer, Chairman of the Advertising Council, and vice president of General Foods Corporation, measured advertising soberly and intelligently when he said recently that “advertising has acquired new and sometimes frightening responsibilities . . . we have discovered in the last few years that advertising can literally accomplish miracles . . .”

What Mr. Mortimer referred to was advertising’s power in the realm of ideas . . . “that in advertising there exists one of the most effective means for inspiring and informing the people that the world has ever known . . .”

Great advertising, like sublime happiness, is a lot of little things. Sometimes these things hang together and sometimes they don’t.

Great advertising is not always the most beautiful. In fact, the reverse is often true.

Great advertising, however, does have one or two things in common: an

idea, or concept, that can't be buried regardless of presentation, and a sincerity, or belief, that reaches right out from the page and into your heart.

It is not the purpose of this book to dissect and lay bare the many little things that are undoubtedly responsible for the generally accepted success of these one hundred choice examples of our craft. I doubt if anybody on earth could do that. It is the purpose of this book to provide those who make, buy, sell, teach, or study advertising, with a comprehensive reference work which can serve as a new and, I hope, exciting, stimulus to the continuing search for advertising effectiveness.

If advertising is to accept and cash-in on the broader challenge of its responsibility as a growing social and economic force, it can well review, study, and apply, some of the best that has gone before.

The term "great" as I have used it in my title and must use it throughout this book, is both a matter of personal opinion and a matter of record. As to whether my opinion is any better than yours — I don't know. I offer only my fifteen years with N. W. Ayer & Son, Young & Rubicam, J. Walter Thompson Company; and sixteen years as a principal with the H. B. Humphrey Company, Boston. As to the matter of record, I offer more; the one hundred advertisements recorded here have been chosen, primarily, by two kinds of exceptionally well qualified experts — one, the people who read, (or do not read) advertisements — who act, or do not act, upon them . . . and two, *time*.

While compiling my list I wrote to many of the leading advertising men in the country for suggestions, and it is amazing how many of our ablest stand solidly behind Cadillac's "The Penalty of Leadership" — Squibb's "The Priceless Ingredient" — Jordan's "Somewhere West of Laramie" — Book of Etiquette's "Again She Ordered Chicken Salad" — Listerine's "Often a Bridesmaid but Never a Bride" etc!

It is amazing, and significant, because even these few differ so widely in concept and execution that their classification as "great" ads is indeterminable by any rule or method, save by these two: that they are *remembered*, and the ability behind them *respected*.

Persuasion is still the destination of any advertisement, and you can reach it from almost any point on the creative compass if you've got an idea worth

traveling in.

Some of the stories behind these selections have never been told before. Some are fascinating examples of far-sightedness. Some are Algeric. Some are immensely American. Some are sheer inspiration. Some are downright funny; with a lot of horse-sense laughing through! Some are intensely human. Some will fill you with the fine old wine of nostalgia.

All are useful as demonstrations of skilled advertising performance. The ability to think, to analyze, and to work like hell for clarity and conviction.

I think, as you go through these pages, you will feel a new pride in the business of advertising, for you will realize again what it has meant to the building and to the preservation of American free enterprise... *and how little its surface in that direction has been scratched.*

You will differ perhaps with some of my selections. That is inevitable. My hope is that my list is truly representative of the first hundred years, let's say, of advertising progress.

And if I have helped create in you that solid gold incentive which great performance invariably arouses, then I shall be exceedingly glad.

We have books of great short stories, great plays, great poems, great trials, great paintings, and so forth, but so far as I know, this is the first attempt to marshal the great in advertising, and to present it in compact and convenient reference form.

To Raymond Rubicam, with whom I once had the great privilege of working; to George Cecil and Ken Slifer of N. W. Ayer & Son, where I first saw the light of copy day; to James W. Young, with whom I never worked but always wanted to; to Hayward Anderson, an old and valued friend, and to the Curtis Publishing Company for almost endless photographs from issues long buried in the files — I owe particular thanks for gracious, thoughtful and enormous help.

And, of course, if it hadn't been for Fred Kendall, the astute and friendly editorial director of the Moore Publishing Company, publishers of Advertising Agency, (better known to our generation as Advertising & Selling), the book probably would never have been published at all. Fred liked the idea from the start and encouraged me to do it — supplying both valued data from his files and genuine enthusiasm from his heart. In fact, the

book's title is his. He admits that I may know a good ad when I see one but that he knows a title that will sell books!

My files are filled with wonderful letters from other men and women about whom you will hear later, and who, in turn, have filled my heart with a very special quality and quantity of gratitude. This is really *their* book; I've simply put it together.

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS
OCTOBER, 1949