

LEADERS IN MARKETING

Raymond Rubicam

By **JAMES PLAYSTED WOOD**
The Curtis Publishing Company

IN CHARACTERISTICALLY forthright fashion, Raymond Rubicam is emphatically clear about why he chose the marketing approach to advertising in 1925. Primarily a writer, he adopted marketing as a defense against an accusation which he found both flattering and dangerous to the advertising agency of Young & Rubicam, organized two years before.

Descended from a Pennsylvania-Dutch family, which had originally settled in Germantown in 1725, Raymond Rubicam was the eighth of eight children. His father had inherited a prosperous importing business. When it failed, he went to New York as a trade-paper writer. Through this circumstance, the youngest child was born in Brooklyn in 1892. On the father's death the family was broken up and, at 12, the boy was sent to live in Denver with a brother who was 21 years his senior.

Raymond Rubicam concluded his formal schooling in Denver at 15, after six weeks of high school. While he was working as helper to a shipping clerk, a cousin kept urging him to come to Philadelphia where the family had originated. When he was about 18, Rubicam worked his way east.

He sold colored enlargements of family portraits house-to-house, learning much, he said later, of the average American woman and her household. He tended a carload of cattle from Omaha to Cincinnati, walked to Columbus, hopped a freight for the last stage of his trek to Philadelphia.

Ambitious to write, he began to do free-lance newspaper writing at space rates. Later he became a \$12-a-week reporter. Wanting to marry, and unable to do it on \$12 a week, he shifted to selling

automobiles. This paid better, but commissions were undependable. Someone suggested that he try advertising. Rubicam wrote one sample advertisement for tobacco, and another for a motor truck, and went to the office of F. Wallis Armstrong to apply for a job. He had decided to call on all the advertising agencies in the phone book, from A to Z if necessary, to land a place. Armstrong's name came first in the book, and Armstrong was also agent for the tobacco account.

For nine days Rubicam "warmed a bench,"

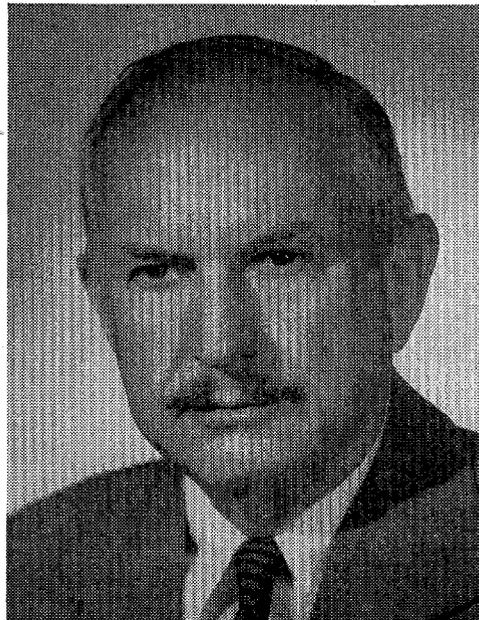
awaiting an interview. Though Armstrong got so used to seeing him that he greeted him by name when he passed, no interview ensued. The determined Rubicam went home and wrote Armstrong a letter which, he says, was "designed to produce an immediate interview or a couple of black eyes for the writer." It got him the interview.

His sample advertisements, Armstrong told him, did not amount to much, but his letter had some "stuff" in it. He hired Rubicam as a copywriter. Rubicam stayed with Armstrong for three and a half years. In 1919 he moved to N. W. Ayer & Son. It was for the Ayer agency that he wrote some of the copy that

made him famous. For the Steinway account he devised "The Instrument of the Immortals"; for Squibb, "The priceless ingredient of every product is the honor and integrity of its maker"; for Rolls-Royce, "No Rolls-Royce has ever worn out."

Founding of Young & Rubicam

Rubicam, 30, and John Orr Young, 37, an Ayer account executive who also had worked earlier for Armstrong, were walking across Independence



RAYMOND RUBICAM

Square one noon when they decided to form their own advertising agency. They scraped together \$5,000 and started. Their first account was for the "Quick Tipper," a kit for making your own shoestrings by pinching a tip of metal on whatever length of lace was desired.

Their first big account was Postum, a product which had previously proved difficult to advertise. Young & Rubicam immediately put marketing research to work to find out what people thought of Postum, what they expected of it, to what appeals they would respond, and how best to express those appeals. The magazine campaign they built from their findings avoided specific mention of coffee, which had been lambasted in previous Postum advertising. The new Y&R campaign employed different kinds of copy for different audiences, whereas earlier copy had been standard for all. Special copy was written for women, for men, for teen-agers, for younger children, for nurses and physicians.

Research showed that most Postum drinkers turned to the product for reasons of nerves, digestion, or sleeplessness, and, of course, these were dramatized in the advertising. But research also revealed a fact which had not been utilized before—that a substantial number of people liked and preferred the Postum flavor for itself, and that the way it was made was a factor in whether or not it was liked. Y&R's advertising featured "Carrie Blanchard's own way" of making Postum (the way it was made by the company's hostess at Battle Creek) and urged a 30-day test, with the first week's supply offered free.

This campaign was so successful in its first year that Young & Rubicam won the Harvard award for a national advertising campaign "most conspicuous for the excellence of its planning and execution."

Immediately Y&R became known as a creative agency. There lay both flattery and danger. Actually Rubicam had used marketing techniques in preparing and executing the Postum campaign, but the advertising world saw only the creative imagination displayed. Some commented that Y&R was a lopsided agency, weak on the marketing side. It was this situation that Raymond Rubicam decided to remedy.

He and John Orr Young hired a recognized marketing man to head a new department to be known as "merchandising," which was to conduct marketing research and perform counseling services both to clients and to the agency. They paid this man more than either of them was drawing at the time. As the agency grew, other "merchandising men" were hired to work under him, and one such specialist was placed on every Y&R account to work with the general account executive. A field staff was assembled to act as eyes and ears for these marketing men.

Copy and Marketing Research

In 1932 Raymond Rubicam took another step of far-reaching significance to marketing. From the beginning, his advertising philosophy had been to get the facts, then to present them imaginatively. His idea was to "try to know more than your competitors do about the market, and put that knowledge into the hands of writers and artists with imagination and broad human sympathies."

To find out more about people and their reactions, Rubicam employed George Gallup, who had been teaching at Northwestern University, to head Y&R research. As his first job, Gallup checked the extent of reading of both editorial and advertising content of the six leading women's magazines. Later he made the same check on general magazines. This revealed many valuable facts about the relative editorial appeal of the different publications and about the importance of position; but its primary usefulness was in determining the relative effectiveness of advertising appeals and techniques.

Gallup's second Y&R assignment was to analyze some 5,000 advertisements—to identify the elements common to the most successful advertisements, and the least successful. To utilize this information to the full, Rubicam conducted night classes to teach Y&R's creative, marketing, and executive personnel the significance and use of the research findings.

Gallup's department at Y&R, inspired and backed by Rubicam, devised research methods which were applied "across the board" in the agency's service—and which influenced the development of later research elsewhere. A national field research force of 400 was put into operation. Soon 10 per cent of Y&R's home-office employees were working in marketing and advertising research. Y&R continued to be a creative agency; but its creativeness was based on the marketing facts drawn from study of their clients' businesses and of the consuming public.

Rubicam not only stressed "ideas founded on facts," but was constantly reiterating to his staff the importance of putting vanity and self-pride aside to "let the best idea win, no matter who has it." "No one," he would add, "can have all the good ideas himself. Having an ear for a good idea is almost as valuable as having the idea."

Y&R began regularly checking its own advertisements in publications and on the air against the advertisements of its competitors. In the broadcasting field, Gallup devised the "coincidental method" of checking the size of audiences, sponsor identification, and the registering of sales points. Later Rubicam himself suggested a procedure for learning what audiences thought of different component parts of radio shows. Listening audiences were assembled with the aid of churches, women's

clubs, etc., and were provided with a means of registering like, dislike, or indifference with respect to the different part of programs.

This was done first with pad, pencil, and check list. Later General Electric produced for Y&R an electrical machine for registering opinions. This was a forerunner of present-day program and commercial testing.

In 1930 Raymond Rubicam extended his marketing interests by the purchase of *Tide* from Time, Inc. He made *Tide* for eight years one of the leading publications of marketing fact and opinion.

By 1937 Rubicam's contributions to his field were sufficiently recognized for him to be awarded the gold medal for distinguished services to advertising. He was the youngest man who had received it.

Since Retirement

In 1944, with the war drawing to an end, Rubicam's thoughts began to turn to retirement. He had long planned, he said then, "to devote some of the good years to work outside advertising and business . . . I have always had at least as much interest in the basic living problems of our time as I have had in advertising and selling."

Young & Rubicam was then the second largest advertising agency in the United States, with annual billings topping \$50 million. Rubicam had served the agency twenty-one years, seventeen of them as head of the company. His job was no longer as creative as it had once been and he did not particularly enjoy being a "big executive." This seemed a good time to try new fields.

Uppermost in his mind, then, was an intention to speak out in writing on public questions that interested him. He wrote and published two magazine articles—one about sensationalism in newspapers; the other about the atomic bomb, which had just been dropped on Japan. In the second article Rubicam took the unpopular position that America should never have dropped the bomb without first offering Japan a harmless demonstration and an opportunity to surrender. His main point was that this repudiation of needless destruction would have established America unforgettably and beyond question as the world's leader for peace and for peaceful uses of the atomic discovery. This position has since found considerable support.

Rubicam confesses now that, after "sweating over these articles," he decided that writing was a lonely life of drudgery, and that years of working with people had spoiled him for it.

In the meantime, an invitation had come to him to join the Research and Policy Committee of the Committee for Economic Development. His first assignment was to lead in the production of a

"policy statement" on how and when to end war-time controls. After two years on the Committee he was made its chairman, serving from 1946 until 1948 when he moved to Arizona. During this period the group he headed produced a plan for European recovery which was considered a major factor in persuading Congress to pass the Marshall Plan. He is now an honorary trustee of CED.

During his early period of retirement, Rubicam was made a trustee of Colgate University, and was awarded honorary degrees by both Colgate and Boston University. He continued to have part-time business interests in New York. He was chairman of *Tide*, a director of the New York Life Insurance Company, and a director of Bride's House, Inc., publishers of *Bride's Magazine*, of which he was a minority owner. He also served as chairman of Audience Research, Inc.

On making Arizona his permanent home in 1948, Rubicam severed Eastern connections, with the exception of Colgate University and *Bride's Magazine*. In Arizona, where he lives in Scottsdale, he is a director of the Valley National Bank of Phoenix, and of the Arizona Bancorporation, an investment company. He was a founder and is part owner of the Tower Plaza shopping center and of the Paradise Valley Water Company. He is also a trustee of the American Institute for Foreign Trade in Phoenix, which trains young men and their wives for business service in Latin America and overseas areas, and he is active in varied Arizona community affairs.

An intense and vital figure, Rubicam writes and talks forcefully on public affairs. One address he made in 1938, "Liberty or License—Which?" was re-published in full in 1960 by *Advertising Age*, as having direct import twenty-two years after its original delivery.

In 1951 W. B. Murphy, then Executive Vice President and now President of Campbell Soup Company, got in touch with Rubicam in Arizona and asked him to undertake a study of Campbell's marketing and advertising situation with respect to personnel, advertising agencies, and policies. Seven weeks of study went into a 20,000-word report. This was to be a strictly temporary engagement; but Rubicam has been serving as a Campbell marketing and advertising consultant ever since, going to Camden three times a year—twice en route between Scottsdale and his summer home in Boothbay Harbor, Maine—to participate in the planning of marketing strategy, the execution of plans, and the mid-year checking of results influencing new plans for the next fiscal year.

Marketing, which Raymond Rubicam claims only to have undertaken as a defensive maneuver in 1925, is still a central part of his active and varied career.

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