

Place an Advertisement

learn how to advertise in the 18th century

"I look upon them as pieces of domestic intelligence, much more interesting than those paragraphs which our daily historians generally give us, under the title of home news...the advertisements are filled with matters of great importance, both to the great, vulgar, and the small."

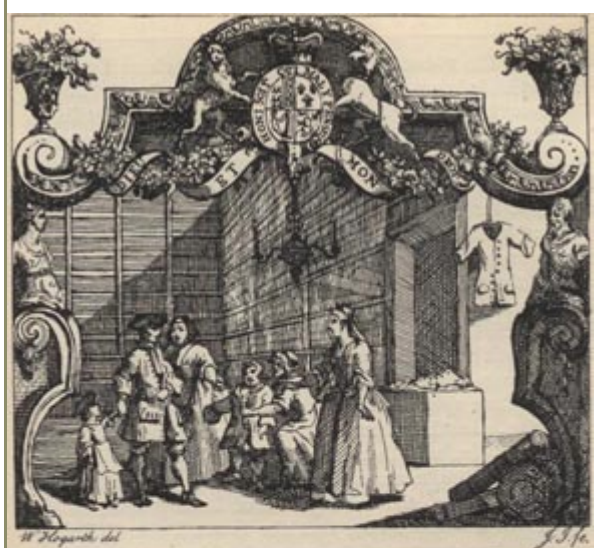
—*Fog's Weekly Journal*, 1736 (1)

The ECE Advertiser can't survive on sales alone. For just two shillings you can help us survive while making money for yourself. Just place an advertisement in our newspaper (2). The thousands of readers who peruse our paper daily can make you rich. Our newspaper, like others, is widely available at London coffee houses and taverns (3). We charge only two shillings per advertisement, and as an added bonus, many coffeehouse owners will display your advertisement publicly, further increasing the circulation (4). Not to mention the fact that your support will help keep the cost of this newspaper down for your fellow readers (5). A little imagination and a spot on our front page is all it takes. You, too, can join the masses of people moving up the social ladder.

Placing an 18th-century advertisement is easy. You just need to know a little bit about the tactics and products of your advertising colleagues in order to compete and, hopefully, beat them at their own game. Here are some helpful hints to get you started.

The most important thing to remember is that there are no laws in advertising. You're after results. Honesty may or may not be essential to your campaign. No code of advertising ethics, legal or informal exists in the 18th century (6).

First, you must decide what product you plan to advertise. Most advertisements in the 18th-century related to medicine, the press, or commerce (7). Imported or luxury goods, such as jewelry and furniture, rarely made it to the pages of an early 18th-century newspaper (8). Instead, newspapers and advertisers focused on products that appealed to a mass market. They generally targeted themselves to the middle and upper-middle classes (9). By the mid-eighteenth century, the variety of ads began to increase. Ladies' fashions as well as silver, brass, and copper items became subjects of advertisements (10).



Mary & Ann Hogarth
 from the old Frock shop the corner of the
 Long Walk facing the Cloysters. Removed
 to y^e Kings Arms joyning to y^e Little Britain-
 gate, near Long Walk. Sells y^e best & most Fashi-
 onable Ready Made Frocks, suites of Fustian,
 Ticken & Holland, strip Dimity & Flanel
 Waistcoats, blue & canvas Frocks & blue coat Boys Drs.
 Likewise Fustians, Tichens, Hollands, white
 strip Dimity, white & strip Flannels in y^e piece,
 by Wholesale or Retail, at Reasonable Rates.

**An example of an eighteenth-century shop
bill**

Although quack doctors make up a significant percentage of your advertising colleagues, you can choose to be a legitimate advertiser. You might choose to advertise for stolen property or to lobby for a political project. Social and political groups sometimes advertise, as do organizations looking to buy or sell land (11). Advertisements for schools, wetnurses and lost property are also common in country newspapers (12).

Keep in mind that your advertisement will probably not include graphics. Although some newspaper advertisements did contain small graphics, they were rare. If you wish to advertise graphically, you should make use of handbills, tradesmen's cards, or shop signs.

Your readers, like you, want to take advantage of the growing consumer society to climb the social ladder. If you want them to buy your product, address them as you would address the aristocracy (13). It is also critical that you treat your readers as intelligent, skeptical consumers. The boom in advertising, especially medical advertising, in the 18th century has left many consumers skeptical. Establish the authenticity of your product over other similar products. Many advertisers provide a certificate of authenticity with the sale of their product and warn customers against inferior lookalikes (14).

If your product isn't novel and fashionable, create a new fashion to meet your desire for sales. The London market is highly changeable and suggestible. The famous and profitable button manufacturer, Matthew Boulton, schemed to introduce his buttons into the King's court by sending presents to nobles and bribing servants of the royal family to push his product. When he revealed, through advertisements, that the royal family wore exclusively Boulton buttons, his buttons became the newest fashion (15). Obviously, Boulton's technique was ideal, but you don't need to have access to the royal family to make your products fashionable. Any member of the aristocracy will do:

"A Lady of Distinction has declar'd that most of her teeth became loose and some dropped out quite sound, but after using four bottles of Cherry Lotion the remainder of her Teeth became quite firm. Ask for Prince's Cherry Lotion. ½ a guinea a bottle, or one dozen bottles Five Pounds"

—*La Belle Assemblée* or *The Universal Advertising Sheet*, 1806 (16)



The Famous Anodyne Necklace was One of the Rare Advertisements to Contain Graphics (19)

If you are unable to secure the endorsement, real or otherwise, of a member of the aristocracy, middle-class endorsements will do. Many eighteenth-century advertisers offer refunds to customers who are willing to write a testimonial about the efficacy of the product, complete with their name and address (17). These testimonials from satisfied customers are extremely valuable in gaining your audience's trust and esteem.

Mask your advertisements as news. Most readers pick up the Advertiser for its informative news stories. The abundance of advertisements in today's modern world encourages many readers to skip advertisements entirely. In order to attract readers to your product, you may need to disguise your advertisement as a news piece (18). Simply request for your ad to be placed next to authentic news stories, then draw your

readers in with a professional tone. By the time the reader has discovered his mistake, he will have read your product's name and the details of your business. With the product name in his mind, your foot is already in the door.

Many previous advertisers have found success by offering "free" gifts to their readers and potential customers. Due to the fact that there are no laws about truth in advertising, you may manipulate your readers with "free" gifts as much as you please. In this increasingly capitalist society, your readers may be eager to buy things that they view as investments in future wealth (20). By giving away a fraction of your own profit on each item sold, you can gain enormously in the total number of products sold. Some merchants, reluctant to give up even a fraction of their profit, charge exorbitant rates for their primary products to cover the cost of the "free" gift. If you don't want to trouble with the free gift at all, another common promotional tactic is to offer a prize by lottery to one lucky customer. Again, whether the prize actually exists or not is largely irrelevant (21).

A Brief History

Eighteenth-century ads were frequently referred to as 'puffs,' and in a market with no regulations on advertising, 'puffing' was an appropriate term. Most advertisements glossed over facts in favor of grandiose claims.

Although there were no rules concerning truth in advertising, in 1712, the government imposed a one-shilling tax on each advertisement. In 1757, the tax increased to two shillings and in 1789 to three shillings. In 1725, the passage of the Stamp Act resulted in a general increase in advertising prices. Advertisements must have paid off regardless of the extra money, however, since none of these events resulted in a major decline in the number of ads published (22). This may have been due in part to the fact that the Stamp Act went largely unregulated (23). Newspapers individually made the decision about who bore the brunt of this tax: advertisers or customers. Increased prices of advertising also led to an expansion in the products advertised. Since advertising became more expensive in the latter half of the

eighteenth century, purveyors of imported luxury items like tea and coffee were more able to bear the added cost. These merchants began to compete with the typical booksellers and doctors for advertising space (24).

Advertising had truly emerged as an economic force by the close of the 18th century. In the late 1600s, advertisements in newspapers were sparse (25). From the 1720s to the 1780s, the number of advertisements in papers increased drastically. Ads became a much more prominent part of the newspaper. In the 1720s, an informative essay generally occupied the front page of a newspaper. By the 80s, advertisements had infiltrated the front page as well as the content of the paper.



The second of only two newspaper advertisements we located that contain graphics (26).

On July 7, 1761, 74% of the content of the *York Courant* was advertisements (27). Although 74% is relatively high, many London papers in the second half of the 18th century devoted 25-75% of their content to advertisements. The word "advertiser" appeared in the title of many papers, and in the subtitle of a large number of others (28). Instead of politics, the newspapers of the late 18th century featured advertisements and news stories focusing on social life, fashion, and medicine (29).

The growing prominence of advertisements in newspapers partially reflected the fact that newspapers were frequently owned by booksellers eager to promote their own publications (30). The ability to attract other advertisers to one's paper also served as a form of status and economic dominance (31). While many political newspapers began incorporating large numbers of ads in the 18th century, many simple advertising sheets also expanded into newspapers. Newspapers such as the *London Times* and *The Morning Post* began as a compilation of advertising sheets and expanded into full newspapers that provided political, social, and economic news stories (32).

The eighteenth century marked the beginning of a consumer society in Britain. The growing middle classes had the economic means to purchase luxury items as well as the desire to imitate the aristocracy. Merchants, middle-class and otherwise, took full advantage of the desire for class mobility. Newspapers were a prime target for advertising because of their widespread availability in coffee houses that middle-class men frequented. Throughout the course of the 18th century, advertisements became more prominent, more widespread, and more creative. Advertising, for better or for worse, became an art and those who succeeded gained both social and financial power.