

THE MERCHANTS' COLUMN

Edited by
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In this column, which appears every Monday, Wednesday and Saturday, will appear news and short articles of special interest to merchants, their salespeople and business men and women in general. All phases of store management—buying, accounting, advertising and retail salesmanship—will be dealt with, not theoretically, but by descriptions of methods actually in use by successful merchants.

One Girl's Voice Worth \$50,000 a Year

What is a "telephone voice" worth? There is one which is worth \$50,000 a year in sales to Bonwit, Teller & Co.'s Philadelphia store, and several which range up to this in value. They all belong to women, and their names are shrouded in secrecy.

Exactly what is a "telephone voice?" P. J. Walsh, manager of the store, explains it this way: "Physically it is a voice which sounds pleasant and distinct on the phone. It is a voice which carries a smile with it over the wire. Very few good speaking voices measure up to the standard of the telephone voice. They may be softly modulated, distinct, appealing, sympathetic and everything a voice should be, but some little trick of the wire robs them of their individuality, and they become commonplace. A very small percentage retain these characteristics.

"On the other hand, a voice which does not seem at all out of the ordinary, when the speaker is facing one, takes on the desired qualities when heard over the wire.

"But the valuable telephone voice means more than all this. It means a high degree of selling ability on the part of the owner, who can rely only on her voice, who can bring to bear no charm of manner, no attractive appearance. It means a quick brain, and an intuitive ear, which must make up for the lack of observation of the customer's mood and mood. It means tact in the highest degree, for the customer may be in a buying frame of mind when she picks up the receiver. It means appreciation and memory of the individual customer's habits and tastes.

How It is Used.

"In putting the \$50,000 voice to work its owner does nothing so crude as running down a general list of prospects. She rarely calls up women who are not already patrons of the store. When she does it is because she has special information which leads her to believe that the sale is pretty certain. It is rather a question of increasing the volume of purchases by those who already are customers of the store.

"For instance, Miss Fifty-thousand reads the society columns of the daily papers, and learns that Mrs. Cadmalader is about to stage a triumph as a gracious hostess, or that

she is on the point of going to Palm Beach as the guest of Mr. and Mrs. Gaston Wexel. Then Miss Fifty-thousand runs through her card index and her memory to put herself in the mood of Mrs. Cadmalader's tastes and preferences in gowns. Then she runs through her exclusive models which have just been received or which are on the way and she makes mental pictures to herself of Mrs. Cadmalader gowned in the few best suited to her complexion and the occasion.

"Then, and not until then, she goes to the telephone. She tells Mrs. Cadmalader who is calling. Here again is an important link in the chain. Mrs. Cadmalader knows who she is. It isn't like a stranger calling up. Miss Fifty-thousand has seen to all that before she ever put Mrs. Cadmalader on her list, upon the occasions of that lady's visits to the store.

"From there on it's just straight good salesmanship, with specific interest in Mrs. Cadmalader's activity of the moment, coupled with friendly courtesy. Miss Fifty-thousand mentions the affair and she mentions the gowns. She describes them as only one woman can to another, and may she not send these four for leisure? There is no obligation to buy at all. The store is only too glad to perform this little courtesy,

even if Mrs. Cadmalader is only curious to see these Parisian models. The store feels repaid just to have her judgment on them.

Really a Buyer for Customer.

Miss Fifty-thousand has succeeded in building up a peculiar and very profitable relationship between herself and the store's good customers. Her attitude is really more that of a purchasing secretary than of a seller. She never indulges in the slightest thing that remotely suggests the forcing of a sale. She's just enthusiastic about giving them the opportunity to buy things which she knows they like."

That is why Bonwit, Teller & Co. do \$50,000 more a year in gowns and dresses than they would without the telephone, plus the telephone voice, plus their records of customers' tastes.

Discovered "Self-Sale" Plan by Accident

Long before the first groceries or cafeteria was started, Lester Turner, a young man operating a shoe store in Brazil, Ind., stumbled across the self-serve idea entirely by accident.

Turner was in business with his uncle. The older man had operated a store in Brazil for a good many years and, being a merchant of the old school, insisted on holding on to stocks which should have been turned into cash at reduced prices.

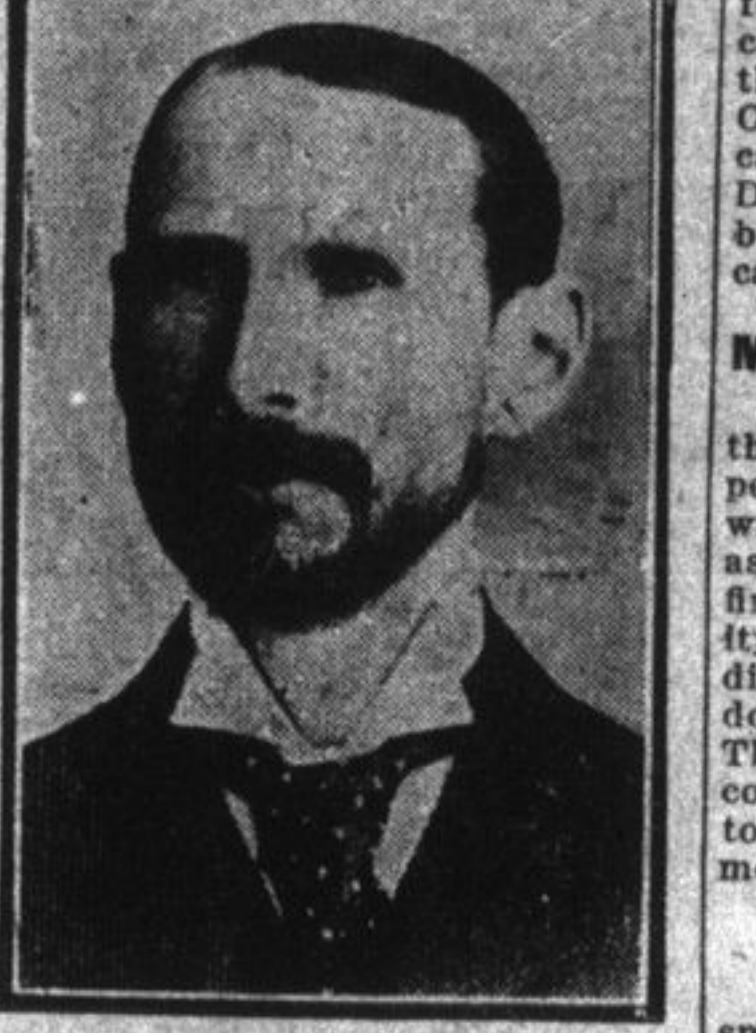
When his uncle retired, Turner took an inventory, piling the older and less attractive shoes in stacks at the back of the store. Then he advertised special sales of these shoes and the Bradlians came in droves. He and his clerks simply could not handle the crowds, so he told a number of the customers to pick out shoes that fit them out of the boxes and barrels as he was entirely too busy to find the right sizes for them.

That night he and his clerks sorted the shoes by sizes and marked the prices on the soles. When the crowd gathered the next morning they were requested, by means of hastily prepared signs, to pick out their own purchases and kindly to return to

their proper boxes any shoes that did not fit. The sale went so well that Turner decided to establish a department at the rear of the store for the handling of job-lots, reserving the front of the establishment for a "regular" shoe store. Later the self-serve department was moved across the alley, where it may be found today—the first of the "eria" stores in the country.

Customers Can Watch the "Mark-Down Man"

Davidson Brothers, in Sioux Falls, N. D., introduced a decided novelty



LATE J. S. BARBER, Member of the Inland Revenue Department, Toronto, for forty years, who died at his summer residence at Oakville, Ont. in reduction sales recently. They advertised, "The Mark Down Man will visit each section of the store, starting at opening hour in the bargain basement, and continuing his trip through the store, visiting each department in turn till the close of the business day."

The "Mark Down Man" proved to be a real live fellow, dressed in the height of fashion, silk hat, frock coat, patent leather shoes and the rest of it, who, blue pencil in hand, visited each section and reduced goods before the very eyes of the crowd, which followed him about, eager to share in the activity.

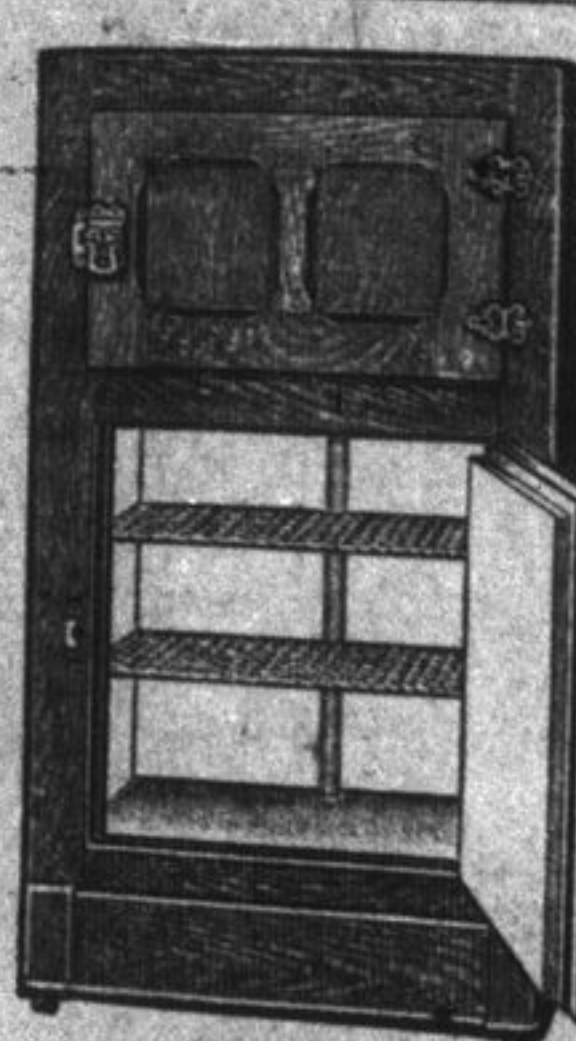
The picture of the Mark Down Man was published in all the papers so shoppers would recognize him. The store reports an increase of 125 per cent in sales the first day of the "Mark Down Man's" work.

Bridging a Trade Gap

A pharmacist in Stillwater, Minn., found one of his most profitable forms of advertising to be plain tally cards one-and-one-half inches by three, punched with a hole in the top. On the back was printed his business card with a catchy phrase or two. During last winter he distributed between 3000 and 4000 for use at card parties.

Makes Authors Help

To introduce his book department, the owner of a New York drug shop performed a rather daring stunt by writing to a dozen popular authors asking how they came to write their first novel. Authors dislike publicity about as much as a small boy dislikes strawberry jam, so out of a dozen he received seven replies. These were mounted on cards and conspicuously placed in his window, together with some unusual arrangement of the six best sellers.



An Ice Box For Year 'Round Service Is a Present Day Necessity

Health statistics absolutely prove that an Ice Box is a household necessity for the good of the family's health all year around. Better take this precaution and safeguard your food before it's too late. Here is a complete assortment of Ice Boxes in all sizes and styles at moderate prices.

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