



J. Walter Thompson

AD AGENCY CREATED ART

THOMPSON PIONEERED QUALITY PROGRAMMING

In an article published March 7, 1955, Jack Gould, *The New York Times*' first TV critic, wrote, "The notion that an advertising agency must be a corporate dolt in television theatrical matters is not standing up too well in one quarter. The J. Walter Thompson Co., one of the largest agencies, is quietly walking off with some major honors for distinguished TV drama. It's time the Thompson boys received their due."

Most viewers, Mr. Gould noted, probably didn't even know JWT existed.

"But, as it happens, the Thompson staff is playing a direct and most stimulating role in the artistic and creative realm of TV, a role that, in the long run, could be as important as anything to happen in video this season."

He went on to praise two live TV dramas: "Patterns," Rod Serling's now-classic story that had debuted two months earlier on "Kraft Television Theatre," and a production of Eugene O'Neill's "Anna Christie" that had appeared the week before on "Pond's Theater." The shows were produced by JWT for its respective clients, the Kraft Food Co. and Pond's facial and hand creams.

Mr. Gould praised JWT for "showing heartening respect for the importance of the play as such."

"The agency is experimenting; it is trying new things in many directions. Within the framework of commercial television it seems to have found a place for the vital ingredients of creative excitement, which in the long run should prove as sound advertising as sound theater.

"Unless memory fails, an advertising agency as such never has won a Peabody Award for programming contribution. There may not even be provision for such a prize, in itself a significant and undesirable omission if agencies are to have incentive to lift their artistic sights. If the J. Walter Thompson Co. continues its present constructive course in TV theater, some sort of citation will be clearly merited."

JWT—and Kraft—did indeed continue their dedication to quality TV drama. Kraft announced it would award \$50,000 to the writer of what was judged to be the best original play on the "Kraft Television Theatre" during the 1955-56 season. ●

—BY CHUCK ROSS

MODEL

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almost immediately." Despite New York's relatively few TV sets, and "although there was no other advertising support for it whatsoever, still grocery stores could not keep up with the demand."

Kraft was not the first marketer to use advertising on TV, nor was NBC the only network to encourage marketers, nor were JWT clients the only ones trying the new medium.

For example, four years earlier, in March 1943, WABD, a station run by the Allen B. DuMont Laboratories, offered TV time to agencies and their clients, according to *Printer's Ink* magazine. The first agency that responded was Ruthrauff & Ryan (a major agency at the time that was eventually acquired by Interpublic) and its client Lever Brothers. For more than a year they presented a half-hour variety program titled, descriptively enough, "Wednesdays at Nine Is Lever Brothers Time."

Here is the description from the Feb. 9 *Printer's Ink* about an ad on the show:

"[A] Lifebuoy [soap] commercial pictured a pretty girl sitting beside a telephone. Upon its ring, she picks up the receiver and, from the ensuing conversation, the audience learns that her engagement for the evening is canceled. Annoyance and regret are mirrored in her face. Then, in one corner of the picture, appears a miniature figure of the girl herself. The tiny figure, the girl's Conscience, endeavors to show the young lady the error of her ways.

"What's stopping you from having B.O.?" queries Conscience. "How about trying Lifebuoy? You know all those millions of people can't be wrong!" The girl deliberates for a few moments. The scene changes to show her singing merrily in the bath tub, enthusiastically clutching a bar of Lifebuoy."

Remember, commercials were live back then. This very early special effect was accomplished by using identical twin actresses. While one camera focused on a tight shot of the actress answering the phone, another camera took a long-shot of her identical twin sister "Conscience," and that image was superimposed on the first.

As marketers were trying to figure out what kinds of commercials would work, just about everything was tried, including a few tricks that were rather deceptive.

"The televised commercial of a dog-food company was in the nature of a scientific experiment," explained an article

about TV commercials in the Aug. 18, 1947, issue of the *New Republic*. "The test began when two bowls, one marked with the sponsor's dog food, the other label a competitor's, were placed on the television stage. As the directors sat tense in the control room, a dog galloped into the picture. Springing at the competitor's bowl, it suddenly stopped in consternation, sniffed, shuddered and ran for the sponsor's entrée, which it promptly consumed with a hearty appetite. Dog lovers viewing this scene on their television sets were thoroughly impressed. 'It went over beautifully,' remarked a producer. 'We filled the competitor's bowl with ammonia.'"

Beyond their instant success, what made the commercials on "Kraft Television Theatre" so impressive was their simplicity.

The principle of each spot, according to a JWT memo, "was based on never showing anything except what you are talking about, concentrating on the food itself, using table-top photography, no



One of the first trade ads for TV to run in Ad Age, this NBC promo was published in November 1948.

people and a voice-over."

Indeed, all that was shown on most of the commercials were a pair of women's hands preparing certain recipes. Viewers didn't have to write down the recipes—as Kraft had done on radio, it instructed the audience to write in for the recipes.

The immediate commercial success of "Kraft Television Theatre" was a watershed moment. It established TV as a commercial medium.

Kraft never varied the simplicity of how its commercials communicated with viewers. "Kraft Television Theatre" ran for 11 years and four months. Unusual even at the time, the series never went on summer hiatus. The only times a show wasn't produced was during the political conventions every four years. By the time the last cheese slice was diced, 650 dramas had been presented.

As the series continued, the dramas became better and better. More and more, young writers were employed to write original teleplays, and "Kraft Television Theatre," produced by an ad agency, helped usher in the Golden Age of live television drama. ●



Imagine the ways
we could integrate
your story into ours.

or create content
made just for you...