

THE BUSINESS FORUM

Business Clubs—The "Mixer"—Commercial Art—The "Pull"
Of "Branded" Goods—Winning The Consumer

EXPERT COMMERCIAL HINTS

(By ORGANISER.)

The head of a famous business house once confessed to me that for many years he fought shy of business clubs, considering them a sheer waste of time and a systematic picking of good men's brains by the inefficient and unintelligent. Then he went on to admit that he was eventually won over by reading in a little business house organ published to a rival firm an article that solved for him one of his own most pressing business problems. He decided that if there were men big enough to pass on to their colleagues the fruit of their experience and knowledge he preferred to be on the side of the angels and to contribute, where possible, his own quota to the evolution of business. Undoubtedly the clash and stimulus of minds in the great world of commerce becomes increasingly indispensable as conditions grow more complex and problems are difficult of solution. The big business mind can go on giving out to lesser men; it has always something in reserve and it is always assimilating something new. It realises, moreover, that it can often learn from the lesser men. Unfortunately, it is an undeniable fact that the 'clique' spirit is still too prevalent in many business clubs; but with all their disadvantages and abuses, they can nevertheless be made a provocative intellectual rendezvous where the leaders of business thought can set the pace for those of lesser acumen and shorter business experience. Personally, I have never attended such a club meeting without hearing at least one brilliant speaker who shed considerable light on some one or other of the numerous phases of commercial complexities, and illumined some region of business psychology from the point of view of master or man.

The "Mixer"

There is of course the somewhat futile type known in certain circles as the "mixer." And the confirmed "mixer" is as a rule a peculiarly unproductive person. He 'mixes' so persistently—generally with a crowd of similar gossips and time-wasters—that he leaves himself no time to pursue his own business and to think his own thoughts. This type it is that has brought bad repute to the business club. It is the type that is responsible for the 'clique'—for the indefensible, deliberate scandal-mongering that right-minded business men would at one time have regarded as the privilege of the unfair sex. Curiously enough, there is one extremely successful business club whose rules of membership admit both sexes where there is a most refreshing absence of this deplorable spirit. The influx of capable and often brilliant women into the business world has proved a revelation. The best of them have worn away the old clichés that women are incapable of co-operation; that they cannot see vital issues in the large. For a long time before business women came into their own in this country America had 'tried out' this business collaboration. Heads of enormous undertakings declared their women secretaries invaluable; gave them directorships and a voice in their business councils; had the wit, in short, to gauge their essential capabilities and to employ them accordingly. Business men in this country are rapidly following suit.

Commercial Art

The head of a famous house that deals in children's wear, for instance, realised that a woman artist would almost certainly turn out more attractive 'children' pictures than a man. Commercial art is a splendid field for the women who have had a good art-school training but who realise they never paint an epoch-making picture. Advertising experts are all agreed that an illustrated advertisement has twice the 'pulling' power of letter-press alone. More than one business house with a world-wide reputation owes its success to first-rate commercial art; in a word, to 'picture' advertisements. Quite a number of firms have such an artist on their staff to co-operate with the advertising manager even when they employ 'outside' agents for the planning of a big publicity campaign. Another phase of commercial art that is rapidly coming to the fore is commercial photography. Undoubtedly there are many instances in which a photograph is a superior 'draw.' Naturally, the field is limited by the type of paper used. The idea is mainly practicable in the better-class illustrated weeklies and monthlies printed on good paper; but when the photograph is good and the subject chosen a happy one, it has the immense pulling power. The 'society' pages of fashionable pictorials are an infallible draw; the same idea translated to the world of advertising has been admirably executed,

quite recently, by a famous Regent Street milliner who persuaded a rising young actress to 'pose' in hats. This one illustration will suggest a hundred others to the business man dealing in a commodity that would lend itself to picturesque photography.

'Branded' Goods

The cult of the trademark, or 'branded' goods, has proved by fortunes running into huge figures the wisdom of the old adage—particularly in business—that 'honesty is the best policy.' When a man 'brands' or trademarks his commodities he backs them with his own reputation. He gives them a name—to all intents and purposes he writes his signature upon them. He stands or falls, in a word, by the honesty of his business policy. He knows that unless he puts good value and good workmanship into every article turned out of his factory bearing his 'brands,' his reputation will suffer. For some unaccountable reason there was at one time an extraordinary prejudice against branded goods. Manufacturers who had goods to sell that were *sans peur et sans reproche* fought shy of placing them on the market with a label. They were afraid it 'cheapened' their appeal; would prejudice unfavourably the wealthy buyer. Some of the most successful combatants of this erroneous impression have been the various manufacturers of high-class woollens, for the quality of which this country is world-famous. Buyers of woollens came to the industrial fairs recently held in London from every corner of the globe. And the busiest stalls were those representing two lines of 'branded' woollen goods that from the outset have pursued this policy of backing their 'brand' with their reputation. Another highly successful branded line is a certain hat—a much more difficult proposition, for women are notoriously averse from any form of sartorial standardisation. But the manufacturers determined, when they 'branded' the hat in question, that although they were standardised models they should be irresistible. And they were. Their output has steadily increased both in this country and over a wide foreign and colonial field. As for tinned goods—meats, fruits, etc., the wise housewife demands the branded lines that by their brand carry conviction of excellence.

Winning The Consumer

The linking up of sales effort—advertising and salesmanship, the retailer and the public—comprises today's work and the day's thought of the merchant with goods to sell. And very often the toughest nut to crack is Mr. Retailer. There is on record a striking instance of his obduracy in the case of the manufacturer of a high-class commodity to whom the retailers in a certain town turned a deaf ear. The price was too high, they declared. With such discouragement confronting them, the advertising agents agreed with the manufacturer that it was useless to advertise in the press of that particular locality. Then an enterprising salesman—a young newcomer—had a brilliant idea. He had no false pride; he simply set forth to make house-to-house canvass of the housewives in that town; with the result that his eloquence—backed by his samples—won over so many that the retailers were compelled to supply the demand thus created. It was not long before the advertising agents 'got busy' in the neighbourhood to multiply the fruits of that individual effort. Naturally, advertising, always advertising, is the secret of consumer's goodwill; goodwill that goes on increasing from year to year. And advertising alone is a subject that demands the keenest brains and the richest experience of experts trained to win the consumer by the power of the printed word—and picture.

Undoubtedly the entry into the advertising field of journalists and artists has done much to speed the progress and increase the results of the 'appeal direct' to the buying public. The rigid line of demarcation that at one time existed between the artist and the business man has been broken down. And this very fruitful co-operation has for permanent result the betterment of business: of business methods and business ethics; and, of more importance to the business man with imperial ambitions, of business growth. Here we have one supreme illustration of the power of the ideal business club that under one roof can link the creative minds of every sphere of human thought and give to business—in the new conception of the word—an intellectual impetus and an imperial impulse that will hasten the advent of the new era of industrialism that for years has been the pre-occupation of Parliament as well as of progressive business men.