1961

Art and Industry (1962): Article 03

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Just a bit of imagination, and sales were in the bag

Bags may not be inspiring products but they are useful—and Chase Bag Co. believed its particular brand is exceptional. How was it to show this in its ads? A light, “animated” approach was the answer.

How can an advertiser attract attention to a product whose appeal has been somewhat neglected?

That was the problem the Chase Bag Co. of New York faced—and solved—after it realized that “purchasing agents are, after all, human beings.”

Chase Bag, at 115 years one of the oldest producers of multi-wall paper bags in the United States, long had the problem of getting across its name while advertising a relatively unexciting product, William Mordwin, president of the Hazard Advertising Co., Chase’s agency, New York, said this week.

Chase’s object has been to impress upon packagers of chemical and agricultural products that

- it makes rough, tough bags
- it uses imagination in packaging through printing and graphics

Almost every paper, plastic or textile bag that Chase makes has some form of printing on it: either company name, insignia, or product design. Chase’s printing and engraving facilities, therefore, had to be a major selling point in any advertising approach the company adopted.

Until Chase took its industrial ad account to Hazard at the end of 1959, it had been using high-key, often abstract photography tied in with product advantages. An effort to dramatize the uninspiring paper bag with illustrations of more thought-provoking and eye-stopping subjects had one important drawback: it didn’t show the product.

But the other extreme—technically serious ads—was pushed aside by Hazard. “A reader seeing the ad would only say, ‘Just another bag ad,’ and turn the page without noticing the Chase name,” Mordwin explained.

With two approaches ruled out, Mordwin said, Hazard began toying with a third—an animated approach.

It applied imaginative printing and graphics to the bags in the ads. As a result, the paper bag became more than just a paper bag; it became a living thing. It had a face, arms and hands, and was able to talk.

In a straightforward ad,” said Mordwin, “it would sound ridiculous to say, ‘Our bags are beautiful’ and wavingly flat to say, ‘We make big bags and little bags.’ However, the animated bags created an atmosphere that enabled Chase to say such things about itself without sounding ridiculous.”

One ad had a coy, feminine-looking bag leaning against a masculine-looking bag and saying, “Tell me again that part about ‘You’re beautiful.’” The masculine bag replied in the copy, “You’re beautiful because your colors are so bright,” and went on, “That certain perfection is really a host of little details that Chase never overlooks. For instance, every Chase plant employs an ‘ink man’ just to keep...
constant watch over hundreds of different hues..."

Another ad had a fatherly looking bag being queried by a son-type bag: "Dad, where did I come from?" This permitted Dad to answer: "You came from Chase, son, and a lucky little chemical bag you are! Nobody knows more about bag materials and bag-making than Chase... Doesn't it all make you just glow with pride, son?"

A third ad in the series had a punching bag telling a Chase paper bag, "I'm a bag that gets knocked around a lot in my business," and the Chase bag chiming in, "Me, too. And I don't think I could stand it if Chase didn't know how to pick the paper."

To show the wide variety of sizes of Chase bags, still another ad showed a very large bag telling a very small money bag, "You tote the money... I'll carry the goods. And we'll both do a perfect job, thanks to the Chase Standards Laboratory."

Each bag in the Chase ads carried a graphic design that tied it to its particular use. The "father bag," a Triangle brand chemical bag, had a T drawn in a triangle. The money bag "belonged" to the County Federal Bank. Its big buddy was an Apex Products bag with the name graphically illustrated in a diamond. The punching bag's companion had a C within a circle, for Circle products.

A two-year campaign

The animated bags started appearing in full-page ads in ten business papers in the agricultural and chemical fields—the principal users of Chase bags—early in 1960. They have continued to run in the same publications ever since, and will continue at least until March. Both agency and company feel the campaign is successful. It generated considerable talk among purchasing agents, and sales held up well during the recent business recession, according to B. J. Chase, Chase Bag ad manager.

Referring to comments from his sales staff and clients, Chase said enthusiastically, "We're selling bags now—not just a name."

After next March, Mordwin indicated, Chase probably will change the emphasis in its ads and this change may necessitate a change in approach. But by no means will this change—which is still in the talking stage, Mordwin hastened to add—indicate a weakness in the current campaign. If it comes about, it will be because Chase will want to concentrate its advertising on new products next year, such as polyethylene coated bags, and other innovations just coming out of the company's research laboratories.

One of the delights of staying in New York is staying at The Plaza—with a room facing the park. For apart from getting an eyeful, you get a melodic earful—the clop-clop of the horse-and-buggies as they make their romantic rounds.

Perhaps this native New Yorker will be told (before taking another exile-breath) that the city fathers now frown upon riding through Central Park at night—too many muggings. No matter. For, paraphrasing a famous aphorism: If there were no such thing as romance, we would have to invent it.

The point is: This exquisite color page (no black-and-white halftones can possibly do it justice) is an advertisement for Drambuie. No glass is being raised. No drink is being sipped. Yet, who can look at this romantic scene without a stir in the heart? Without a twinge of nostalgia? Without recalling tender moments? And who can deny that the heart-warming cordial Drambuie fits this mellow mood?

Here is romance—flowering in the magic of a memorable evening. And who cares whether or not it happens today in Central Park? The comforting truth is that it happens somewhere, every day, the world over. Hence the illustration is simply a symbol of sentiment—to which Drambuie pays tribute.

The small patch of text matches the mood the picture evokes: *Evenings that memories are made of—often include Drambuie*.

After dinner, have a dram of Drambuie, the cordial with the Scotch whisky base.

The hard-boiled lads, of course, will tell us that, stripped of all sentiment, this alcoholic adventure simply sells the effect of the effect. But that's just it—you can't strip it of sentiment because sentiment is one of the big words in the book. So much so that the greatest register-ringers are romanticists at top and realists at bottom.

Through its agency (Charles W. Hoyt Co., New York), this after-dinner drink has run many pages depicting the usual drama of gentleman-and-lady hovering over a dram of Drambuie. But when it comes to stirring misty memories, this page tops them all.
Two things bother me about this Dresser Industries ad. One is viewpoint and the other is voltage. The slogan at the bottom of the page reads: "Whatever Your Industry, Let the Dresser Team Serve You." So I assume this ad and others in Dresser's series is aimed at potential users of the company's products in a broad range of industries. And it appears that Dresser wants these users to buy a broad range of products from them—engines, pumps, blowers, fittings, structures, etc.

There's nothing wrong with those objectives. But in trying to achieve them Dresser writes from its own viewpoint as a supplier instead of from the potential user's viewpoint:

"POWER—Another Growing Industry Served by Dresser."

"In the electric power industry—so vital to our lives—Dresser equipment has many applications. Hydroelectric plants receive water for power generation through giant penstocks joined by Dresser couplings. In nuclear or thermal generation of electricity, Pacific pumps supply boilers with large volumes of water at high pressure and high temperature. Motors made by Dresser are found in power stations all over the country. Dresser's scope of single-source buying? Better dovetailing of individual pieces of equipment into an integrated installation? More advanced design because of size, diversity and experience? Or what?

The other problem: For a power-industry ad, the copy has awfully low voltage: "Hydroelectric plants receive water for power generation through giant penstocks joined by Dresser couplings. In nuclear or thermal generation of electricity, Pacific pumps supply boilers with large volumes of water at high pressure and high temperature. It's all so bland ("receive water" . . . "joined by" . . . "supply boilers with water"). And so unspecified: How large are those "large volumes?" How "high" are those pressures and temperatures? Even the photos have no punch.

What this ad needs is more "you" and more "yowhee."

—Fred R. Messner