

## WORD PROCESSOR: HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE COLLECTION

Advertising Procedure, Fourth Edition  
Jim Hanas

In the February 1951 issue of *Harper's* magazine, Otto Kleppner wrote an article called "Is There Too Much Advertising?"—a question raised as much, if not more, in the sixty years before the article's appearance as it has been in the sixty years since. For much of that time, from 1925 to 1979, Mr. Kleppner was engaged in answering this question as the founder and editor of seven editions of *Advertising Procedure*, this basic textbook of the marketing arts. (Now in its 18th edition, the 86-year-old franchise still bears its founder's name as *Kleppner's Advertising Procedure*.)

Born in Vienna in 1899, Otto Kleppner graduated from NYU in 1920 and eventually became the advertising manager at Prentice Hall, which publishes *Advertising Procedure* to this day. The first edition appeared in 1925, very early in the codification of advertising as a mature industry. The American Association of Advertising Agencies, the so-called 4A's, wasn't founded until 1917, for example, while the trade magazine *Advertising Age* didn't launch until 1930.

So, *Advertising Procedure*, as one might expect, seeks to set advertising on a firm, no nonsense footing from the start. Kleppner's intellectual bent is well-suited to the job.

In 1950's Fourth Edition, we learn that "the word *slogan* comes from the old Gaelic, *sluagh gairm*—*sluagh* meaning army and *gairn* meaning a call or cry," and that—to keep the martial theme going—the use of slogans dates to Cato's repeated pronouncement, "*Delenda est Carthago*—*Carthage must be destroyed*, words that led to the Third Punic War and to the end of Carthage." (Is it any wonder advertising efforts are called "campaigns"?) We also learn that "trade-marks have a lively and ancient history that affects their usage today" as "the ruins of a prehistoric settlement near Corinth have yielded saucers and bowls at least four thousand years old that bear potters' marks."

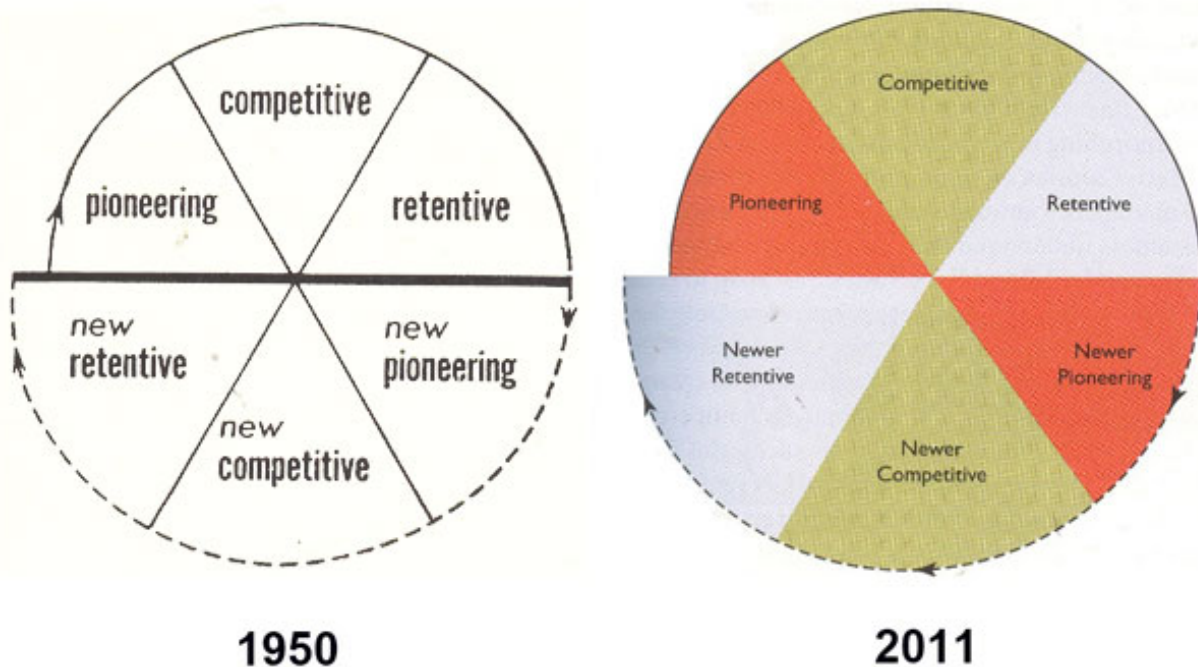
Whether or not advertising is, in fact, an ancient art, the modern American psyche has a divided relationship to the adman that mirrors the relationship the ad industry has to itself. On the one hand, the adman is projected—like Don Draper—as a mysterious Svengali who both manipulates and excuses our desires. This image is as old as advertising itself, but was perhaps most famously presented in Vance Packard's 1957 *The Hidden Persuaders*. This image serves to explain our consumerism to ourselves, while generating periodic outrage over the otherworldly powers of the adman.

Such outrage, meanwhile, is defused by the image of the adman as bumbling fool, exemplified by Darrin Stevens in *Bewitched* (1964) and all of J. Pierrepont Finch's hapless predecessors in *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying* (1957).

Meanwhile, within the industry, advertising—like most social sciences—oscillates between seeing itself as an art and a science, since it contains elements (and excesses) of both. Kleppner, as the title *Advertising Procedure* suggests, wants to establish advertising as a science—this before the so-called "Creative Revolution" of the late '50s and early '60s, which moved the pendulum in the direction of art and conjured a fitting setting for *Mad Men*.

Kleppner's "system," however, neatly serves to explain why advertising is alternately considered to be manipulative enough to be nefarious yet so useless as to be expendable. The answer lies in Kleppner's "advertising spiral."

## THE ADVERTISING SPIRAL



The spiral is so central to Kleppner's text that it serves as a colophon at the conclusion of the Fourth Edition and survives all the way to the current 18th Edition. The spiral divides a product's advertising into three stages—the pioneering stage, the competitive stage, and the retentive stage. In the pioneering stage, advertising seeks to educate the public about a

product they are not currently using. From a critic's perspective, this is the manipulative stage, the Don Draper stage, when advertising secretly molds our minds and our mores.

In the competitive stage, people are already using the product, but there are many brands to choose from, all of which are advertising to increase their overall market share. From a critic's perspective, this stage is merely wasteful, since all this outlay only serves to move the same amount of market activity from one player to another, not to increase the overall amount of activity. And so, too, with the retentive stage, where brands seek to remain omnipresent in order to maintain present levels of consumption.

In both *Advertising Procedure* and the *Harper's* article, which appeared within a year of the Fourth Edition, Kleppner addresses these and other criticisms. The mere existence of the *Harper's* article, incidentally, positions the Fourth Edition at a moment when the free reign of advertising over society was not yet presupposed and total. To be answering serious proposals to curb advertising—offered by senators and cabinet members—in a national, general interest magazine seems impossible today. But it was still possible in 1951 and Kleppner's responses to the above criticisms are interesting and (interestingly) contradictory.

On the one hand, in answering the claim that pioneering advertising is manipulative, he offers both a *de jure* and *de facto* justification for its use. In the first case, he relies on free speech, arguing (in a Romneysque formulation) that "freedom of speech is no less precious when a man talks about his product than about his politics" and later that "the total amount of advertising which is socially desirable is limited only by man's enthusiasm and sagacity in supplying better satisfaction with products to more people."

Advertising is American, in other words. As a backup Kleppner argues, "advertising is not the solar center of the system around which all business revolves, as the movies and critics picture it." Far from being devilishly manipulative, he seems to be saying, it isn't even that important.

He paints a completely different picture, however, when answering critics who claim that competitive advertising doesn't increase overall consumption. In fact, he enthusiastically presents evidence (from what now appear to be unfortunate quarters) that advertising has caused "more than a sevenfold increase in the less than three decades in the total number of cigarettes sold" and that "twice as much gasoline was used in 1947 as in 1927."

Today, of course, these statistics appear not as defenses, but as more criticisms, and Kleppner's advertising spiral appears to be the very dynamo of capitalism—demanding ever-greater levels of consumption until such levels are no longer sustainable. Borrowing Žižek's idea that the London riots were the result of consumers who could no longer

answer the bell of consumerism, we might see the riots and the Occupy Wall Street movement as the rebellion of consumers against the call of Kleppner's relentless spiral.

Something interesting happens on the way the 18th Edition, however. Just as the Fourth Edition comes from the point of view of an industry whose dominion is not yet complete, it comes from an economically conservative point of view. It argues from laissez-faire principles—and against regulators—that advertising makes sound economic sense.

The 18th Edition, however, explicitly positions advertising since 1965 as being in the "Era of Social Responsibility." In a way that will surprise no one (least of all Thomas Frank, who laid out this turn toward "hip consumerism" in 1998's *The Conquest of Cool*) the 18th Edition goes so far as to portray advertising as a capitalist apostate, breaking away from classical economics in order to provide for the social good. "In the opinion of some economists, the notion of the corporation as a social organization runs counter to its primary goal as a profit-making institution," its authors explain. But advertising goes its own way, they seem to say, doing good despite urgings to do otherwise.

*thirtysomething's* Steadman and Weston join Stevens and Draper in advertising's contradictory multitudes, while Kleppner's spiral turns, unchanged, until (one supposes or worries) Carthage has been destroyed—or at the very least occupied.

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