

PROFILE

AD PIONEER RECOGNIZED TV'S PROMISE

AGENCY FOUNDER YOUNG TOUTED MEDIUM IN 1948

By the time TV started to take off in late 1947, John Orr Young, the co-founder of ad giant Young & Rubicam, had left Y&R and was working in public relations. In his book, "Adventures in Advertising," written in 1948, he addressed the subject of the new medium:

"Television is coming so fast that it is now the item of bright promise. However, judging from the programs I have seen so far, television is still in the promise stage. Except for sports, it seem to me that, though we have wrought a miracle in bringing this new theater into being, we still lack a show."

Addressing what had happened in radio, he wrote, "Twenty-five years ago it was the advertising agencies that led the way in bringing the show world to the world of commerce. The ad agencies dreamed up most of the ideas, got the acts, supervised the production, made the thing roll."

However, Young wrote he was disappointed in the results and decided ad people "are either tired old men or young ones lacking inspiration."

What TV needs to take off, he said, is "real advertising genius." First, genius to convince marketers that TV is worth the investment it will take to be successful. "Inspiration is needed, in the second place, to develop an art worthy of this marvelous

new medium, which is here to stay and to affect our lives."

Mr. Young concluded with a warning: "Television is an intimate thing. You watch with 100% attention—or with none. It is the center of the home. We cannot expect the public to be satisfied with cleaned-up nightclub shows; threadbare movies, and interminable amateur shows forever. Nor can television be morally negative. The responsibility resting upon telecasters and sponsors is at least eight times greater than it was when only radio was involved. For television, as the tests show, has an impact on the listener about eight times greater than ordinary radio."

As Mr. Young was writing this, Y&R, the agency he co-founded in the early 1920s, was the second biggest ad agency and, like No. 1 agency JWT, a huge booster of TV. In 1948 Y&R had six network TV shows on the air.

Although predictions that TV could grow into a \$6 billion industry—three to four times more than radio at the time—seemed outlandish, Mr. Young thought that figure "is, if anything, conservative." On that score he was prescient. Four short years later—in 1952—TV became the No. 1 national advertising medium, according to Advertising Age, and it's never looked back. ● —CHUCK ROSS



John Orr Young

MODEL

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tion to the shows they watched on "this new branch of entertainment," as the magazine characterized it.

The New Yorker was 22 years old, and this was the magazine's biggest article to date about TV. In one of those coincidences that only brings a smile to one's face years later, staring at the reader from the full-page ad opposite the beginning of the article is a huge picture of then-stage star Lucille Ball, pitching Schaefer as "The finest beer I ever tasted," years before she became a TV icon.

The Dubins had had their TV for six years, but they were still enthusiastic about it. Echoing a lament that would forever be associated with TV, however, Mr. Dubin did have one complaint about the new medium: "[W]ith the children it's not so good sometimes. I find they don't get their homework done."

May 7, 1947, was a partially cloudy day in New York; a typical spring high of 62 degrees with a trace of rain. The New Yorker writer Robert Rice joined Mr. Dubin, his wife, Juliette, and another couple who were friends of theirs to watch TV.

What none of them knew at the time is that they were to become witnesses to history. The hourlong program they were going to watch—broadcast live—has been called by some the most significant series in TV's early years—the show that established the medium as a successful vehicle to sell products and services.

Here is Mr. Rice's description of what they watched that night:

"[W]e tuned in WNBT, which was having a gala. 'The Kraft Television Theatre,' presenting 'The Double Door,' was to be seen for the first time on a cathode-ray tube in this or any other hemisphere. 'The Double Door,' in the likely event you've never heard of it, is a 15-year-old horror piece about a lady named Victoria who disappears so strongly of her brother's marriage that she locks his bride in an airtight vault. In the third act the bride is rescued, and Victoria goes off her rocker. The play lasted an hour and after it was over and the commercial had begun, Mrs. Dubin said she thought that, during a play whose action

covered several months, the actress should have changed her clothes at least once. Being a groceryman, Dubin may be presumed to be a merchandising expert and he thought that Kraft proclaiming in its commercial that McLaren's Imperial Cheese is 'not plentiful and not low in price' was a dubious inducement to purchase it."

Au contraire, Mr. Dubin. He may have been an excellent grocer, but he was not the most astute of admen.

This was written about the show just nine weeks later: "'The Kraft Television Theatre' is showing a definite impact on sales," according to the June 30, 1947,

issue of JWT News, the in-house newsletter of the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency in New York City.

"McLaren's Imperial Cheese, not advertised in any other medium except 'Kraft Television Theatre,' is enjoying a gratifying demand," JWT News said.

"Television viewers who are unable to purchase McLaren's Imperial Cheese at their local stores have called Kraft Foods Company in N.Y. to find out

where they can obtain the cheese. The audience, seeing melted, golden rich cheese pouring from a chafing dish over freshly made toast, can almost taste it, according to reports."

JWT was interested in the show and its commercials because the agency was responsible for producing both. Programming during the early days of TV was based on the business model that had made radio such a success: The advertising agencies produced the radio shows on the radio networks for their clients as vehicles to encourage consumers to buy their clients' products. The biggest, most successful agencies doing this were Young & Rubicam and JWT.

For example, one of the most popular radio shows ever was the "Chase & Sanborn Hour." Owned by a major client of JWT, Standard Brands, Chase & Sanborn was a fashionable coffee throughout the 1930s and 1940s. The show hit its peak when it featured ventriloquist Edgar Bergen and his dummy, Charlie McCarthy—in fact, the program eventually was renamed "The Edgar Bergen-Charlie McCarthy Show."

To those raised in the visual eras of TV and the Internet, the appeal of a ventriloquist on radio may be puzzling, but the



Young & Rubicam ad from 1957 referred to TV viewers tuning in by the millions.

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What if we were partners
at the moment
of inspiration...