

JACK PAAR'S BUFFERIN EXPLOSION

DISASTER GAVE SPONSOR SOME ADDED PUBLICITY

When live TV commercials were a mainstay on TV, anything could happen—and it often did.

One of the more fun disasters occurred on “Tonight” in the summer of 1958. Jack Paar hosted the show then; in fact, it was known as “The Jack Paar Show.”

In his opening monologue, Mr. Paar said he had a headache. “I think I should take an aspirin,” he said, according to *Sponsor* magazine’s July 12, 1958, issue.

However, longtime fans of the show knew one of its sponsors was Bristol-Myers’ Bufferin; its main ingredient is aspirin, but it has other ingredients as well.

Realizing what he had said, Mr. Paar immediately picked up a bottle of Bufferin off his desk and continued, “Now, now, that was just a slip. I take Bufferin all the time and I’m going to take one right now to show you.”

Paar opened the bottle, *Sponsor* reported, “and couldn’t get by the cotton wadding. For what seemed like several minutes he struggled with the cotton. Then trying to devise a blackout for what had become a hilariously funny, though embar-

assing, situation, he finally said, “Oh well,” and picked up a glass of water, poured some into the Bufferin bottle, lifted it in a brave salute, said ‘Skoal’ and pretended to drink to the audience’s health.”

He then put the cap back on the bottle and started talking to his guest, Broadway director Abe Burrows. About 20 minutes later there was a “sharp explosion,” the magazine said. “The Bufferin bottle cap hit the ceiling, and soggy, white blobs of melted Bufferin splattered in all directions. Jack’s suit and Abe Burrows’ suit were suddenly transformed from neat, conservative garments to gaudy, polka-dotted apparel.”

The audience went nuts, laughing for several minutes.

Lee Bristol Jr. appeared on the show the following night to give Mr. Paar a giant bottle of Bufferin and chide him for the biggest screw-up in the history of Bristol-Myers’ advertising. Bristol-Myers also sponsored “The Alfred Hitchcock Show,” and Mr. Hitchcock was forever belittling his sponsor, but it was nothing like what had happened on Paar’s show, Mr. Bristol said. (Years later it was learned that Mr. Hitchcock’s sarcastic remarks were actually written by a smart copywriter at Bristol-Myers’ agency, Young & Rubicam.)

The ensuing publicity in the nation’s newspapers was deafening, *Sponsor* wrote. “Bristol-Myers received thousands upon thousands of dollars worth of mention of its product.” ●

—CHUCK ROSS



Jack Paar



U.S. Tobacco products are ubiquitous in a scene from “Martin Kane, Private Eye.”

Smoking Gun

BEFORE PRODUCT INTEGRATION HAD A NAME

BY CHUCK ROSS

Most TV viewers today are familiar with the Coca-Cola cups that sit on the judges’ table on “American Idol.” Some say it’s the quintessential example of product placement on TV today.

But the integrated marketing on “Idol” doesn’t hold a candle to what advertisers did in the early days of TV.

TV shows then were produced by advertising agencies for their clients. And no agency did a better job—or at least a more obvious one—of integrating its products into a show than the Kudner Agency did for client United States Tobacco Co. on the largely forgotten series “Martin Kane, Private Eye.” (Kudner long ago was folded into an agency that eventually became today’s Euro RSCG.)

The half-hour detective show was seen live on NBC from 1949 until 1954. The title character borrowed his name from advertising executive Martin Kane, later a writer and editor at *Sports Illustrated*, according to “The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network and Cable TV Shows” by Tim Brooks and Earle Marsh.

Typical of the series was this episode from 1953: The show opened with the silhouette of a man lighting a pipe. Then came the announcer’s voice: “The makers of Old Briar pipe tobacco, Dill’s Best pipe tobacco, Sano cigarettes and Encore cigarettes—members of the complete line of products made by the United States Tobacco Company—present ‘Martin Kane, Private Eye,’ starring Lloyd Nolan.”

The camera cut to a cabin on a yacht, focusing on each of four characters, two of them smoking. Kane’s gritty voice-over said, “It was a congenial little group aboard the Grasshopper. The owner and skipper, millionaire yachtsman Angus Redfield, a lumpy little character who collected black pearls like a schoolboy with a passion for agates. Nan, his niece, who couldn’t be bothered with such baubles, but who was very much bothered by the rugged Mr. Dan Larsen. Her aunt, Cecile Ashley, as lovable as a scorpion. A caustic queen with a bank account that was slowly dying of malnutrition. And her husband, Chester Ashley, whose vocabulary consisted of exactly two phrases: ‘Yes, m’dear,’ and ‘No, m’dear.’ These were the characters I was to meet later, exactly 12 hours after the arrival of [dramatic pause] the letter.”

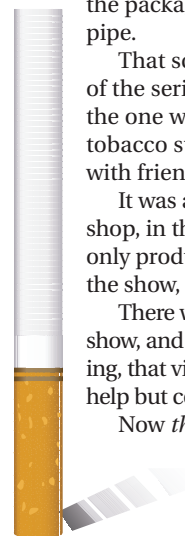
As Kane was about to open the letter in his office, he put it down and took out his pipe and a package of Old Briar pipe tobacco; the camera lovingly lingered on the package as he filled and lit his pipe.

That scene was in every episode of the series’ four-year run, as was the one where Kane went to his local tobacco store to discuss the case with friends and the store manager.

It was a very peculiar tobacco shop, in that it carried and promoted only products made by the sponsor of the show, United States Tobacco Co.

There was so much smoking in this show, and so many references to smoking, that viewers today almost cannot help but cough just watching it.

Now *that’s* product integration. ●





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