Advertising Progress
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When competition increased after the war the manufacturer did not wait for trade to turn up, but sent out salesmen, catalogues, circulars and what has now come to be a mass of trade literature, much of it elaborately designed to gain the attention of busy men.

—“Methods of Selling Goods,” Iron Age editorial, 1896

The roots of the tremendous growth in American advertising that took place after the Civil War were laid down over centuries of evolution in Western marketplaces. Conspicuous traces of the earliest history remained in the 1870s. As people walked through commercial districts, they still saw and heard advertisements in two media that harkened back to ancient towns: trade signs with emblems but no lettering still hung from buildings and stood on the streets to announce the locations of merchant, banking, and artisan businesses, and in the larger towns, street criers and peddlers still shouted their chants very much as they had for centuries. The latter was clearly the liveliest medium of the period. In earlier times, many street sellers had represented merchants, publishers, or medicine dealers who hired them to sing their wares. Street criers had provided advertisers with their best opportunities for emotional advertising appeals, applying humor, rhyming, and exaggerated descriptions. Prior to the 1820s, news, official announcements, and commercial announcements all fell under the rubric of advertisements, so the street criers’ occupation held a measure of prestige.

The bourgeois pedestrian of the 1870s, in contrast, had little respect for either the business or the practitioners of street selling. In the commercial cap-
itals of New York City and Philadelphia, a few retailers still attracted attention with flamboyant additions to the street crier's repertoire, such as ostriches and elephants laden with sandwich boards. These extravagances were the street sellers' swan song, however, and did not revive the ancient advertising medium. With rare exceptions, such as department-store parades, only peddlers offering goods for sale on the spot have survived the nineteenth century, and they occupy the lowest rung on the entrepreneurial and social ladders.

The conditions that destroyed the viability of street crying as an advertising medium of any consequence were those that dominated the transformation of the entire nation through the course of the nineteenth century. The impacts of industrialization and urbanization appeared so vast and profound that both contemporary and later observers were inclined to declare them inevitable, even deterministic, processes. Like other historical processes, however, they resulted from countless decisions by countless individuals driven by their personal needs, ambitions, and expectations; together, they determined the transformations of nations.

Whether these changes improved or worsened people's lives, whether participants harkened back with nostalgia or looked forward with anticipation, nineteenth-century Americans usually attributed the changes in their material and cultural lives to progress. Even those who romanticized the preindustrial past with its street criers and picturesque towns generally forged ahead. Sometimes, innovators in advertising such as the retailer John Wanamaker and the editors of the Inland Printer (a leading printers' trade journal) idealized visions of the rural past even while they promoted cosmopolitanism and steam-powered presses, helping to generate and define the modern age. Countless individuals played out another dualism, as both observers and participants in a progress that proceeded by competition. So merchants switched their advertising patronage from street criers to print in order to compete with others who had already made this "progressive" shift. As the ancient medium lost credibility, its attractiveness and prestige spiraled further downward; youths inclined to performance occupations turned instead to the growing audiences for traveling troupes and repertory shows. Printers used their increasing revenues to invest in ever more sophisticated ways of pleasing their advertising patrons, and merchants, in their turn, advertised and sold more and greater varieties of goods, helping thereby to develop markets. Both winners and losers had a word for this reciprocal, competitive dynamic: progress. Moreover, whatever else they thought of the changes, Americans' goals increasingly, if not universally, absorbed materialist criteria for progress. So, instead of the appearance of spiritual or political worthiness determining the value of a person's contributions to the commonweal, at least in principle, as in the Puritan communities.
and the early Republic, material successes became major criteria for leadership and social prominence. This was notoriously so in the Gilded Age metropolis.

The dramatic expansions in population, wealth, income, and territory that characterized the United States in the nineteenth century paralleled equally dramatic expansions in the size and character of markets for both consumer and industrial goods. Then, as now, businesspeople defined their marketing problems in terms of what they wanted to accomplish in selling their goods or services and the circumstances that they encountered in doing so. Advertising is only one component of addressing a marketing problem, namely, paid communications with one's market.³ To canvas their potential markets, whether urban, suburban, regional, or national, as markets changed, businesspeople came to define their marketing problems as entailing communication goals that required advertising media with far greater reach than street criers. An 1890 authority on advertising summarized why these changes increased the use of printed promotions:

The manufacturer once made everything in one shop, and sold to everybody near him. Now he only makes one or a few things, and must supply more customers, who are widely scattered. The consumers . . . must now use the products of numerous and remote manufacturers. Thus there is an ever-widening distance between the producer and the consumer.

But the producer and consumer should know each other. . . . The railroad only allows producer and consumer to drift farther and farther from an acquaintance with each other. Only the printer's ink can bridge the distance, and bring the producer and consumer into relations of intimacy. The locomotive and printing press must go hand in hand.⁴

As early as the 1820s, even the concentrated domains of urban merchants became larger, busier, and noisier than street criers could manage. By midcentury, the available varieties of products and services exceeded the carrying capacity of an unaugmented aural medium. Advertisers experimented with other on-the-scene media, such as wagons covered with signs, decorated clocks, and mechanical trade stimulators, devices highly ornamented with brand names that drew people into a store by performing tasks, from cutting the tips off cigars to providing therapeutic electric shocks. Advertisers even tried sending their messages out on coins.⁵ All these methods, however, suffered from limited reach or exposure to the market, so over the decades, advertisers increasingly chose printed media to disseminate information and appeals, exchanging liveliness for reach. Only later could the technical capacities of print replace some of the street criers' color.

Marketing Problems and Advertising Methods
Printed media expanded the reach of advertisers' communications, but until midcentury, in newspapers and broadsides they rarely permitted anything other than short announcements decorated with simple woodcuts. Steel or copper engravings were costly and relatively rare in American advertising before mid-nineteenth century, and almost never appeared in newspapers; only the more affluent merchants and tradespeople in the larger cities adopted the English custom of commissioning finely engraved bill heads and shop cards.

Dating back in England to the seventeenth century and flourishing in the United States in the eighteenth, these advertising sheets ranged from quite small to twelve inches across and were used to wrap small purchases, to record transactions, and as papers for public posting. Then by the 1850s, woodcuts and other print forms began to proliferate in newspapers and elsewhere. As limited as the earlier options for print advertisements were by our standards, there was little else for people to read that was new each week; hence, the merchants' unadorned lists of goods received ample attention.

Advertising Methods in Pre–Civil War Markets

Prior to the 1820s, most printed advertisements in America were primitive in both their styles and their communication techniques. With few exceptions, advertisements were little more than announcements of whatever goods a merchant had to sell or whatever services someone desired or offered. Only as commercial advertising activities expanded did the term advertisement gradually narrow to encompass primarily commercial announcements, excluding other announcements such as legal notices, which had once been considered advertisements. (Reminders of the roots of the word advertisement in to advert or to turn the attention, remain in older newspapers' names such as the Daily Advertiser and also the Spanish use of advertencia as a notice or warning and of anuncio for advertisement.) Frequently, merchants began their announcements by craving "the public's indulgence," "beg[ging] to offer," or "respectfully inform[ing] friends and the public" of their offerings. These deferential, almost servile, prose styles derived from the social customs of service and self-conscious pretensions of gentility shared by politicians and merchants alike that preceded the Jacksonian era's revolution in rhetorical styles. Moreover, the simple announcement, with or without such deferential stylistic conventions, sufficed for sellers and consumers alike at this stage of marketing because most items offered before 1820 were traditional, generic services and goods such as foodstuffs, cloth, or ribbons. There was no need to educate the public about their uses or desirability except in the few circumstances where fashion had
begun to generate discretionary demand, such as in ceramics, textiles, and apparel accessories. The attractions of fashion had begun to build a consumerist culture in Britain and Europe during the eighteenth century. Before the War of 1812, fashion lured Americans into consumerism primarily by example and travel to Europe rather than advertising. And the public did not have to be taught to distinguish between goods within most categories: consumers judged products by inspection and by merchants' reputations, not by brand names. Common understanding in America—more than in Britain or Europe—assumed that demand typically exceeded supply, obviating expenditures to generate interest in goods. Merchants in the United States deemed it necessary only to announce the availability, quality, and affordability of their offerings to market them, unlike in eighteenth-century London, where Dr. Samuel Johnson represented many observers when he noted in 1759 that "[a]dvertisements are now so numerous that they are very negligently perused, and it is therefore become necessary to gain attention by magnificence of promises, and by eloquence sometimes sublime and sometimes pathetic." Both purveyors and consumers in the United States, in contrast, presumed that people already knew what they wanted and that they bought what they could. Retailers, including artisans selling their own products, sometimes claimed that their goods met the standards for fashion, but enticing and instructional illustrations of just what fashion entailed did not yet accompany such declarations.

The U.S. distribution system, or marketing channels, until the 1810s centered around unspecialized merchants acting as the primary intermediary between producers and retailers and other middlemen. Whether in towns or rural areas, retailers ran comparatively small operations, and no individual retailer came close to wielding the marketplace impact of the general merchants until the middle of the century. With their roots in the colonial period, such merchants dominated the economy of the Federal and Jacksonian periods; they were the "business class." They imported and distributed to retailers goods from abroad, distributed raw materials to many trades, distributed the few domestically manufactured goods that were available to retailers, and also exported. General merchants also had important functions as a major source of credit for both businesses and governments. Advertisements before the 1820s reflected the importance of the general merchants as their announcements of arriving ship cargos and other sources of inventory were major features in port city newspapers. They directed announcements primarily to retailers, both in the port city itself and those from the hinterlands who came into the cities to purchase their stocks several times a year. Most commercial advertisements not placed by these wholesaling merchants were placed by retailers who had acquired much of their inventories from them. At either level
of merchandising, wholesale or retail, lists with occasional, brief descriptions characterized the prevailing style of advertisements. Auctioneers, agents for ships, entertainers, schools, medical practitioners and medicine sellers, lawyers, lottery companies, and financial services such as insurance companies and bankers placed most of the remainder of the commercial announcements in the typical newspaper up through the 1860s.

Merchants and patent-medicine purveyors dominated the early newspaper pages. The differences in their promotions demonstrate the connections between marketing problems and advertising forms, the latter supplying the exceptions that proved the rule of the announcement format. Preparers and purveyors of medicinal products and services faced different marketing problems than did most contemporary advertisers. Unlike most goods that were identified and sold generically, that is by type, and that required no explanation to sell, proprietary, or branded, medicines all claimed to offer unique solutions to consumers' difficulties that had to be explained. (Medicinal products that sold at retail in England and the United States were considered proprietary or patent goods because the preparers and/or sellers declared ownership and filed legal claims to their unique names, or brands, and secret compositions.)

Also, unlike the merchants selling most other goods in that era's marketplace, medicinal promoters operated in "an economy of abundance," according to historians David M. Potter and James Harvey Young; that is, even though people's ailments and lack of effective medical care combined to create high levels of demand for remedies, the proliferation of entrepreneurial medicine preparers sufficed to motivate intense competition for market share and to expand markets geographically when conditions created apparent opportunities.

This set of circumstances set up three basic marketing problems for the medicine sellers: how to phrase and present their claims; how to communicate their claims; and how to connect those claims in people's minds with specific nostrums. The advertising forms that nostrum sellers practiced, therefore, argued their products' merits and associated those merits with a specific identity through a name or an emblem, which we have since come to call a trademark or brand name. The trademark often served a second purpose, linking nostrums with symbols for reassurance, such as saints, angels, herbs, doctors, or grandmothers, or symbols of power such as electricity or swords, or symbols for exotic resources, such as non-European peoples or exotic places and plants.

Another, related, marketing device that set nostrum promoters apart within the American marketplace before mid-nineteenth century was their extensive use of consumer-sized packaging. Only a few other products, such as cosmetics, alcohol, and tobacco, had both the marketing needs and the profit
margins to justify the tremendous expense that packaging entailed before the availability of industrialized packaging. The traditional, generic goods that filled people's basic needs, in contrast, were sold unlabeled and in bulk. Patentied, processed, and packaged as pills, lozenges, or solutions in alcohol, medicines, however, were sold in small units. Unlike most other goods, they were therefore easy to store and ship for distribution outside of their immediate production areas. Competition between producers encouraged expanding the geographical boundaries of their markets, with the result that nostrums were the first branded products promoted widely as early as the eighteenth century, and more widely as the transportation networks of the nineteenth century developed. With each incremental increase in the networks, medicine sellers expanded the size of their campaigns until, in the transcontinental, national markets that existed by the 1870s, they became the largest group of advertisers. Medicines, bottles, boxes, and wrappings carried products' identifying shapes or marks as well as their claims. Identifiable packaging with a strong symbol, whether name or image, also served as a cognitive link between the product itself and advertising for it in other media. Indeed, before medicine promoters routinely patented their products, many of them patented the shapes of their containers or copyrighted their labels in order to protect their unique appearances, as the Coca-Cola Company did for its bottle adopted in 1916.

One other characteristic distinguished the nostrum sellers from all other early-nineteenth-century American businessmen other than entertainers, namely, a tradition of showmanship that went at least as far back as ancient Greece. Perhaps this tradition followed simply from their special need to compete for attention, or perhaps a flair for theatrics and exaggeration inclined an entrepreneur to selling nostrums. Whatever the explanation for the high correlation, selling snake oil and the like has been rivalled in hyperbole and dramatics only by such famed showmen as P. T. Barnum. Such lessons were not lost when, later, other promoters had to solve similar marketing problems. As James Harvey Young, historian of medical promotion, has concluded: "While other advertising in the press was drab, his [the medicine seller's] was vivid; while other appeals were straightforward, his were devilishly clever. The patent medicine promoter was a pioneer, marching at the head of a long procession of other men with ships and shoes and sealing wax to sell."

In all the alternatives tried during the primordial stages of American advertising, promoters of successful nostrums and entertainments led the fields because their plentiful, lively, colorful, optimistic, and enticing messages successfully resonated with enough of their audiences to have powerful impacts.
Fig. 1.1. Densely packed pages that often did not distinguish between commercial and other announcements typified newspapers until printing technologies in the 1870s permitted increased illustrations. The customized banner for Anderson’s Cough Drops on this front page of the Massachusetts Spy (Worcester; 10 October 1821) illustrates how patent-medicine promoters stood out from others in their advertising techniques; most other woodcuts in early newspaper ads were of stock images, such as ships, set in at the advertiser’s request.
Despite the dismay of elitist naysayers, most Americans eagerly experimented with the new medicinal and experiential options offered to aid both ancient ills and modern ambitions. Nostrum sellers and sideshow operators also offered Americans a freedom from authority that appealed to many still reveling in the decline of deference that characterized the century between 1750 and 1850. The growing confidence that citizens could simultaneously purchase independence from pain and elitist authorities, such as doctors, also resonated with the spirit of the times. Many considered this a form of progress, albeit one that would wane with the waxing of professionalism at the end of the century. Patent medicines and their narcotic content also offered consumers opportunities to violate the temperance strictures of the times, another aspect of the nostrums' appeal. Nostrum sellers—like circus people—flourished in this environment, leading the way for other entrepreneurs whose ambitions and promises later laid claim to growing abundance as the century moved along.

The attributes of the thirty advertisements on the front page of the Massachusetts Spy of 10 October 1821 (fig. 1.1) illustrate the contrasts between medicinal and other announcements of the period. Nine announce legal matters, hearings, or meetings; ten list goods "respectfully" submitted by merchants, both wholesale and retail; two seek workers and two offer services; one combines a legal announcement and a mercantile listing; at the top of the page, Harvard University offers "Medical Lectures," and at the bottom the publisher announces a medicine just arrived at his bookstore; a notice informs readers of the availability of real estate; another tells of a "Premium Bull, Columbus"; and the Spy's publisher announces his almanac for 1822. Only black lines and variation of font differentiate these messages, but a thirtieth, an advertisement for Anderson's Cough Drops, displays a woodcut of an elaborate banner encasing the lone brand name on the page. Immediately under this banner lies the claim, "The most valuable Medicine in use for Coughs and Consumptions." The intensely argumentative copy that follows exemplifies the genre of nostrum advertising:

This new and healing Balsam bids fair to rival every Medicine heretofore discovered, for Coughs and complaints of the lungs, leading to Consumption, and even in seated Consumptions it has lately been used by many, with the most surprising success. If Certificates [testimonials] from persons of the highest respectability, or the great and increasing demand for it, may be called proof of its good effects, it is proved. Scarcely a case of Colds, Coughs, pain in the side, difficulty of breathing, want of sleep, arising from debility, or even Consumptions, but may be relieved by the timely use of this Medicine.———Many certificates of its efficacy accompany each bottle.
Caution.— Be particular that every genuine bottle has “Anderson’s Cough Drops” stamped on the bottle, and the directions are all signed by James Mellen.15

(In the above quotation, as in all quotations throughout the book, unless otherwise noted, the emphases are as in the originals.) Two lengthy testimonials follow the declarations quoted above, and the message concludes with information about retailers and the wholesaler who carried the medication around New England. The illustration, the many claims, the use of testimonials, the relatively wide geographic distribution, and the caution about competing substitutes came to typify techniques in marketing all varieties of goods after the Civil War.

The language of excitement, promise, and innovation exhibited in medical advertisements continued for decades. Samples from the New York Tribune of 26 May 1865, include the following:

Mrs. M. G. Brown, metaphysical physician, from Philadelphia, discoverer and proprietor of the celebrated “metaphysical discovery” for deafness and every disease which flesh is heir to, is now at her office, No. 51 Bond-st., and would be glad to see all who are using her Metaphysical Discovery; also those afflicted in any way. She positively assures the world that there is no other antidote that will reach the cause of disease. Her discovery treats the cause, and not the effect.

Sharing twenty-one inches with twenty-nine other advertisements, Mrs. S. A. Allen offered her World’s Hair Restorer in six different two- and three-line notices. But, while Mrs. Brown tried a long entry to reach her audience and Mrs. Allen tried many short entries, Weeks and Potter tried a startling headline to sell Wheaton’s Ointment [which] will cure the itch in 48 hours.

Itch! Itch! Itch!
Scratch! Scratch! Scratch!16

Whatever healing powers the ointment had were probably those of suggestion, much as the headline held the power to stir an itch in readers.

From the 1870s through the end of the century, medicine producers and entertainers such as theaters, circuses, and exhibitions dominated advertising to such an extent that many people associated the entire field of advertising, other than local retail and noncommercial announcements, with these dubious but lucrative trades. By far the largest category of businesses through the end of the century that advertised beyond local limits, patent-medicine com-
panies accounted for more than one-half of the 104 firms listed as spending more than $50,000 on national advertising as late as 1893. Much of the public opposition that the whole advertising field faced when the Progressive movement attacked the enterprise resulted from the strength of this association. Notwithstanding the many criticisms that have been directed at entertainers and patent-medicine advertisers, it was the patronage of these clients that subsidized the era's printed media—as, today, advertisers of all sorts continue to subsidize most media. Entertainers and medicine sellers also set the standards for color and liveliness in visual style and for drama and hyperbole in copy of the period. Conversely, by the end of the century, they set standards against which all advertisers were judged, both by modernizing advertisers and by the mainstream public. Although the mainstream public—that vocal portion of the population dominating the press and other political institutions—may have represented larger portions of the population even less than it does now, its impact was profound.

The Evolution of Retail Advertising

This first stage of U.S. industrialization, between the 1820s and the 1870s, provided the market conditions for the heyday of retail advertising, when retailers contributed many innovations in advertising content, style, and placement that determined the direction of the whole field. Ever-growing quantities of both industrial and agricultural goods, together with concomitant developments in urbanization and in transportation and communication technologies, made increasing numbers of traditional, generic products available to consumers, who were increasingly concentrated in cities. Consequently, the new market conditions of midcentury were characterized by a gradual shift to a buyers' market. Responding and contributing to these developments, producers, wholesalers, and merchants expanded and changed their marketing activities. As they did, they altered the distribution channels through which goods passed from the producers of raw materials to processors and industrialists and then to consumers.

This early stage of industrialization began the slow shift away from the announcement-style of retailers' and manufacturers' print advertisements that prevailed at midcentury—fueled, perhaps, by the plentiful exceptions in medical and entertainment advertising. Most of the consumer-directed products of industry and commerce from the 1820s into the post–Civil War period remained traditional, generic goods (domestic foodstuffs, textiles, shoes, and iron products). Developments in manufacturing techniques and technologies...
(manufacturing generally included the processing of raw materials, such as foodstuffs, into usable forms, as well as the assembly of products) increased the volume of these traditional goods but rarely resulted in different types of goods for the general marketplace. Consumers already knew the nature of most goods for sale and businesspeople did not recognize any need to educate consumers at the expense of advertising costs. Furthermore, most advertisements still promoted merchants, not brand-name products, so the basic marketing needs during this period changed primarily by a quantum increase in the intensity of competition between known entities; that is, between merchants selling generic products.

Yet increasing competition does not alone explain retailers' marketing innovations in this period. With the exception of the printing and advertising trade presses that specifically targeted advertisers in all fields, the extensive but conservative trade and industrial advertising directed to wholesalers, processors, and industrialists had virtually no impact on the overall development of advertising methods in the nineteenth century (or in the twentieth, for that matter). Transportation enterprises advertised extensively as well, but until the late 1800s their consumer-directed messages usually listed space available for people and cargo, schedules, and claims for speed; they gave essential information but the formats changed little. Therefore the following analysis examines changes affecting the distribution channels for bringing goods from importers, processors, and industrialists to consumers.

In 1820, the wholesale and general merchants dominated not only commerce but the entire U.S. economy. As marketing conditions changed after 1850, wholesaling changed. The general merchants' prominence faded as commodity dealers and full-service wholesalers came to divide the intermediary functions of the distribution channels. Even though these more specialized wholesalers dominated the distribution channels as a group, their decisions to advertise decreased relative to the vastly expanding marketplace. Moreover, like other forms of trade advertising, as a rule the wholesalers' messages remained stylistically conservative. Thus, although wholesalers, like most businesspeople, increased their absolute amounts of spending on promotion, their share of and innovations in advertising expenditures declined relative to the dramatic expansion in advertising bought by retailers and manufacturers after the Civil War. Instead, wholesalers increasingly relied on traveling salesmen and catalogs to promote their stocks, both to processors and to retailers.19

In contrast to the wholesalers' marketing mix, consumer-directed advertisements have always been the primary means by which retailers of all sizes have regularly communicated to their potential markets. Until the 1930s, most store operators continued to maintain small inventories and to sell to
neighborhood residents. Most of these neighborhood stores confined their advertising to trade signs outside their stores, to small spaces in local newspapers, and to leaflets announcing promotions or pictures and calendars purchased from printers with their names overprinted on them. Specialized stores, on the other hand, provided the earliest retailing innovations in response to the first stage of industrialization and urban population concentrations. Specialized retailers, as distinct from artisans' shops, operated as early as the 1830s selling particular types of clothing or hats, usually men's, or dry goods. Such specialized storekeepers had to solve a new marketing problem through advertisements, namely, to draw customers from outside their immediate neighborhoods. As a result, the successful among them bought space in citywide newspapers and had flyers printed for distribution on outdoor walls, by mail, and for handouts. They also wrote more aggressive copy to tout their wares than had previously been typical for retailers, competing with neighborhood shops by convincing customers to travel extra distances to shops previously unknown to them. While American cities did not yet possess "economies of abundance" according to Potter's designation, competition between retailers did indeed accelerate after 1820, and retail advertisements began to take on greater intensity as a result. Even so, until the 1870s, price and occasionally the quality of goods remained the primary inducements normally touted in these advertisements.

Unlike the unadorned lists placed by merchants in the 1821 Massachusetts Spy, merchants' advertisements by 1865 showed that they had learned that their primary advertising goal was to create a sense of urgency with which to attract customers into their stores without fail, and immediately—which is still the rule in retail advertising. Sampling advertisements from the New York Tribune of 26 May 1865 demonstrates this trend with large, bold, uppercase lettering, extravagant punctuation, and rising levels of hyperbole. Using a woodcut illustration of a man in an elaborately tailored shirt—one of only two woodcuts in the entire, eight-page paper—Ira Perego & Sons offered "PEREGO'S PATENT BOSOM SHIRT. IN ADDITION to our usual stock of MEN's FURNISHINGS, we have opened a full assortment of FASHIONABLE CLOTHING, AT POPULAR PRICES." L. Binns, Millinery offered "BONNETS at HALF PRICE this week. STRAW BONNETS at $1, $2, and $3 each, worth $2, $4, and $6. CRAPE BONNETS and SILK BONNETS at $10, worth $16." An unusually coaxing entry promised that, "Heads win a new charm from the superb Summer HATS just brought out by GENIN for the special adornment of the beau sex. Have you seen them, Ladies? If not a new delight is in store for you; and mark this! the prices will not alarm you." Of course, the patent-medicine and entertainment advertisements in that same paper far outshine Genin's one-half column inch
in their claims and hyperbole. For Barnum's American Museum, the master showman listed sixteen different attractions that day, plus "a million curiosities." Still, the promise to add to ladies' charms and the use of a question within the copy to engage readers placed Genin in the vanguard of copywriting enthusiasm.

Merchants who recognized the growing potential for profits in selling industrially produced, processed, and transported goods to urban consumers built a new type of institution—the mass retail store. American cities of the mid- and late nineteenth century increasingly concentrated population and wealth, first in port cities, then in hubs of the railroad networks. Because the people in these burgeoning population centers made their livelihoods in specialized occupations, they had to buy, rather than make, more and more of what they needed and desired. Adequate output of both domestic and foreign industries and some means by which to inform people that these goods could be had in desirable selections and at favorable terms fostered centralized retail outlets. The earliest mass retailers carried large stocks of many varieties of dry goods, augmented often by jewelry and domestic wares organized by category or department.

In meeting their marketing problems, owners of large stores entered the ranks of the most prolific and innovative individual advertisers, especially during the decades following the Civil War. Like specialty stores, large stores could not exist by drawing only on neighborhood-sized markets that had traditionally attracted urban spending. In centralizing consumer activities, they joined and often led the trends to pass up the announcement-style of advertisement, and they vastly expanded the volume and pace of retail advertising. Price became, as it remains, a focus of department-store advertising to foster high-volume, high-turnover selling at low margins. Part of "price advertising" featured the policy of selling goods at one, nonnegotiable price at any given time. All department stores eventually adopted this policy because of their interests in maximizing efficiencies and turnover and because they grew to employ more sales clerks in larger numbers of transactions than any businesses had previously required. All this activity ruled out traditional negotiations. Since brand names did not yet guide consumer purchase decisions, major retailers also increasingly featured merchandise guarantees. Stores trying to attract consumers away from neighborhood and small-town stores found such confidence-raising policies invaluable competitive tools.

Two main paths led to the early department store, the first developing when wholesalers opened up retail showrooms to the public. An advertisement in the 1865 issue of the New York Tribune cited above promoted the goods of
Clark, Traphagen, and Hunter, who offered clothing for men, boys, and children at reduced prices from their "entire wholesale stock at retail." By this route, Alexander T. Stewart built a prototype department store, the Marble Palace, in New York City as early as 1846, and then, in 1862, the first fully departmentalized store in the United States, the Cast Iron Palace. Still, of his total annual sales that reportedly reached $50 million by 1870, all but $8 million came from his wholesale operations. By 1841, Stewart already advertised "regular and uniform" prices, and he usually receives credit for originating both the one-price policy and the storewide guarantee, although Lord & Taylor in fact preceded him by three years in advertisements for their dry goods, claiming "no deviation from first price."

Augmenting a specialized clothing store or dry-goods store with other types of goods marked the second path by which retailers developed department-store operations. As late as 1889, Marshall Field resisted adding items other than dry goods to his enormous store in Chicago, but competition and younger managers prevailed. By virtue of this diversification, Field's retail trade gradually overtook his wholesale operations, although those had still made 95 percent of the firm's total profits through the 1870s.

John Wanamaker began business—and began to change retail advertising—in 1861 in partnership with Nathan Brown, his brother-in-law, selling men's clothing in Philadelphia. Unlike Stewart's sedate newspaper announcements intended to inspire confidence, Wanamaker's promotions proclaimed his store's goods and prices loudly and frequently. He often ran one advertisement several times in the same newspaper edition. Wanamaker competed for attention, and he succeeded notoriously. For example, a couple of days before the store opened, he spread countless small handbills through Philadelphia with only the initials "W. & B." Just before the store opened, a second set of handbills announced the opening. After taking in $20.67 his first day, he spent all but the sixty-seven cents on newspaper advertisements offering men's suits at bargain prices. He opened his department store in 1869 and continued with flamboyant promotions throughout his long career, including advertising in newspapers to an extent considered profligate by many. According to an advertising agent, by 1870 he had already "caused the universal 'Wanamaker & Brown' to be chiseled on the street crossings, painted on rocks, and mounted on house-tops," thereby gaining the praise of a major figure in the advertising field at the time. His most famous aphorism about advertising responded to critics who accused him of wasting half of his advertising expenditures: Yes, he agreed, but since he was not sure which half that was, he intended to continue on. As extravagantly as he advertised, Wanamaker did not intentionally waste
money. For instance, when he recognized that advertising the wholesale enterprises he later opened did not carry the same advantages as retail advertising, he minimized it.  

Highly personalized organization and operations so characterized all mid- and most late-nineteenth-century businesses that the impact of owner-managers on the practices and styles of advertising cannot be overemphasized. Stewart's and Field's reserved styles as well as Wanamaker's spiritedness derived directly from their personalities and attitudes toward business. Likewise, Rowland H. Macy's copy was unique, not only winning great success for his retail business but also setting new standards for the literary quality of department-store advertisements. Macy opened a dry goods store in 1858 outside of the busiest shopping districts in New York City. He had little capital and could not buy newspaper space for his first month in business. Once he began, he used aggressive advertising techniques to compensate for his poor location and lack of financial resources, drawing customers from well-established stores with low, one-priced, guaranteed goods offered for cash only. His advertisements read more interestingly than his competitors', and he used white space creatively by distributing words with a bit of distance between them, or by repeating words to give a designed appearance, practices he might have learned from the display advertisements (those laid out for attention-getting, unlike classified advertisements) of some innovative publishers, such as S. N. Dickinson of Boston, or patent-medicine sellers. His copy also read pleasantly, with few of the conventional, stilted clichés. For instance, he asked readers about their preferences regarding purchases and then told them that their answer could be found at his store. He also announced his wares and then told readers, "You want them, of course." After about 1863, Macy's marketing problems dwindled compared with the administrative problems brought on by his successes. Macy chose to take less interest in writing copy, and his advertisements lost their freshness. Even so, he had made his mark on the advertising field.

Mail-order retailing, and the newspaper and magazine advertising to support it, grew steadily through the nineteenth century, picking up pace just before 1870. Even so, until 1872, the nation lacked a retailer concentrating on marketing a wide variety of goods solely through catalogs. At that time, Aaron Montgomery Ward and his brother-in-law George A. Thorne took advantage of the transportation and communications developments that fostered the mail-order magazines. Ward's varied background of selling to rural consumers in several capacities had prepared him to communicate and appeal to them. He was particularly aware of their concerns both about the costs that middlemen's profits added to most of their purchases and also about getting fair value for their money. The National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry, an agrar-
ian social, educational, and political movement founded in 1867, endorsed Ward and Thorne in 1873 as a means by which rural folks could bypass middlemen, including wholesalers, drummers (traveling salesmen), and creditors. Accordingly, they promoted their operations as The Original Grange Supply House and promised to save purchasers 40 to 100 percent of the “profits of the middle men.” To do so, they aimed at purchasing goods directly from manufacturers for cash; they also sold for cash. By 1874, in addition they guaranteed their goods, reassuring distant purchasers of recourse that was sometimes more reliable than that available from their local general storekeepers. Because Ward recognized that gaining the rural consumers’ confidence was his most important promotional goal, his copy focused attention less on specific items for sale and more on his institution, encouraging people to send for the catalog. Ward wrote his company’s extensive advertising himself. He placed it in the general presses as well as specialized mail-order magazines and, following the lead of the patent-medicine advertisers, he also mailed almanacs to farmers. In the 1890s, he even sent out promotional railroad cars loaded with both merchandise and entertainers. Ward continued to write most of his advertisements through the 1880s, self-consciously maintaining a friendly tone and repeatedly inviting readers to his establishment. Although many other firms exploited the nation’s burgeoning railroad networks, postal system, and presses by selling specialized lines through the mails, Ward did not face major competition until Sears and Roebuck began their general line of catalog sales in 1893—also out of Chicago, the Midwest’s hub.

By the time that Montgomery Ward and Company started up, large, urban retailers had been advertising dry goods and other wares to the urban public for decades. But because consumers visited their stores, these retailers perceived less need for illustrations. Marshall Field, for instance, built the largest store in the Midwest using few illustrations in his newspaper advertisements right up to the last years of the century, despite protests from his top managers. By the early 1880s, in contrast, Ward offered such abundance in watches, notions, gloves, toilet goods, cutlery, jewelry, fans, albums, trunks, harnesses, ready-made clothing, boots, hats, and so on, that he deemed woodcuts, and, later, electroplated or photoengraved images, necessary to illustrate the variations and entice consumers. Ward and Field made their different decisions according their perceptions of their different marketing problems. Other urban-market retailers, such as Wanamaker, showed more enthusiasm than did Field for illustrations, but in general large retailers’ marketing problems tended to diverge from those of other types of advertisers after the 1870s. As a result, with a few notable exceptions, such as Wanamaker’s 1880 decision to hire a specialized copywriter, John Powers, their later innovations rarely ad-
dressed the marketing problems of the brand-name advertisers, whose activities were to determine the next major thrust of advertising evolution. Although retailers as a whole still buy more advertising space and time than national, brand-name advertisers, their techniques and strategies developed in a different direction from that of branded-product advertising, at least until the 1970s when fast-food chains and other retailers began to blur the distinctions between advertising products and advertising retail outlets.

As nineteenth-century businesspeople learned by competition and comparison to appreciate the value of eliciting emotional responses from the audiences for their advertisements, retailers and manufacturers found that different appeals satisfied their different personal and business interests. Whereas manufacturers tended to make their claims on excitement in terms of technological progress and their sense of its ramifications, retailers featured services and their handling of burgeoning varieties and volume of goods as their contributions to progress. The excitement of buying and selling, of competing on price and quality and sometimes integrity, has proven consistently compelling for retailers. As prominent advertising agent George Rowell argued in 1870, competing with aggressive advertising marked the "progressive spirit" of the era:

Much less than a hundred years ago, in the days of slow-coaches and very slow people, when business men were content with few sales and small profits, it made little difference whether a tradesman advertised his goods or not. But the whole course of trade and traffic has undergone as much change as other things, and now it is indispensable [sic] that he should keep up with the progressive spirit of the times, and he is certain to succeed best who in business tact, and the liberal expenditure of money, leads rather than follows in the race. It is doubtful if any retailer clothier in the United States scatters as much money among newspaper people as John Wanamaker.35

Despite all the activity and dynamism Wanamaker and others poured into their advertising, until the 1890s, when retailers moved from seeing service as deference and fashion as nonessential to new views of service and fashion as progress and boons to society, even their most elaborate advertising images in the 1870s lacked the dramatic iconography they showed by the end of the century.

The divergence between urban retailers and manufacturers in their marketing problems and advertising styles came to the fore just as the latter started to assert themselves as advertisers to consumers, with considerable consequence for their messages. Indeed, just as marketplace leadership had gradually moved from wholesalers to retailers by 1870, it then moved to manufacturers.
Impersonal market forces did not determine this movement: manufacturers aggressively and deliberately developed advertising techniques to wrest control of the marketplace away from retailers and wholesalers. Because of manufacturers' highly visible successes at developing branded products, most people today identify "modern" advertising with branded-product advertising. As a 1909 article in the *Yale Review* explained, "the older [newspaper] advertisements were almost exclusively of localities and persons," informing the reader at what retailers various goods could be purchased. "To-day," on the other hand, the majority of the advertisements one sees "are issued by the manufacturers of a particular article or special kind of articles . . . [that] may be obtained 'anywhere,' and the only request made is that the name of the brand be not forgotten. It is one more striking illustration of the shrinkage in distances and the unification of demand that are almost world-wide."36

**Early Developments in Manufacturers' Advertising**

The second stage of industrialization, approximately 1870–1900, with its surge of invention and increased productivity, coincided with a dramatic expansion of world trade and provided the context for new developments in the marketplace. These factors combined to add immeasurably to the types and quantities of material goods available to consumers—sewing machines, spool thread, musical instruments, clocks, polishes, packaged foods and drinks, and countless varieties of tools and devices for everyone in every type of work, including housework. The shift from a sellers' market to a buyers' market begun by the first stage of industrialization became even more apparent with all these new varieties of goods competing for the consumers' spending. The postwar expansion of new types of goods into the marketplace propelled the emergence of modern product marketing, with brand-name advertising as its primary tool. Manufacturers experimented with introducing their branded products to the public and with generating both general demand for their type of product and specific demand for their brands. As remarkable as the manifestations of material progress were, people could not very well want to buy what they did not know existed, did not understand, or did not perceive as a need. Advertisements served as a major means by which the public became aware of the fruits of invention, industry, and world trade. In this way, advertising truly became the business of material progress: it helped create desire for the new and improved, even as it made the very existence of the "new" financially possible. Moreover, advertisements provided a public forum for presenting progress, in word and image, according to the visions and interests of their creators.

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With promises and threats, often with novel imagery and vitality, advertising messages helped to define both progress and the expectations and rewards of the Victorian lifestyle in terms of materialistic criteria for personal and material success.

Accelerating population concentrations, growing income levels that allowed increasing levels of discretionary spending, the growth of transportation systems (particularly the railroad networks), and the rapid growth of communication systems (telegraph, the postal system, and the press), all continued prewar trends. Although these preconditions facilitated the development of brand-name marketing by manufacturers, modern advertising did not develop as a simple, direct result. Nor did aggressive advertising by manufacturers just appear because of a ready and accessible audience, for example, or simply because industrialists' new productivity left them with unforeseen supplies to sell. Instead, the complex economic conditions on both the demand and the supply sides created opportunities and marketing problems that entrepreneurs recognized and responded to variously. The most successful exploited their opportunities and resolved their marketing problems through methods that often included advertisements. Indeed, marketing decisions often determined a business's success as much as, and in some cases more than, did technological innovations.

For instance, to step back another century, advertising did not simply appear from nowhere in the consumer and industrial revolutions of eighteenth-century England, where what I have referred to as the first and second stages of American industrialization occurred as a single, more graduated, process. Merchants and manufacturers first used advertisements extensively as a deliberate means of exploiting novel economic opportunities. Historian Neil McKendrick writes that attitudinal changes overcame traditions in a “consumer revolution [that] was the necessary analogue to the industrial revolution.” McKendrick specifies that the key to the novel opportunity that successful entrepreneurs recognized in eighteenth-century England was fashion; that is, they saw the potential to exploit popular desires to emulate the rich and powerful, and the new capability for doing so. Furthermore, “all of these small items of household consumption [particularly clothing and beer] offered the lure of profit for those who flocked to make and sell them.” McKendrick contends that this era’s substantial economic development required the pursuit of luxury by “an ever-widening proportion of the population,” which “became an engine for growth, a motive power for mass production.” A case in point, Josiah Wedgwood very deliberately promoted his potteries with such success that he created an “‘epidemical’ sickness to possess his wares amongst the upper and middling ranks.” He did so by first winning the patronage of the no-
ability for a style of pottery, then gradually cheapening the pottery to attract what he called "the middling People" through advertisements and showrooms. Wedgwood's implementation of promotional innovation responded to his perceptions of marketing problems that stood in the way of selling large quantities of his goods to various markets.38

In the United States, the specific marketing problems of selling manufactured goods, such as textiles and ceramics, were quite different than in cosmopolitan and affluent areas of England. During the first stage of American industrialization, merchants, not manufacturers, promoted the consumer goods subject to fashion. Because the engineers of fashion by and large remained British and, to a much smaller extent, continental, comparisons with fashionable persons and households of England and France, or with those who had contacts or experience there, sufficed to lure scant discretionary income from Americans quite self-conscious of their cultural distance from cosmopolitan centers.39 American merchants and manufacturers generally merely copied European fashions for which demand already existed. Only later, when American manufacturers began to produce goods that were unknown or as yet undesired by their markets, did they need to generate demand by developing innovative marketing techniques. Until after the Civil War, American manufacturers apparently left the determination of fashion to the Europeans, since the first innovative goods they produced for the consumer markets and promoted directly to consumers were what they themselves called the mechanical wonders of their day.

Through the century, producers developed a sense of their participation in technological changes that they believed was worthy of widespread notice because of its presumed value to the progress of both society as a whole and their potential customers. That spirit increasingly pervaded their commercial messages. While retailers emphasized the prices, the "latest fashions," and the variety in their stores, artisans and larger-scale manufacturers described their contributions to prosperity in terms of "improvements"; at best, merchants could claim only to carry the manufacturers' improvements to consumers. These different claims on progress symbolized an increasingly antagonistic relationship between manufacturers and merchants that played out in their marketing strategies into the next century.

In this context of a rapidly changing economy, the first American manufacturers to develop nontraditional distribution channels did so to meet their specific, nontraditional marketing problems. In the mid-nineteenth century, the usual distribution channels positioned the wholesaler between manufacturers and retailers and normally saved manufacturers considerable money and effort in product distribution. The wholesalers or jobbers who purchased goods,
then stored, marketed, and distributed them to retailers, bore the burden of these costs and activities, as well as the attendant risks. The wholesalers’ traveling salesmen—“drummers,” or commercial travelers—also provided easy and quick ways of introducing new products to the retail trade (as, today, for many types of products, they still do, although their control of most markets has substantially diminished). For manufacturers to give up those benefits and to try new alternatives, they had to have expected substantial countervailing benefits. For instance, the Fairbanks Scale Company of St. Johnsbury, Vermont, founded in 1830 and producer of the earliest business machines (reliable scales for weighing goods for sale and shipping) spent $3,000 on advertisements at one time in the New York Tribune—the largest single pre–Civil War expenditure by any advertiser—and paid out more than $30,000 annually on various media through the 1860s. Fairbanks also sent out catalogs with woodcuts at least as early as 1847, and by the 1850s he hired “itinerant agents” around the country to supervise sales through regional offices.

Advertisements in the New York Tribune of 26 May 1865, referred to earlier, hint at why some mid-nineteenth-century manufacturers, like Fairbanks, chose to bypass wholesalers and retailers, devising new distribution channels despite the costs and risks involved. Other than publishers and medicinal promoters, most of the producers seeking to reach consumers directly in this issue manufactured complex machines and sold out of their own showrooms. Musical instruments, especially pianofortes and organs, predominated, followed by another expensive and novel machine, the sewing machine. Unlike the myriad generic goods, such as notions, ribbons, hats, foodstuffs, and so on, advertised by wholesalers and retailers and certified by their reputations, the public’s estimation of assembled devices relied solely on their manufacturers’ reputations. For example:

STEINWAY & SONS’ GOLD MEDAL GRAND AND SQUARE PIANOS are now considered the best in Europe as well as this country, having received the first Prize Medal at the World’s Exhibition in London, 1862. The principal reason why the Steinway Pianos are superior to all others, is, that the firm is composed of five practical piano-forte makers (father and four sons), who invent all their own improvements, and under whose personal supervision every part of the instrument is manufactured.

No marketer of that era knew a complex product as well as its manufacturer. Therefore, no one could argue such a product’s benefits better or explain its use. To that end, Steinway spent more than $50,000 on advertising in 1868. When a product possessed a unique and attractive differential, its “own im-
provements" in Steinway's case, its manufacturer often considered that feature at least as important if not more important than its price. Whereas retailers and wholesalers generally competed by offering generic goods at competitive prices, manufacturers of complex, expensive, consumer goods discovered that instead they fared best by promoting their differentials as arguments for fixed and profitable prices. In this situation, retailers and manufacturers had conflicting interests that inclined the latter to market their own goods so they could better compete on nonprice variables. They could also balance saving middlemen's markups against the expenses of their own showrooms, advertisements, and itinerant agents. Furthermore, effectively promoting a product's differential through advertisements or salespersons required forming an association between the product and the differential through some symbolic representation that functioned as a trademark. Before the 1890s, that symbol was usually the name of the producer or inventor; for their part, wholesalers and retailers generally saw little merit in promoting another's name, unless they had exclusive rights to that product. The marketing advantages of establishing a wide reputation associated with a brand name cannot be overestimated; after 1870, they drove many of the most important innovations in the advertising field.

For the same reasons that Steinway and Sons sold from their own showrooms and spent more than $50,000 in 1868 on advertising, the manufacturers of sewing machines, another complex product, recognized the need to control their own sales and distribution. Manufacturers of other complex machineries, such as agricultural equipment and printing presses, followed similar practices. Accordingly, Elias Howe Jr., placed an unimposing advertisement in the 1865 New York Tribune for "THE ORIGINAL Howe Sewing Machines." Like Steinway, Howe invited customers to view his machines at his own showroom in New York City. Unlike Steinway, Howe also sought agents with this advertisement. In selling from his own showroom and seeking agents, Howe followed the patterns originated by his antagonist both in courtroom and marketplace, Isaac Singer. In 1851, Singer and his partners began selling the sewing machine that incorporated Singer's first improvements through specialized showrooms, a practice that had evolved out of the artisan's shop tradition. Singer initiated its unique successes by inviting women, through advertisements, into the showrooms to learn how to use the new technology from other, trained, women. This merchandising by instruction was an important, albeit intangible, differential and one well worth associating with the company's name and machine through advertising. Accordingly, most Singer advertisements in the 1850s and 1860s showed a woman working at a machine. Because of the mechanical inadequacies of these ma-

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chines, the advertisements soon thereafter offered guarantees, at the same time touting "the best" sewing machine available.

In 1855, Singer's lawyer and partner, Edward Clark, wrote that "a large part of our own success we attribute to our numerous advertisements and publications. To insure success only two things are required: 1st to have the best machines and 2nd to let the public know it." Since we know that Singer did not produce the most reliable machines, we might well doubt Clark's judgment about the second requirement, too, except for the many other times that advertising has successfully compensated for inadequate products. By the end of the 1850s, the Singer Manufacturing Company and its major competition also began to put agents around the country on salary and to open up branches rather than franchises, thereby eliminating the independent agent as well as the wholesaler and independent retailer. Singer's early centralized control over marketing and distribution resulted in commercial success that derived more from his marketing prowess and innovation than from technological innovation, despite advertisements proclaiming technological progress. Indeed, the company managed to dominate competing firms that had superior production methods and machines. Reversing the expected causality, the Singer Manufacturing Company seems to have been forced into improving its production methods in order to meet the demand achieved by its sales techniques. Thus, the nature of the product—a novel, complex, and expensive device for consumer use—and not surplus inventory, drove Singer's marketing innovations.

Cyrus Hall McCormick developed solutions along similar lines in turning to advantage the special marketing problems faced in promoting new and complex agricultural technologies. He recognized that his harvesting machine required demonstration and explanation, in part because it was novel and in part because of intensive competition from other harvester manufacturers, most notably Obed Hussey in the early years. Hussey and McCormick patented their machines within a year of each other, 1833 and 1834, respectively. In the early years, both men sold their machines by traveling personally in the countryside near their origins. While they continued to invent and "borrow" mechanical improvements to improve their imperfect machines, McCormick forged ahead of Hussey and the other manufacturers by promoting his machines beyond his personal contacts: his first advertisements appeared the year before he filed for his patent. Then, during the 1840s, McCormick developed a network of agents and advertised widely in agricultural publications, while Hussey continued to rely heavily on his own personal salesmanship and free publicity from contests and exhibitions.

McCormick advertised aggressively early on, unusually so by comparison
with other manufacturers or retailers of the pre–Civil War era. Indeed, in McCormick's enthusiasm for the hard sell, his advertisements strongly resembled those of the medicine sellers. Like them, McCormick heavily employed testimonials that he not only solicited from well-known figures but that he sometimes wrote as well. His advertisements attacked his competitors by implication and even by name, which also paralleled patent-medicine purveyors' assaults on medical doctors' snobbery, faulty treatments, and expenses. In addition, McCormick engaged in unabashed puffery; that is, he paid or coerced editors of publications in which he advertised to write favorably of his machinery or to print his copy as editorial comment. McCormick also used job printing (printing done to order, such as cards, tickets, and brochures) early and heavily. He had pamphlets printed during the 1840s for distribution at fairs and exhibitions, and his first advertising pamphlet for distribution by mail and agents appeared before the harvest of 1859. McCormick used chromolithography, too, commissioning his first multicolored posters in 1867. The handbills and newspaper advertisements that McCormick began using at least as early as 1851 demonstrated his recognition of the importance of both touting and explaining his products to his potential customers. His advertisements continued for decades to combine claims for his machines' prowess with instructions for their assembly, operation, and repair.52

By 1870, the marketing problems that retailers and producers faced were changing in many ways as they participated in and contributed to the developing national marketplace. Those who adapted their advertising methods to their specific circumstances best succeeded in extending their reputations and expanding their sales. In turn, they altered their own marketplace and influenced future marketing conditions. While not all nineteenth-century manufacturers built their own marketing organizations, those producing goods for the widely dispersed American consumer increasingly began to find merit—that is, profit—in exerting increasing control over the distribution channels through which their goods passed to the consumer. Increasingly aggressive and extensive advertising methods often led manufacturers' marketing strategies in achieving this control.