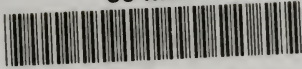


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SOME NOTES
on
CATALOG MAKING

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Some Notes on
Catalog Making

Some Notes on Catalog Making

By

Samuel Graydon

Treasurer, Wynkoop Hallenbeck Crawford Co.



Wynkoop Hallenbeck Crawford Co.

"PRINTING HEADQUARTERS"

Printers & Binders

80 Lafayette Street, New York

1921

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Foreword

Too much cannot be written or said about making the catalog better. It is in its place one of the most important units in the whole advertising campaign. It is what makes effective the direct advertising and the general advertising. It frequently takes the place of the traveling salesman. It is, or ought to be, a work of reference to be kept, filed and consulted. Therefore it should have everything the writer, artist, engraver and printer can add to it to make it simple, clear, intelligent and convenient.

ERNEST ELMO CALKINS

December 4, 1920

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Library
School

Apologia

THE enormous volume of printed matter of an advertising and publicity character, of which the catalog and booklet form a most important part and involve a large proportion of the expenditure, presents a field where "live wires" in the advertising and printing business may profitably devote their energies in determining the best methods to follow in order to derive the largest and most effective results from the appropriations for catalogs and booklets.

These few pages have been written with the hope that they may be of help to the advertiser, and that the views expressed, drawn from experience, may tend to bring about that closer and more confidential relation between advertiser and printer conducive to the production of catalogs and booklets with more "result-getting" and "business-bringing" qualities.

This little volume is practically a copy of the author's talk before the Technical Publicity Association of New York, at the National Arts Club on January 14, 1909.

The appreciation with which those remarks were met, the inquiries received for copies of

them, and the recommendation that they be published, encouraged their issuance in printed form.

By request of the Advertising Men's Club of New York and of the Technical Publicity Association of New York, copies were printed at that time and distributed to their memberships.

This present edition is a reprint in response to the continuous demand during the past twelve years.

S. G.

New York, January, 1921

Some Notes on Catalog Making

Mr. Toastmaster and Gentlemen:

No doubt some of you may have noticed a recent article in the *Saturday Evening Post*, in which the author said: Why is after-dinner speaking? Some say we got it from the English, and the English from somebody else. Those of you who are familiar with history, however, will bear out the truth of the assertion that it began with the first man. When Eve handed Adam the apple, Adam took a few bites of it, and then getting up on his hind legs, put his hand on his chest where the bosom of his dress shirt would have been — if he had had a dress shirt — and said: "I must confess that this is a great surprise to me. I did not expect to be called upon this evening, and I am not prepared. I know full well that I can say little that would be of interest to this distinguished company, especially in view of all the eloquence and wit to which we have listened; but, as the serpent was talking, I was reminded of a little story," and so on.

That, in a general way, is how all good public speakers begin, and then they settle down

to their subject, or rather, see how far away they can wander from it. I am not a public speaker, even using that term in its most elastic sense, and will therefore try to stick to the subject in hand.

If you members of this Association were amateurs in the work of catalog making as a part of your advertising campaign, I would feel much less diffident. Realizing that many of you have had more experience than myself, I rather felt that whatever I might say would savor more of platitudes than the imparting of information of much material value. I am enthusiastically interested in catalog making, not merely as a bread-and-butter proposition; and also as I have enjoyed the privilege of meeting with you on several occasions, and heartily believe in the get-together principle of men in a similar calling for the exchange of ideas, I will try to help the cause along a bit with a few rambling but decided impressions, and profit by what I hear from you.

In my library there are probably some hundred or so titles relating to books, printing and advertising, forming the nucleus of what I hope some day will be a comprehensive covering of the field. History of printing, printing as an art, advertising from various viewpoints, building of books, etc., all are there, but with the exception of slight references, relatively nothing on catalogs, so I have not the oppor-

tunity of quoting at length from authorities on the subject.

To begin with, catalog making is practically a business in itself, the actual mechanical execution being second only to the conception and format. Of necessity, I will have to talk more along the mechanical production side, as my experience has been mostly in that direction. The subject is too broad and too varied to be adequately discussed in any great amount of detail in a few minutes on an occasion of this sort, and yet generalities will not really convey any helpful information. The circumstances and conditions surrounding different propositions are so varied that one cannot say thus and so should be the case, or lay down any hard and fast course to follow. The character of the product, the money available for its exploitation, the location and type of person to whom the catalog is to be sent—all have their part in determining the policy.

The more one learns of the subject the more one appreciates the difficulty of starting out with a premise and by logical and consecutive argument to briefly reach a concrete conclusion that will be of any real benefit, and at the same time without citing specific instances.

From the eight to ten billions expended annually in the United States for publicity, and the six hundred millions for printed matter, more than half is for catalogs and booklets.

I believe the appropriations for catalogs and booklets are becoming larger, in proportion, each year than those for the other branches of advertising, and that more attention is being paid along educational lines.

To my mind, and I think to that of both the experienced user and producer, the simplest is usually the most effective. The worst catalogs in this country to-day, as I have seen somewhere stated, "are not the trashy product of the cheap printer, but the overdecorated, overprinted, bescribbled and bebordered 'creation' of the half-baked 'artistic printer.'" I have no sympathy for that type of so-called art; neither have I for art for its own sake, in catalog making. Art for your business' sake is what you want in your catalog.

Printing comes in contact with so many phases of life, and it is so impossible for persons of intelligence to put themselves outside its sphere of influence, that it is a vital factor in our education and progress.

Some one has said that printing is ninety-nine per cent utilitarian. The motive is utilitarian and not artistic. Art should be invoked for guidance, and in so far as it will help to express the motif. *Art* and *artistic* are the two most misused words in the advertiser's and printer's vocabulary.

A large amount of money is uselessly spent through the mistaken idea entertained by some

manufacturers and fostered by some printers that a catalog to be successful must outshine in elaborateness of scheme, decoration or expensiveness of material those of their competitors.

Please do not mistake me, I am not advocating the use of cheap materials or severe mechanical scheme; but the most costly materials and ornate treatment cannot make up for the lack of horse sense used in the vital setting forth of a proposition. Brains in the recognition of possibilities and intelligent treatment of materials, and a preconceived view of the effect of something as yet unproduced, more often result profitably, than the use of costly materials and a multitude of colors and elaborate treatment. Too few pay attention to the basic art principles underlying good typography, such as proportion, harmony, balance and tone, and, what is of great importance, of having the printing suggest the motif of the advertising.

Artistic publicity matter is the most effective in returns, but without such returns there is no excuse for its existence, no matter how beautiful or expensive.

Decoration and treatment that tend to increase confidence or create desire should be utilized, but all "gingerbread" is superfluous and detracts from the real efficiency of the book. You are not trying to convince your prospective customer of your ability to issue a magnificent

piece of printed matter, but to favorably affect him as to your product and imbue him with a desire to buy. Your catalog is usually intended to exercise a definite influence as well as to give information; and it should convey progressiveness, and while avoiding ultraconservatism, should carry conviction as to your solidity, integrity and reputation, and be so conceived as to command the attention of and appeal to the particular class of people you wish to impress.

Competent salesmen and advertising managers get more remuneration than operatives, because it is more difficult to sell a thing than to make it.

Advertising is the initial and most important feature of distribution.

A catalog to be successful from a distribution standpoint is one which sells goods, promotes enterprises, and wins prestige, reputation, and good will. It is the dual function of such printing to hold your present customers and hasten belated ones. The truly effective catalog is one in which the superficial physical features are harmonious and blend pleasingly to the eye of the class of person one desires to impress. Its character should create in the mind of the recipient confidence in the sender and his product, crystallize partly formed plans, create new wants, and compel favorable action, and quickly. It should be essentially adapted to its purpose to be commercially profitable to its issuer; and it is successful, from an advertising standpoint, if it accom-

plishes its purpose, even if it is not an ultra de luxe "thing of beauty and joy forever."

Many really good catalogs are wasted either through being sent to unintelligently prepared lists of those who are not possible purchasers, or, in these days of large concerns, through not reaching the particular individual desired; and others fail of their mission through not being distributed in the manner and season or time of day calculated to be the most acceptable.

Here let me mention a case I know of. We decided that the type of man we wanted to reach on a certain proposition was most susceptible if the mail brought our literature so that he found it on his desk upon his return from lunch, when with a cigar between his teeth he was at peace with things generally. He then had the morning mail out of the way, and had a little leisure to look into our matter before taking up the routine afternoon work. And our list being all local, with a little trial we soon found how to have our stuff arrive at the proper time. A year's record showed forty-two per cent responses. It is a watching of these details that gives the largest proportion of returns.

While it is impossible in a discussion of this sort to talk specifically of details, and the subject has to be treated more or less in the abstract, I will try to bring out in a way the features that naturally should come up for consideration in preparing to issue a catalog and their relation

to each other and to the finished whole. I will have time to do little more than merely enumerate the items, and will have to omit any discussion of the advantages of one form from the other.

All the purposes, items, details, and features should be thought over and mapped out carefully before doing actual work on any one of them, so that the whole will dovetail together harmoniously when assembled in the finished product. And I do not mean merely the mechanical features, but object, purpose, and whole aim. Of course, some details may be advantageously altered during production.

In selecting data for the catalog, besides the body matter, argumentative and descriptive, portraying the goods proper, the features of text to be considered should be the policy of the concern, its business methods, reputation, financial standing, facilities for quality and volume, equipment for speed in production and early delivery, views of plant or offices to convey capacity, prestige, stability; also policy of the amount of text to give relating to any section of the book, and as a whole.

Do not make the mistake of giving the copy to the printer in a most imperfect condition, with the idea of raising Cain with it and whipping it into shape after it has been set up, as so many do, who, lacking imagination, cannot see its effect at all until it is put in cold type, when they

then rephrase. This all costs money to alter, and is an unnecessary expense (and often a bone of contention between advertiser and printer), and can be to a very large extent obviated if reasonable care is used in editing copy beforehand.

The text should be written by one who is not only familiar with the goods, but who is a student of human nature and can so phrase and portray the subject as to appeal to the reader. He must have the faculty of being able to lift himself out of the rut of stereotyped statements from the seller's viewpoint, and put himself in the position of the particular type of buyer he wishes to impress, to be truly effective. There should be a continuity of thought and sequence of ideas, leading to a logical conclusion.

Eliminate all matter not germane to the subject. Have some one in the sales department write the first draft in his own language and from his knowledge obtained from personal contact with customers. Then take his facts, no matter how crudely expressed, and put them in more presentable shape for publication.

In the matter of illustrations and engravings, select the goods to be illustrated, bearing in mind who is to be impressed; determine the most effective views, sectional, entire, perspective, exterior or phantom. Decide the most practicable treatment to remove objectionable features and make pleasing to the eye. The

style of engraving must vary according to the subject, depending on the size of the edition, whether to be electrotyped, kind of paper, and amount of wear to be given the cuts. The photographer should be one who knows how to take pictures designed for commercial reproduction, and the viewpoint selected carefully to avoid distortion. Solio prints of brown tone are most advantageous to retouching. One hundred and seventy-five screen half tones are more difficult to print, as the mesh is apt to fill, while in one hundred and thirty-three screen more detail is lost in reproduction. One hundred and fifty screen is a good average.

The profusion or scarcity of illustrations, and their general location must be determined, and also their size.

The size and proportions of the book come next (if there can be any precedence of one feature over another, for all should be considered one with another and their planning progress side by side, in thought at least). These are determined by the impression to be created, by the class to whom the books are to be sent, usage they will be given, requirements of the illustrations, or to permit of the grouping of a certain amount of text matter and cuts on the same or adjoining pages. 6 x 9, 7½ x 10⅝, and 9 x 12 inches are the generally accepted new national standard sizes. On small editions consider the standard sizes of paper in the market

of the character necessitated by the work in hand, to permit of economy through the advantageous cutting without waste. On the larger runs, this need not be considered, as the paper can be secured to order in almost any size.

Have the number of pages conform to even forms, usually sixteen to a form. Smaller forms are more expensive to run in proportion than sixteens; generally speaking, an eight-page form averaging about seventy per cent of a sixteen.

As to typography, thought should be given to face, style, spacing, measure, and margins for the body matter; also for the display matter. Always bear in mind not to please one's own personal tastes, but those of the one to whom the book is to be sent.

Simple, dignified composition is always the most effective. Avoid the tendency to over-display and to emphasize unduly. Do not, in an effort for originality or eccentricity, use a variety of styles of type in the same book, after the fashion of the old-time butchers' billhead, but adhere to a single face and use it in series, which will give harmony and balance. Have uniformity in leading. Give good proportions of white space. About fifty per cent for marginal surface is good. Eight or ten point type (ten, as a rule) is best adapted for body matter, except in the larger size pages, when eleven or twelve point may be used to better effect.

Many utilize marginal headings, but I have

never seen the catalog where equal emphasis could not have been given in other ways; and marginal headings certainly look badly.

Here it should be determined whether the job is to be electrotyped or not (and this often depends, too, on the size of the edition), for, if for electrotyping, the spaces and quads should be set high; while for letterpress, low; and in either case costs money to alter from one to the other after once in type. Better results in electrotyping half tones can be obtained if blocked on metal instead of wood. Nickeltypes, costing about double that of electrotypes, are often desirable on long runs, or finely vignettted half tones, or where some inks are used which eat into the electros, destroying them for good work. As a rule, it is advisable to have engravings and electros backed up with metal for patent blocks.

In selecting paper, consider the character of your illustrations and type and the handling the book will receive, also the durability, tone, finish, texture, strength, weight, etc., of the paper. Fine half tones, of course, necessitate highly coated papers. Second-grade coated papers give a flat effect, contrasts are lacking in the illustrations, owing to the fact that the solids look grayish and the high lights dirty, instead of rich blacks and sharply contrasting high lights on the better grades. For type only, the nicest results are obtainable on antique or rough-finished papers, which are easier to the eye, and give an

effect impossible with coated paper. Always avoid newly made paper, as it is liable to stretch or shrink, according as climatic conditions change. This is especially true where very close register is required in color work.

Use stock of such proportions that when folded to the size of your catalog the grain will run the same way as the backbone, to prevent cracking, assure better folding, avoid buckling when bound, and lay flat when closed.

If your paper is antique laid, you should have the wire marks run across the page and the chain lines run up and down, as the latter always run parallel with the grain.

The finished effect of a piece of printing depends on the presswork. One cannot convey quality of workmanship in a set of specifications, so there is a wide variety in this item, which will run from a job that is printed almost flat to one where it is planned to so cut overlays and so perfect the make-ready as to get out of the cuts all there is in them.

It requires a nice judgment in the determination of what colors or shades of ink to use, the selection often making or marring a book otherwise well done. Some inks which give beautiful results under some conditions produce most unsatisfactory effects with merely a change of paper or subject of a cut. For example, a double-tone sepia ink gives beautiful results on an India-toned coated stock with a half tone of exterior

foliage, etc., while if used with a portrait on white paper the result is most disappointing.

The decorative features should be carefully thought over, the symbolical drawings that bear on the subject in hand, the conventional ornaments, tint schemes, borders, embellishments of one sort or another, and the thousand and one things that might be used to advantage, always bearing in mind that they should only be used to help the main thought. Don't let elaborateness of frame detract from the picture itself.

The designing of the cover and the binding naturally have to be considered jointly. Select paper, cloth, or leather, in the one of the various styles of each class that is best adapted for the purpose, according to usage, thickness, size, desire for impressive cover, color scheme, finish, weight, wearing qualities, adaptability for printing in inks or stamping in gold or embossing. There is the widest variety in each, of paper, cloth, or leather styles, as to materials and construction.

The cover scheme should be most carefully thought out, for the reason that first impressions, whether good or bad, are lasting: the keynote, treatment, color effects, lettering, illustrative or decorative features. More attention should be given to the utilization of the color of cover stock as a factor in color scheme. I am a strong believer in covers and decorative features that are symbolic or suggestive, and, as a general rule, without

being illustrative; rather more impressionistic than realistic. Purely decorative design has been overdone. A cover design should tell something and have an application to the article or advertiser. Embossing often adds strength to a cover. Where an embossing die is made, have scoring lines cut in to save separate operation for scoring.

Then, too, the question of plain or decorative linings and end leaves, and simple or pattern wraps should be thought of. Fly leaves, harmonizing in material, design, and color, and specially decorated, help in many cases to put a finishing touch to a book.

Sometimes certain kinds of work cannot be so well or advantageously bound in some sizes as others, which has a bearing, too. How the books are to be distributed and the total weight has a material bearing oftentimes on the plans for a catalog; as also does the longer time required for producing one style of book than another.

One more feature. Without undue haste, to the detriment of the workmanship, get out your catalog quickly once you decide to issue it. Proceed steadily till it is finished, for as long as it is in a state of incompleteness you will find constant demands for alteration and modification, indefinitely postponing its issuance.

There are doubtless several points I have overlooked that have occurred to you, but I have mentioned sufficient to show the bearing each has on the other and the necessity of taking all

into consideration before proceeding to actual mechanical production.

Briefly, with your initial factors to work with, the form and details of your catalog should be determined by your ultimate object, and not by mechanical features.

Careful consideration of the above features when preparing a catalog will not only mean a more effective finished product, but save unnecessary expense and insure more speedy completion. Oftentimes intuition, born of experience, helps in the decision as to what is advisable when one cannot do so by reasoning. The man who has intellect will reach a conclusion, and cannot help it; but he can no more tell why he decided than Wordsworth could tell how he wrote one of his sonnets.

I was once asked an equally inane question by a man who said: "Mr. Graydon, tell me briefly just how you go about trying to sell a man printing, what do you say to him," etc. That is a question one could not answer in a single breath.

The layman recipient of a catalog does not realize or care whether it is the paper, workmanship, design, illustration, phraseology, or what not that impresses him. All he knows is that the general effect pleases. The advertising manager and the printer must use their knowledge of why, how, and what to bring together as a finished whole to give the desired effect.

The superficial features of a truly successful catalog never convey its effectiveness, for they should be so blended that none stand out distinct from the theme, to the reader's attention, but each is lost in the one harmonious symmetrical whole. The finished book should not bear the earmarks of the work necessary to its production.

The text-thought should not be detracted from by the physical appearance of the printed page. Some one has said that "a book should be so perfect a vehicle for the entry of an author's motive into the reader's mind as to obliterate itself, as it were, and leave with the reader no sense of the book but a clear impression of its motive."

The average catalog does not measure up to the full standard of efficiency in accomplishing the purpose for which it was designed. The buyer as well as the seller is to blame for it. The buyer plans to buy by the yard or by the karat that which is to be a selling force, as he would buy an article of merchandise which had been previously manufactured and has a fixed market price, and fails to realize that the quality of real value in advertising-printing is something which cannot be written in a contract. He should deal with a printer in whom he has confidence as to integrity, ability, and facilities.

True cost is not denoted by the figures of an estimate, but also includes the purchaser's time, and he should get together with the printer whose

experience and qualifications fit him to require the least of his time.

Allow such a printer to use his own judgment regarding many matters. Not that the printer should even try to tell the advertising manager what he wants or what to do, but that the advertising manager can be helped in determining what he really does want and what is best by the advice and suggestions of the printer. If he has had experience and knows his business, he knows more about the mechanical side of catalog production than the advertising manager can naturally be expected to know, whose thought and energy is divided over the larger field—the supervision of all branches of his advertising campaign.

The bearing and effect that the relations between advertiser and printer and the consideration of all details in advance have in the determination of the effective production they jointly conspire to accomplish is evident even to the student of psychology in a small way; not in any dreaming or ethereal sense, but in an intensely practical manner.

To conclude, I have learned from experience that the most satisfactory and effective catalogs are produced where an advertiser and a printer, having mutual confidence, get together in the truest sense of the word to jointly produce the piece of advertising-printing which we call a catalog.

And if there is one thought more than another that I would like to leave with you, conducive to best results, it is to cultivate the intelligent printer, for there is, today, a far more intelligent and competent type of man in the printing business than a few years ago; take him into your confidence, forget the proverbial relations of buyer and seller, and you will find that the sincere cooperation of such a man, who enjoys and is enthusiastic about his work, and does not use it merely as a means of livelihood, will result in money in your pocket and in such a successful business-getting catalog that you can say, in the words of some one—I don't remember who:

“I doubt your painful Pedants who
Can read a Dictionary through,
But he must be a dismal dog
Who can't enjoy this catalog.”

*Gentlemen, I thank you for your consideration
and kind attention.*

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