Advertising Progress
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Nowhere has there been given a more notable response to the spirit of modern improvement than in the advertising pages of the current newspapers and magazines. Advertising itself is not a new thing, but its primitiveness of style was, until very recent times, a markedly persistent trait of it.

—“Progress in Advertising,” Harper's Weekly, reprinted in Printers' Ink (1897)

Long before advertising agents made broad claims about the impact of their activities on the ambient culture, they did participate in the progress discourse that pervaded nineteenth-century American culture. They observed with great satisfaction their own progress and that of others, although taking credit for none but their own and those they served. By the turn of the century, however, the advocates and practitioners of advertising expanded the range of their stake in progress to a third theme, namely, their profession’s roles in national economic and cultural progress. Whereas the first two themes appeared consistently and in all forums, the third developed only gradually at the end of the 1890s, after which it flourished. So, before the 1890s, advertising’s partisans could juxtapose articles on the general progress of the times next to articles on the growth of advertising and form no connection between the trends. For instance, in the late 1870s, N. W. Ayer & Son published an Advertiser’s Guide that carried a regular column containing “Notes of Progress.” These columns routinely recorded developments external to marketing, such as those in science, technology, and industry. Articles in the same issues remarked on how advertising was expanding and how “curious” its practices had been in earlier centuries, but made no reference to the types of events covered in
“Notes of Progress.” Progress was something to be noted and celebrated, but advertising practitioners still considered that only contributions to their own progress and that of their clients fell within their purview.

Proponents of the new and professionalizing occupation always wrote voluminously, both to justify its activities and to improve them. Trade journals, led first by *Printers’ Ink* and later by *Profitable Advertising*, *Judicious Advertising*, and others, promoted the field to advertisers and debated its issues with fellow practitioners. Those who set the field’s pace wrote with increasing frequency and intensity to sell their profession, targeting potential clients as a rule—George Rowell called *Printers’ Ink* “a journal for advertisers”—but also the general public. As the Curtis Publishing Company argued in 1913 on behalf of the advertising agent, “because their calling is so young and the abuses have been so much more apparent than the merits, they still have to apologize for their calling.” And so they wrote to show how advertisements and their own activities and achievements had progressed, how they had served clients and publishers, and, eventually, how they served both industrial and social progress. Each theme appeared according to the challenges they experienced and to the stages their own development had reached. As people whose jobs entailed selling through the medium of print, they learned early on to sell themselves; in fact, as we have seen, even before they wrote advertisements for clients, they wrote ads for themselves. By the turn of the century, in their own defense and with considerable enthusiasm, they participated in the dramatic changes of the nation’s ethos to that of a consumer culture, for which they believed that they provided the most essential services.

### The Advertising Profession Promotes Its Modernity

At every point, advertising practitioners observed that their field had developed substantially since its inception, and for that matter—because progress was, after all, the watchword of the century in every avenue of self-promotion and self-justification—since any given time, however recent. Even in 1849, Volney B. Palmer promoted his services in terms of their improvement by virtue of honesty and system over competitors’ usual practices that fit more the trade of “our grandfathers.” As the pace of change accelerated, this sense of advancement intensified, and it provided a constant source of self-congratulation to practitioners. Early analysts of advertising repeatedly referred to the field as being in its infancy—already valuable, but in need of improvement. For instance, an editorial in the first issue of *Profitable Advertising* noted that the “crude, very crude” infancy of advertising already showed “a great im-
improvement" that augured well for the future. Likewise, the J. Walter Thompson Company looked back on the field's history from 1910 and declared, "When we began business—away back in 1864—advertising was a rather puny infant, and there was some doubt as to whether it would pull through at all. And now look what a world-straddling Colossus it is. Advertising has turned out very well indeed." The agency took some pride in that development, "for we fed it with a milk bottle, figuratively speaking, in the early days, and have done what we could to shape its character for nearly half a century."

Distancing Advertising from Its Past

The advertising press as well as the general press often featured reflections on "old-time" advertisements. Until the 1890s, these always focused on the quaint and curious nature of the vintage messages. For instance, in 1874, Englishman Henry Sampson published the first full text written exclusively on the history of advertising. He sought, first, to correct the notion that advertising was "modern" in origin, and second, to show that outdated advertisements were "full of interest," even "highly suggestive of amusement." Sampson's treatment of advertising's changes was largely anecdotal; he noted advertising's growing importance to the economy only to justify collecting anecdotes about an "important branch of our present system of commerce." Innumerable pieces in Printers' Ink and other U.S. journals for the trade also looked back on "old-fashioned" advertisements as quaint relics of the field's past. Articles or fillers with some kind of historical perspective appeared at least a dozen times each year in each of the various trade publications from 1888, when Printers' Ink began publication as the first successful trade journal for advertising in the United States. In most cases before the mid-1890s, the articles simply itemized curiosities for amusement, retaining Sampson's anecdotal, quizzical manner.

Starting in the 1890s, as advertising specialists began to create advertising copy, a distinct shift occurred in how observers compared the "modern" with the "old-time." The purely anecdotal article still appeared, of course; however, observers slowly began to compare favorably the modern against the old-fashioned, usually to congratulate the growing corps of copywriters and artists who increasingly influenced advertising's output. For instance, an article reprinted in Printers' Ink from the McKeesport Times in 1890 noted that "advertisements are no longer the regulation musty affairs they used to be. They are among the most artistic and attractive features of the popular newspaper."

Self-congratulatory comparisons often also self-promoted, as in 1895 when J. Walter Thompson, in "Antique versus Modern," an article in his annual promotional book, instructed advertisers in "the marvellous improvement of the
present day”: his article demonstrated some “modern” principles, contrasting “ancient cuts” with illustrations by “my artists.” Occasionally instructions made comparisons to inspire, rather than to sell. “In order to arrive at a correct and proper understanding of the ethical and scientific side of advertising, it is necessary to compare the old with the new, the obsolete with the ‘up-to-date’ style, the ‘old fogy’ way with the fin de siècle methods now practiced,” according to one article in 1894. Despite advertising’s recent progress toward becoming a science, it had not yet developed “straight out-and-out ‘specialists’ as that term is understood in the medical profession,” and that important task required the comparison of failures and successes.

Joel Benton noted in 1893 that the growing competition for audiences’ attention had brought about an enhanced appreciation for style among advertisers and their writers. A week after Benton’s essay, a lead article in Printers’ Ink declared that an “advertisement which an advertiser would have felt justified in spending a large sum of money in placing in newspapers some years ago would, in many cases, be rejected to-day as not being up to the mark.” The editors also favorably noted the increased use of illustrations, especially “appropriate illustrations” done by the “good artists at the command of advertisers.”

Carroll D. Wright, U.S. commissioner of labor, commented in 1895 that the “science and skill displayed in advertising in modern times were not thought of in colonial days.” An editorial in the New York Times declared in 1900, “the progress is immense.” Walter Dill Scott, who studied the psychology of advertising at Northwestern University, declared a few years later in Atlantic Monthly that the “change has been so great that the leading advertisers say that in comparison with to-day there was in existence fifteen years ago no advertising worthy of the name.” Advertising professionals sought to put “manufacturers [and others] into a frame of mind where advertising will be still further removed from the old conception of it as circus posting and patent medicine promotion,” according to Stanley Resor of the J. Walter Thompson Company in 1916.

Advertising advocates also eagerly touted the effects of creative innovations. A representative of Lord & Thomas, the leading Chicago agency, wrote in 1894 that because of improvements in writing styles “ads [in periodicals] are now read with as much zest as is the reading matter.” The following year, a Printers’ Ink editorial declared that an “advertisement can be made so seductive and readable that I must continue to read it whether I want the thing it advertises or don’t want it. In fact, the live advertiser is now a sharp competitor of the reading-material purveyor in the race for entertainment.” The pleasures that the new advertisements afforded their audiences, of course, mattered mostly because of their presumed effects on the advertisers’ businesses.

Modernity and Success
The *Inland Printer* praised the way the new advertising methods “coaxed along” success by amusing readers. “Those who are responsible for the great advances made in advertising methods” have created “a distinct art, and a pleasing and profitable one at that. They ... let the sunshine into business methods, and by their efforts the soil of publicity has been fructified beyond belief.”

But this appropriation of credit for the progress in advertising styles did more than simply justify the advertising agents’ work; it also excluded other professions and noncommissionable, nonperiodical media from the field’s claims for its growing authority. For instance, in 1905, H. B. Humphrey, president of a Boston agency, wrote “The Reason Why the Agency Is” for *American Industries*, the National Association of Manufacturers’ journal. In the middle of his extended argument on behalf of agents and their practices, Humphrey asserted that the “agency has developed most of the general advertising.” He ignored nonperiodical advertisements and their contributions to the field’s development, as well as agencies’ decades of not writing copy, declaring that in “the writing, designing and general construction of advertisements the agency has perhaps been of greatest service.” Without explicitly saying so, Humphrey implied that it was through agents’ efforts that the field had moved beyond “old, stereotyped forms (which were nothing more than business cards and formal announcements).” By neglecting to mention formats that had for decades provided countless colorful “forms” of advertising, with often engaging pictorial narratives (such as show cards, posters, trade cards, catalogs, and premiums), Humphrey, along with most other colleagues who wrote on advertising’s place in business development, could claim that there was only one line of advertising history; namely, the one evolving in the periodical media under his trade’s care. It followed from this narrow perspective that their progressiveness alone had moved the field from the old “cards” to the “present-day” appeals that were “direct, forceful, [and] personal.” Printers’ *Ink* eagerly pointed out that its own role in the “interchange of ideas” between specialists had accelerated the pace of change.

Ultimately, the comparisons with the past became scornful. The worst criticism one could make of an advertisement in the new century was that it did not make “any improvement upon the advertising of our grandfathers.” This scorn applied when referring to media as well as to styles and content. For instance, the critics against landscape advertising assured the public that such offensive practices were “doomed to follow in the wake of handbills and town criers,” cursed by obsolescence as well as by public disfavor. On occasion, professionalization activists also repudiated the “Barnum Principle” of advertising. They claimed that although it was picturesque and often influential, it was
Also “inartistic, reactionary, and unsuccessful in the long run, and immoral.” Nonetheless, even the most aggressive of the field’s advocates cautioned against originality for its own sake. Fowler warned that “progression’s marching road is never straight”; moreover, “many a conventional advertisement, moldy with age, has assisted in bringing more business than many an advertisement teeming with originality.” So while “progressiveness demands the new,” success would best be found in a balance of “originality and conventionality.”

**Advertising Practitioners Tout Their Own Successes**

The praises for advertisements’ progress easily spread to include the people preparing them. In a lively few pages on history in *Building Business: An Illustrated Manual for Aggressive Business Men*, Nathaniel C. Fowler Jr. declared that so recently had progress been made that the “youngest business man can remember when [newspaper and magazine advertisements] were clumsily put together, interesting to nobody, and seldom read, even by the advertisers themselves. During the last ten years, and particularly during the last five years, the quality of advertising has passed through a fiery revolution.”

How did Fowler explain this “fiery revolution”? Not given to understatement, he described the “brilliant minds of the country [who] are now giving attention to the preparation of advertising.” Because advertising had become both an art and a science, the “man with the power to write a telling advertisement may have as fine a quality of brain excellence as he who can build literature, and create romance. . . . He will by and by find his monument in the same field with the memorial of the men who discovered the composition of electricity, or were able to regulate the sunshine.” Attracting ambitious, talented people signaled both progress past and progress to come.

Ten years later, in 1903, Daniel M. Lord, Chicago’s leading agent, explained to New York City’s Sphinx Club upon his retirement, not only had “the conditions surrounding the business changed” in recent years, but the advertising profession’s responses to those changes had finally earned it a prominent position. “I can remember,” Lord declared, “when the advertising agent was looked upon as something to be endured because he could not be cured, and I tell you, gentlemen, no time in the history of business has the advertising man stood so high in the estimation of the business world as he stands today.” The potential for prosperous careers appeared in many arguments for the profession’s legitimacy after 1900, such as in the first words of John Lee Mahin’s 1914 treatise on advertising: “This is the age of advertising. Within
the memory of older men the ambitious youth was urged to enter the church or the army, to study law or the sciences. Now business is generally recognized as a world-dominating science. It is becoming more and more intricate and complex, and constantly calls for a higher grade of intelligence." As a leading Chicago advertising analyst, trade-journal publisher, and promoter of psychological research in advertising, Mahin represented those who believed that advertising was the profession of the future.

As the field grew, the size of agencies grew, as did individual practitioner's incomes. The latter provided a major promotion point for both recruiting and professional legitimation. Claude C. Hopkins, writing in 1896 to "The Young Man in Advertising," demonstrated the successes of advertising professionals by comparing their incomes with those of other people in business. "There is nothing higher in business for a young man to attain to" because revenues were growing rapidly. In recruiting young professionals, Hopkins likened his burgeoning profession to a new gold-mining camp, "an unknown and promising field in business" to which young men were flocking to seek their fortunes. In the 1906 memoirs of his long and important career in advertising, George P. Rowell also celebrated a multitude of fortunes made through advertising as evidence of the field's growth and success. Rowell admired most his chief competitor, Francis Wayland Ayer, who had created "the greatest institution of the sort that has thus far come into being in any part of the world." Hardworking and of exemplary character, Ayer had become the richest man in the business while pioneering his profession. It must be said that Rowell acknowledged Ayer's success out of more than graciousness; he used it to prove the viability of their shared profession, just as he used descriptions of his own and others' successes. He felt confident, therefore, in assuring young advertising men, "You are in business to earn a living. The line of business in which you are engaged is respectable." According to Fowler in 1900, a residual factor that still inhibited the growth of advertising and the specialists' incomes resulted from manufacturers who still did not adequately "understand even the rudiments of advertising." They paid "merely nominal clerk's wages" to the people "in charge of the expenditure of a princely fortune in advertising," meanwhile paying "enormous salaries" to other managers, not appreciating that "men of no experience, who are unable to command decent salaries," could not do justice to this "vital department." Fowler and other advocates of the field had more convincing to do.

A rather ironic note sounded now and again in the various ways that advertising agents sought to evoke their growth and successes. Despite the advisers' best efforts to purge advertisements of other advertisers' edifices, they frequently displayed or described their own buildings in their self-promotions.
That this was commonplace in the years before the mid-1890s is to be expected, but interestingly, the practice continued into the 1910s. For instance, in the same annual volumes that, from the late 1890s through at least 1909, J. Walter Thompson published for clients, showing collections of "first-class advertising" containing no edifices, the agency featured its own buildings. "A fine view" of the main office appeared in the frontispiece of most issues, along with an introductory article on "The Thompson Offices" that described and showed views of and from their other buildings. In 1909, the agency's Blue Book featured its six buildings around the country on the frontispiece. Similarly, in 1905 both the J. Walter Thompson Company and Charles Austin Bates published booklets focusing attention on their places of business, Where Good Advertising Is the Constant Product (Thompson's) and Good Advertising and Where It Is Made, (Bates's). Despite the professional copywriters' lack of sympathy for manufacturers who portrayed their facilities to boast of their successes and to demonstrate their capacity, they used those same arguments to show their own facilities. Where Good Advertising Is the Constant Product began: "An inside view of any great industry is always interesting." Four years later, the agency pointed out "the advantages of size"; clients could benefit by "a business dynamo" that was "ready for service of any magnitude." Carrying the metaphor forward, the Thompson agency referred to itself as "a producer of advertising electricity" that operated with efficiency and personal attention to clients because of "subdivision of labor." Calkins, who admired Cyrus Curtis so much that he dedicated his 1915 volume to him, reprinted an ad that pictured the publisher's building with the headline "Visible Evidence of the Power of Advertising." Calkins described this as a "strong, dignified advertisement." In fairness, advertising agents could not easily illustrate their services. Also, such selling points may well have interested clients and potential clients as businesspeople—who were assumed to operate more rationally than consumers—to warrant copywriters' violating their own rules; the factory has continued to flourish in trade-to-trade advertising. But in their attempts to eliminate industrial imagery from consumer advertisements, the pontificating copywriters seem not to have considered the possibility that such selling points about manufacturers' factories might also have interested consumers.

**Promoting Specialized Services**

Specialized experience, skills, and various claims to system provided both the means to success for advertising professionals and their most basic source of legitimation. Early advertising practitioners had always argued for specialization's merits as their own best claim on advertisers' patronage. As noted ear-
lier, George P. Rowell wrote in his memoirs, "These are the days of specialization even more than in the past. Advertisers are not looking for people who can do everything, they are more interested in those who can do some one thing well that nobody else can do at all." Similarly, an 1893 editorial in Profitable Advertising typically emphasized the importance and advantages of replacing nonspecializing "egoists" and their "superficial Knowledge" with "experts" in all phases of business.  

Medicine and law were the professions most frequently cited as standards for advertising professionalization. Nathaniel Fowler, for instance, claimed that his colleagues should be ranked with lawyers, not businesspeople. Their "art is of the essence of professional business rather than of business profession." It was "the expert's business to do that for business which business proper cannot do for itself." Charles Austin Bates identified himself as "a specialist in advertising" and defined the specialist as one "who devotes all of his brains and energy and time and energy to the study of one thing." Hence, a "specialist in advertising is a man who practices advertising as a doctor practices medicine, or a lawyer practices law." As J. Walter Thompson wrote "To Advertisers and Business Men," the "merchant who is his own lawyer or his own doctor does not fare much better than the merchant who does his own advertising." As this professionalization discourse gained strength, some advertising practitioners of the 1890s and early 1900s referred to themselves as doctors of business, attorneys-at-advertising, or even publicity physicians.

Because placing advertisements in newspapers and magazines was the advertising professionals' earliest specialized service, it provided their first claim to professional stature. In 1874, Rowell wrote that only the best, most professional agency, which just happened to be his, could serve clients optimally. He had the most complete information about publishers and could get clients the lowest possible rates from publishers because of his agency's experience and high volume of business.

Advantages accrued to both publisher and advertiser from competent advertising agents' knowledge and experience in placing advertisements. As full-time professionals, they saved advertisers time, avoided inconvenience and expense, and at the same time they assured publishers of more revenue with fewer risks. All parties could enhance their profits through the good offices of the agent. As early as 1876, N. W. Ayer & Son expressed concern for the entire practice of advertising because too many advertisers wasted their expenditures being unaware of newspapers' rates and circulations. "Every dollar squandered in this way is a direct injury to the advertising business." Only a genuine agent's experience and honesty could correct this problem, and many of the advertisements for specific agencies reiterated this theme. In his history of...
the N. W. Ayer & Son agency, Ralph Hower demonstrates that professionals could in fact save even their most experienced clients substantial amounts in expenditure by both their expertise and their publishers' discounts for volume buying. As Fowler summarized the argument, "Advertising agents make mistakes, and lose money for their customers, but they lose a great deal less money than will the customers themselves, if they attempt to handle that which they have no business to handle, and for which the advertising agent was specially created." If this were not true, the "larger part of all national advertising would not be in the hands of respectable and responsible advertising agents."}

Copywriting and planning joined the placing of advertisements in the advertising practitioners' claims to professional justification during the 1890s. The same pressures that induced ambitious practitioners to expand their services then also compelled them to promote their services to advertisers, in part to compete with each other and other service providers such as publishers and in part to legitimate their occupation. Perhaps because of the novelty of these creative functions, but also because their effectiveness was hard to demonstrate, specialists took to proselytizing their benefits to advertisers with even greater fervor than they had their placement skills. Using advertisements for their individual agencies' services, plus articles and books written for the trade and general presses, they informed the world just how difficult good copywriting was. Obtaining desirable results, therefore, required professional services. As George Rowell wrote in his memoirs, "There is an unsuspected difficulty in preparing advertising matter that will not seem tame and valueless beside the more glowing announcements."

The year 1891 was a watershed in the matter of traditional versus professional copywriting. Reflecting the prevailing ambivalence, fully half of the hints in "Hints on Preparing Advertisements," a lead article by John S. Grey, suggested hiring a professional copywriter. Grey began, "Half a dozen years ago, if a man announced himself as an advertisement writer, he would have been regarded with contempt"; "we find things greatly changed, though, in '91." By then, wrote Grey, "people . . . [recognized] that men on whose work depends the successful or unsuccessful expenditure of hundreds of thousands of dollars per year are at least of as much importance in the world as self-satisfied scribblers on the newspapers." All this notwithstanding, Grey's concluding sentence reminded readers that "a regular weekly perusal of Printers' Ink" should satisfy the needs for advice of the "average country merchant."

George Rowell's ironic position as both an advertising agent and the publisher of Printers' Ink embodied this transitional ambivalence. In 1891, when he hired a full-time copywriter and an illustrator for his agency, he began to advertise its preparation services for those advertisers who wanted "good ad-
vertisements.” A few months after Grey’s article, Rowell announced his expanded services. Instead of competing on rates, “we make it our first business to see that [the advertiser] has a good advertisement; next that it shall go into the papers that are best for his purpose, and have a position where it is likely to be seen . . . and we charge the advertiser for the work that we do.” The advertising men’s basis for professional legitimacy had clearly expanded since Rowell’s early days, and he now offered advertisers two paths: they could seek assistance through *Printers’ Ink* or through his agency. Artemas Ward, himself a prominent copywriter, wrote a regular column of copywriting advice for *Printers’ Ink*. In 1891 he warned advertisers that it was “hard to be original” and cited Rowell’s recent advertisement for *Printers’ Ink* that offered subscribers the same quality of expertise for $2 a year for which John Wanamaker paid John Powers $10,000. Advertisers might therefore avail themselves of the advice in *Printers’ Ink* and save themselves the costs of hiring talent and expertise. In 1891, there was no single, clear path to take for self-promotion, for either advertisers or agents.

By 1893, in contrast, advertising professionals regularly advised that all but the smallest firms “always employ an advertising expert to write and an agent to place” advertisements, as William H. Maher explained. As businesses got larger, their owners could spend less time in advertising and were not likely to develop the “popular way of writing” as successfully as professionals. Others reinforced the notion that keeping up with the times and the trends was “a difficult progression, a restless seeking after new ideas, a constant activity in original thoughts and methods.” Successful plans and purposeful advertisements required ambition and dedication. As the 1890s advanced, calls increased for enhanced originality and individuality. As the number of advertisements grew, along with the efforts put into the messages, creativity became ever more important to attract attention, to distinguish between messages, and to make effective impressions through the use of human interest, sympathetic copy, and psychology. All of this called for professional skills and diligence. H. B. Humphrey of Boston titled a 1900 advertisement “Unbelievers” to refute those businesspeople who “condemn advertising, saying that they have ‘tested’ it and failed to get results”; they had merely “made an experiment, having acted independently instead of employing the services of those experienced and skilled in the work.” He advised advertisers to “repeat the successes, not the failures” and to use competent, successful professionals.

*Profitable Advertising* constantly admonished advertisers to “Avoid Egotism. Consult the Expert.” Even though advertising was still in an “experimental” stage, the “scientific advertising agent” had begun to make the effects of his work more predictable and therefore safer and more profitable for advertisers.
No longer could business owners expect to advertise their own products. "The careers of such successful men as Barnum, Hood, Ayer, and a number of other large advertisers who began in a small way, have entered too largely into the beginners' dreams of the future." These were men of "genius," whereas the "average experimental advertiser is not." Nonetheless, Herbert Casson, an efficiency expert, explained in 1911 that advertising was still "so young and immature an art that many men believe they can write their own advertisements. So they can. So could men make their own boots . . . before factories . . . were invented." Since then, however, Casson wrote, "professional ways of doing these things . . . have proved to be so much better that the every-man-for-himself method has been abandoned." Only the professional copywriter could serve the interests of the advertiser and produce the most efficient and effective advertisements.

Charles Austin Bates expressed his excitement at finding greater possibilities for worthwhile copywriting the more he did of it. At the same time, he declared his reluctance to work for clients who thought of advertising as "an exasperating but necessary evil"; his work succeeded where others' had not, and he expected clients to appreciate that "fact." He also pointed out that people turn to lawyers or doctors because of their preparation and knowledge. He had been a "student of advertising for ten years . . . All of my business life has been spent in the way best adapted to fit me for my present business." With no pretense at modesty, Bates explained at length how his professionalism could save his clients' time and money. As discussed in chapter 7, he projected his "egotism pure and simple" as the best strategy for building clients' confidence in his services.

As the importance of creative work grew through the 1890s, advertising practitioners and their advocates began to minimize the importance of placing advertisements in justifying their compensation and professional status. A typical article of the late 1890s asserted that the advertising business existed "because men want help in their advertising" less for the "clerical service" of buying space and more for the "vital thing" of copy. The "agent of the future will sell brains, not merchandise. . . . He will be a counselor, an advertising adviser, just as other men are now medical advisers and legal advisers." Accordingly, Bates began a column in 1900 by indicating that the "mere placing of advertisements in a given list of papers is out of my line," for the "work of placing and checking advertisements is a clerical operation, requiring no particular ability." He did, however, also claim to obtain space at rates as low as anyone could, but at the same time charged more than mere space sellers because he gave more and better services: "The plans, and the copy, and the publications chosen are infinitely more important than the cost of the space." He compared
buying his services with buying those of an architect, lawyer, "or any other professional man."

The egotistical tone of the advertising professionals drew criticism, especially since these newly self-proclaimed specialists critiqued the egotism of advertisers so vigorously; they responded with even more self-promotion. An article in *Printers' Ink* defended against the “fad to sneer at the advertisement writers individually and as a class” with the assessment that most of the critics came “from insignificant sources.” More important, however, the effectiveness of the professionals’ work was demonstrated by the “fact that almost all successful advertisers employ advertisement writers, either in their own establishments, or occasionally, as they may need outside assistance.” This proved “rather conclusively” that “the profession is not a useless one.” The charge of egotism, moreover, could be applied to all advertisements by their nature. Why should people be in business if they did not believe in the superiority of their goods or services? “If it were not for egotism in the world, there would be no progress in any line.”

This proselytizing for specialized professional status based on the preparation of advertisements continued well into the twentieth century. After 1900, specific advice on copywriting in the trade journals was increasingly directed to practitioners, rather than advertisers, whereas advice to advertisers instead told them how to work with specialists and how to judge the advertisements prepared for them. Early in the century, Seth Brown wrote that buying advertising “includes buying space and brains.” It required as much care and expertise as legal work and therefore as much competent professionalism. Yet business persons who would hire the most high-priced lawyer they could afford without questioning the rates still considered it astute business practice to bargain with and challenge the advertising professional. But Brown warned: “Buy space by the inch, where you can buy it cheapest. Advertising can’t be bought by the pound. You can’t buy brains as you do hay.”

*Searching for Standards through Science, Education, and Organization*

System, efficiency, and science entered the practitioners’ discourse early on to assure advertisers and the public that advertising costs and commissions did not waste advertisers’ and consumers’ resources. Many individuals, as well as journals and trade associations, consistently pledged their intentions to avoid inefficiencies due to poor judgment, lack of information, or conflicts of interest. As early as 1849, Volney B. Palmer addressed these concerns, promoting his method of “Systematic Advertising” for the achievement of the most ef-
fective trade on behalf of advertisers. Through that century, one sort of system or another surfaced constantly in the literature and practice of space-brokering agents. As specialists began to take on creative services, they continued to search for and promote their own feedback devices.

By the turn of the century, science had become, even more than now, a word with which to conjure respectability and authority. Advertising's advocates used and debated the concept of science loosely, often using the term interchangeably with system or technique when referring to the search for guidelines by which to raise their effectiveness and efficiency. Some sought to exploit the positive connotations of science among progressive people. For others, science represented a distraction or even a danger that diminished the value of their intuition and experience. For the most part, in the context of rapid and profound changes in business as well as in social and cultural settings, "laws" that might help to govern behavior as well as provide understandings attracted mainstream thinkers in all fields. In 1904, N. W. Ayer & Son expressed the sense in which most practitioners conceived of advertising as a science—a sense that offered them a guide to pragmatic behavior, a discourse of self-promotion, and a source of professional prestige. "Advertising today is a science requiring as deep thought, as great knowledge, as wide experience, as painstaking and conscientious work as any other science or business known to mankind. Its success depends, not upon thoughtless surface work, but upon a careful study of prevailing conditions and of a knowledge of the business as well as of human nature." This usage simply borrowed the term to represent the diligence and learning from experience required for competent advertising.

In order to participate fully in progress, advertising practitioners and other progressive businesspeople believed that they had to take on modern business practices and attitudes. In the early 1890s, it was quite possible for a respected leader in the field like Fowler to call upon the powers of science without initiating a debate on the relative merits of science and intuition, or art. In fact, he called both sides of the coin in fast succession, as others often did, praising advertising's becoming a science at the same time as it reached "the platform of art." After the turn of the century, however, a debate developed with considerable intensity because the question—advertising as art or as science—took on policy implications regarding educational and organizational goals for the profession. Many of the practitioners who had begun work before 1890 resisted innovations in education and organization along the lines taken by law and medicine; they held that such a direction entailed positioning their trade as a science to be studied in the abstract, rather than as a business art or skill best learned by experience in the field. Other leading specialists who addressed the matter head on, such as Earnest Elmo Calkins, Claude C. Hopkins, and
Truman A. De Weese, argued on the one hand for a variety of balances between intuition and personal experience and, on the other, for the "rational" collection and evaluation of information and experimentation.

Quite a number of activists strongly advocated allying advertising practice with a formal sense of science. Psychologist Henry Foster Adams believed "it is possible to measure the development of any industry by the number of scientific laws which are applied by it." As always in such arguments, the "real gain" came from "a gain in efficiency" because applying laws to business "eliminates waste of material and of time." 58 George French, a prolific advocate of science as a key to advertising's progress, declared in 1909 that advertising specialists "must be able to justify the faith that is in them by other evidence than that of their works." Instead, "they must know how to apply advertising so that they may not waste seed and effort trying to get results from stony and thorny ground." This could occur "only through seeking out the scientific bases of advertising, and by a thorough study of them." 59 French argued frequently that "no branch of modern business practice can gain more actual benefit from the teachings and methods of pure science than can advertising." He anticipated that "when the day comes that sees advertisers [i.e., agents] admit that their business is a science, and sees them turn to science for guidance, the business of advertising will advance in efficiency to a point it now touches only in isolated cases." Although French was not satisfied with any psychological research yet conducted, he proposed applying scientific methods and knowledge to advertising "not only [as] the most fertile source of profit, but the most direct and certain fount of power" to attract attention and persuade audiences on behalf of advertisers. He pointed out that major critics of scientific advertising actually advocated many of the same goals of systemizing the field, but refused to call that science. 60

In 1904, an academician wrote a series of articles that typified the enthusiasts' sweeping proposals for application of the various sciences and their concepts to advertising. "A science of advertisement will exist," Conway MacMillan believed, "when there is an orderly and accessible body of information setting forth 1. The structure, 2. The function, 3. The adaptation, 4. The geographical distribution, 5. The classification, and 6. The economic uses of advertisement." MacMillan laid out the subdivisions of this science, borrowing freely from both the physical and social sciences: anatomy addressed the advertisement's structure, physiology the function, ecology the adaptation of advertisement to the environment, and so on. This new science would employ the scientific method, establishing standardized units of measurement and "basal components" that consisted of "commodities, services and personalities." He boldly predicted that the literature of this new science would soon

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equal that of medicine, because “just as a world of living organisms has sprung from the womb of Nature so is a world of advertisement developing through human genius.”

Consistently, the central issue was raising productivity and profits for advertisers and specialists alike through more efficient and effective advertising. All points of the debate focused on this goal. Consequently, while the word science filtered into the trade literature as a source of innovation and validity with varying degrees of appropriateness and success, it was Scientific Management, or whatever various people thought that was, that had the greatest impact on the reality of advertising practices. A near obsession for efficiency affected U.S. businesses near the turn of the century (as it has since) and it spread into much of the popular culture in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Many leaders of the advertising field studied diligently to systematize and standardize their practices and to enhance both their effectiveness and their legitimacy thereby. Francis Wayland Ayer had already brought in an “efficiency engineer” in 1899 to analyze his agency and recommend ways to improve its productivity.

Accordingly, even the astounding successes of the field since the mid-1890s were not enough if they inadequately served the advertising clients’ needs for high productivity. Calkins in fact blamed some of advertising’s problems in the new century on its having developed “too fast.” “This headlong rush,” he wrote, “has produced success rather than efficiency.” The manufacturer was beginning to remedy the situation, Calkins reported, by insisting that advertising “be made more exact.” In like vein, Herbert Casson, an efficiency expert who worked as an advertising consultant, applied in depth the insights of Scientific Management to advertising. In 1911, he published what he believed to be “the first attempt . . . to apply the principles of Scientific Management to the problems of Sales and Advertising.” The large amounts of money spent on advertising pointed to the “tremendous importance of efficiency” in advertising to avoid wasting those expenditures. Advertising specialists who learned the principles of system, strategy, and efficiency could use them to follow the inventors of new technologies in creating “better ways of doing the same old things.” Because advertisers valued effectiveness and efficiency, advertising specialists promised them.

It is not at all certain how deeply or widely these precepts about advertising practices actually changed agency operations directly. Certainly, ideas filtered down through leaders and spokespersons, but applications were less easy to devise and carry out. Lord & Thomas and John Lee Mahin, both major agencies in Chicago, applied what they could, and others, too, struggled with the transition. Stanley Resor, who strongly advocated modernization in the name of
science and efficiency, in 1916 took over the J. Walter Thompson Company when conflicts between his generation and Thompson made retirement attractive to the founder and his remaining cohort. Resor defined science in the sense of system as “organized common sense.” Immediately upon taking control of the agency, he reorganized it according to a division of labor deriving from Scientific Management principles: the goal was to have every employee able “to carry on his part of the work to the very fullest degree of perfection.”

Resor often referred to the agency as a factory operating with people as the machinery. Shortly after he took over the declining agency, he announced to personnel that “the organization, as an organization, has been at fault up to date in not having clearly defined just exactly what the machinery of the organization is.” To achieve the efficiency of a manufacturing plant, he intended to systematize “our machinery and our factory processes.” The next year, he generalized his metaphor, applying it to advertising and selling as a whole. “More and more is the machinery of distribution acting as a machine. It is to the interest of the maker of every good commodity that this be the case.”

For Resor and many others with the new views, progress required acting according to progressive principles.

Still, the traditionalists and progressives debated. Experience in the field had provided the best—the only—means in the nineteenth century for training and selecting advertising specialists. Even commercial artists had no institutional training opportunities per se until the turn of the century. By that time, however, debates raged in the trade press and at trade meetings about how best to provide recruits who could carry the business forward. These debates were intimately linked with the concurrent debates over whether advertising practices could be systematized sufficiently to approach scientific status, because as Lasker, Kennedy, Calkins, and other practitioners recognized about this time, education required system, and a criterion for a true system was its teachability. Moreover, just as specialized skills in law and medicine required a qualifying formal education, those who most sought to develop the advertising field toward those pinnacles of professionalism sought also to found formalized educational programs through a variety of institutions, including universities and business schools.

Traditionalists, by contrast, believed that all formal education, beyond the basics of literacy and numeracy, was irrelevant, even harmful, in the “real” and very particularistic world of business. Neither they, nor even those reformers promoting formalized education, as it turned out, hired graduates solely on the basis of their scholarship. Indeed part of the debates focused on just what a business education, and specifically an advertising education, entailed. Colleges, universities, and business schools started up courses beginning in the
first decade of the century, expanding these in the coming years. That some of the courses grew out of journalism programs and others out of business programs reflected profoundly different views of what practicing advertising was all about, not to mention what it meant to educate someone for it; this dichotomy still holds at the end of the century. Some programs, especially within the leagues of correspondence schools and night schools, took advantage of the ambitions of students more hopeful than realistic about the likelihood of their finding careers with their unstandardized learning from books. The growing numbers of courses and students evinced the field's increasing favor among the ambitious, but they also fueled the arguments of the traditionalists when graduates were unemployable. Although some cheered the schools' "mission of sending into this mass of conservatism a leaven of young and energetic brain matter that will stir it all into activity," others warned that this would cost the field its common sense.68

Central to the debates about science and education were questions of standards and who should set them. Many explained the problem after 1900 as a lack of standards in the field. Profitable Advertising and most advocates, but not all, argued that professional organizations offered the best solution for this problem, just as they had for law and medicine.69 Leaders of the early generations of practitioners, like F. Wayland Ayer, believed that reforms should, and could, be enacted only by individuals, on moral and practical grounds. Despite others' great efforts to organize advertising specialists, no permanent or reasonably effective association could address the many questions of standards and prestige until the formation, in 1917, and subsequent solidification of the American Association of Advertising Agencies. However, neither that organization nor any other could resolve the divisive issues related to standards in education.

A series of questions held constant through the debates on the merits and directions of professionalization. These included how best to raise specialists' credibility to their clients, how to raise their public esteem, and how to raise their self-esteem. These concerns led quite logically to questions about how best to raise standards and performance, in terms of both ethics and results. These latter issues tied into education and association because they entailed recruiting, training, and screening new practitioners. Because there were more answers to these questions than leaders and organizers could reconcile, no resolutions were institutionalized during this transition period, between 1890 and 1917. In the meantime, specialized service stood out as the dominant and recurring theme in advertising agents' self-advocacy. It provided a strong focal point of agreement around which practitioners could finally organize, but only after it had begun to acquire legitimacy in the larger business and public cul-
tured. As H. B. Humphrey explained to manufacturers, "the well-equipped agency is an assembly of specialists," and since "study and practice along a special line bring better results than diversified effort; so the need for the agency will always exist."\(^{70}\)

**Success by Serving the Successes of Others**

Volney B. Palmer set the basis on which advertising practitioners defended and justified their work. This owed less to Palmer’s prescience than to his recognition that his success completely depended on serving others’ needs. In 1850, Palmer stated that his “extensive connections in business, his experience and practical knowledge, his long-established agency for the best newspapers in every part of the United States, and his systematic manner of advertising to the greatest possible benefit of the advertisers, whether on a large or small scale, have rendered his offices . . . highly beneficial to the public and not unprofitable to himself.”\(^{71}\) The material evidence that he had served well—namely, his multiple offices and his own profit—fit the era’s criteria. Just as nineteenth-century industrialists used the evidences of their successes as evidence for the quality of their products, advertising practitioners routinely used their own successes as agents for others to demonstrate the value of their services.

Initially, advertising agents had balanced dual loyalties as intermediaries between publishers and advertisers. In serving two types of businesses throughout their first half century, advertising specialists often argued for the importance and merits of their services to both. Yet conflicts of interest accompanied this dual agency. If agents maximized revenues to publishers and thereby their own revenues through commissions, they did so at the expense of the advertisers. On the other hand, if advertisers were dissatisfied with their costs relative to their gains, both agents and publishers lost revenues in the long run. Francis Wayland Ayer and George P. Rowell were the first to publish the professional and personal risks of mixed loyalties to publishers and advertisers. Their conversions led the field and, by the 1890s, most advertising specialists gave advertisers their primary loyalties, the rest gradually identifying themselves as newspaper or magazine agents. Even so, in whichever of the two directions advertising practitioners faced, service to each formed the bases for justifying their occupation.

**Serving Publishers’ Successes**

The close, if not always congenial, relationships between advertising agents and the commissionable media—newspapers, journals, and magazines—were
often discussed in the advertising trade press. Many of the first generations of agents felt a strong affinity for the press, as did George P. Rowell, who often expressed a more comfortable bond with publishers than with advertisers, although he knew that he must primarily serve the latter. Advertising agents and their trade publications often praised the roles of the press in raising the character of the nation, matching or bettering the fervor of others who declared, as did Carroll Wright, that the “development of the printing and auxiliary industries is a true index to the progress of civilization and the advance in all arts and manufacturers.” Rowell, like many other advertising agents, gave the periodical press a good deal of credit for that broad progress. Without the press “we should immediately fall back to a level with those who lived in the ages of ignorance and despotism. ’Tis only through this agency that we are better than they and enjoy liberties and privileges of which they never dreamed.” Moreover, “business would come to a stand-still, markets be unsteady; stocks unobtainable at any fixed value, and everything else uncertain and fluctuating.” Therefore, “no man, be he ever so shrewd and intelligent, can hope to succeed in any avocation without thoroughly and energetically advertising his business through the newspaper.” One writer in Printers’ Ink defended the general press from criticism during the tumultuous mid-1890s by rejecting the notion that it needed defense. “It has thoroughly vindicated itself as a force that is at once both a security and an inspiration for all the interests of material prosperity and moral welfare and progress.”

In part, these tributes to the press in the advertising literature may have flowed from a deliberate concern to appease publishers, on whose favor and commissions the agencies depended. On the other hand, the motivation could have derived from the advertising practitioners’ desire to take some measure of vicarious credit for the contributions to progress with which they accredited the press. To warrant this connection, the practitioners often articulated their beliefs that they shared important interests with publishers. Through their frequent contentions that publishers should grant bona fide agents exclusive rights to commissions, the advertising professionals reminded publishers of the mutuality of their interests. “The advertiser who starts out under the guidance of a competent agency is likely to spend his money more judiciously, and as a consequence, to invest more money in the newspapers eventually than he who trusts to his untrained judgment.” The advertising agent’s professional standards also inclined him to expect publishers’ appreciativeness for his services. Rowell wrote that the unreasonable occurrences sometimes complained of by publishers were never “invented” by the advertising agent, who “likes to have the conditions simple, so that the work will go smoothly, and the bill may be paid in full.”

Modernity and Success
Conversely, just as Rowell once gave credit to revenues from patent medicines for saving the life of the New York Herald in its early days, advertising agents frequently credited advertising for publishers' profits. Printing a speech given to the Sphinx Club of New York, Printers' Ink declared that advertising "is the breath of life to the trade journal" because its high publication costs required the income additional to subscriptions. The Inland Printer often reminded its readers, once in a rhyme that belied the seriousness of the assertion, that "Success depends alone upon the advertising man"—by whom they meant the papers' employee who compiled and solicited advertising. "He works more men and hours than the other all combined;/To him belongs the victor's crown—this brave catch-as-catch-can,/Keen, money-getting, business-booming advertising man." Editors and all others "were mere assistants." Although this verse put things both lightly and extremely, the point was clear. J. Walter Thompson, the agent who had once controlled most national magazine advertising, wrote in 1908 that the American magazine was "a national institution." Its "progressive" and "magnificent monument to American enterprise, American genius, and American skill," however, "would be impossible without the advertising section." In the thick of World War I, Printers' Ink assured its readers that Congress "could hardly declare general advertising non-essential without making the same interdiction of local and retail publicity," because eliminating all these would destroy the press and "hurl the country back at one swoop into the dark ages," making both democracy and the war effort impossible.

Accordingly, when advertising practitioners formed associations, with or without publishers, these invariably lobbied publishers to recognize their common goals of maximizing advertising revenues by maximizing advertisers' long-term confidence. An organizer of the American Advertising Agents' Association in 1900 explained that the group did not "expect to revolutionize the advertising agency business, but merely desired by means of this organization to help each other and the publishers with whom we are so closely allied." Cooperation between agencies and publishers appeared to many practitioners essential to improving the business overall. With or without that cooperation, advertising agents wanted recognition for their contributions to the publishers' profits and accomplishments.

**Serving Advertisers' Successes**

Advertising agents had never doubted the efficacy of advertisements as selling devices. Their confidence that good commercial messages, placed well and placed frequently, could elicit the desired responses at reasonable cost formed
the core of their self-advocacy as individuals and as a trade. Typically, practitioners solicited accounts by promoting both advertising’s efficacy generally as well as their own services. Early on, George Rowell asserted that the “importance of advertising is undisputed and universally admitted. The extent to which it is carried proves beyond doubt its usefulness, and advantages. The man who advertises once is sure to do so again. . . . It opens the most direct road to success and offers equal inducements to all parties.” In his memoirs almost four decades later, Rowell celebrated a multitude of fortunes made through advertising, including patent-medicine sellers, publishers, merchants, and manufacturers, as he had in the intervening decades.

Assuming advertisements’ “business-building” powers, practitioners claimed to contribute to the success of any business that used their services. They credited advertising even for successes not mediated by an agent. The first issue of Printers’ Ink in 1888 expressed this confidence on a grand scale. One article credited the first English advertisement for a commercial product with initiating the popularity of tea in England. A second article compared the rebuilding of London and Chicago after their great fires: because the London fire occurred in 1666, the city’s businessmen could not benefit from the “prodigious” advertising opportunities available to their counterparts in Chicago in 1871; hence, London rebuilt more slowly—or so the story went. “A good advertisement is the doctor of business. When a business is good you will need it to keep healthy, and when it is poor, you must have it to invigorate it,” explained Rowell in 1891. Anecdotes and analyses in the trade literature constantly expressed pride, along with an element of pragmatic self-promotion, in the many fortunes they could in any measure attribute to their efforts. S. M. Pettengill, for instance, demonstrated Volney B. Palmer’s contributions to the business world by citing some of the many merchants who had increased their profits because his mentor had convinced them to advertise. Rowell, in turn, praised Pettengill for having placed advertisements for even more successful advertisers, including patent-medicine mogul Dr. J. H. Schenck and Robert Bonner, publisher of the New York Ledger. Many patent-medicine successes were so spectacular that the general press celebrated them until Progressive reformers discredited such products and practices. The New York Times highlighted some of these under the headline “In Printer’s Ink the Secret: Vast Fortunes made by the Patent-Medicine Kings”; as discussed earlier, the article concluded that “a pot of printer’s ink is better than the greatest gold mine.”

Charles Austin Bates, like his peers before 1900, rated advertisements and the entire occupation primarily by success in selling and making profits. “Americans are the best and most successful advertisers in the world. They spend more money for advertising than any other nation, and they make more
money out of it."\textsuperscript{85} For Bates, this burgeoning enterprise required no other justification. An 1896 advertisement for Rowell's agency reinforced this promise of advertising's immediate benefits by showing a goddess of justice weighing the small cost of an advertisement against bags of money, spilling over in their abundance, on "the results" side of a scale. The first line of type read: "Successful advertising means getting back more money that is paid out."\textsuperscript{86} Every practitioner held out this same lure in some form, as when the pioneer copywriter John E. Powers reminded his fellows that clients "are in business for a profit; we mustn't lose sight of that."\textsuperscript{87}

The bicycle industry afforded analysts an attractive illustration of advertising's powerful impact in helping to build a new and quite respectable industry. Advertising had served bicycle manufacturers first in pioneering the safety bicycle—"educating the public to the beauties and pleasures of cycling"—and then in competition between makers. Colonel Albert A. Pope introduced the safety bicycle with extensive advertising, generating a fad in the 1890s and making his fortune. In this he was assisted by "the best artists, the best writers," including Nathaniel Fowler, and the most expensive advertising media in and outside of periodicals. Pope and others credited his advertising with "the great popularity bicycling has to-day—in the tremendous growth the bicycling business has witnessed." By 1897, his firm produced six hundred bicycles daily and spent more than $500,000 annually to advertise them.\textsuperscript{88}

The same iconography of success—the factories and machines—that induced manufacturers and advertising agents alike to portray their facilities in their advertisements inspired an 1892 editorial in \textit{Profitable Advertising} the "Monuments of Success in Advertising that Stand in Every City." The journal proclaimed that these "great marts of retail trade, the vast structures, and mills, and factories" were "irrefutable demonstration of the money, the success, the prosperity that are open to those who advertise." On the other hand, "small buildings, small stores, offices up four flights-of-stairs, in a dingy room, in charge of a half-starved clerk; in rapidly diminishing business . . . can be found the irrefutable demonstration that there is no avenue to success in these days except that of advertising." Such successes resulted from the national distribution of products "which except for advertising, would never have attained more than a limited local sale."\textsuperscript{89}

Often encouragements and cautions against failing to advertise, or advertising carelessly, unsystematically, or unprofessionally, marched side by side. Thus "men that know how to advertise never fail to receive abundant returns," whereas "80 per cent of the business firms in this country that fail are those that never advertise." Failures included "old-timers, slow-goers, men of the back-number genus," who rejected advertising as "wholly valueless to
themselves” and who “rely on their past record, their long standing, and antiquated signboards. But in this bustling, hustling, rustling age of sharp competition and quick bargains, it won’t do to rely too much on prestige or pedigree. If failing to keep pace by advertising doomed a business, it was also true that “wild and illegitimate methods which promise quick riches . . . ultimately lead to failure and oblivion.” Steadily practicing sound advertising, in contrast, would bring the ambitious “safely and surely to Success.” In this light, advertising appeared a solid, essential business activity.

In all such claims for their importance to clients’ successes, as in the praises for professional specialization cited earlier, advertising practitioners argued for their individual and collective worth. They rarely explored other factors, such as demographic changes, new communication technologies, competitors’ failures, or whims, which might have explained advertisers’ successes. If their clients succeeded, they had succeeded. If their clients’ successes had merit, so did theirs. A refinement of this genre of claim increasingly supplemented it, focusing on service as an end in itself worthy of professional pursuit; profits alone satisfied less as justification, although they defined success. As Calkins asserted in 1915, by professionalizing, by “studying the underlying problems of advertising,” the specialist had “qualified as a responsible adviser to his clients. The advertiser, feeling this new force in advertising, gets a new confidence, is more wary in the selection of his advertising agent, and at the same time more trusting when he has selected him.” This new dynamic “must ultimately result in removing much of the uncertainty that exists both in the state of mind of the advertiser and in the actual results obtained.” The J. Walter Thompson agency promoted its agents’ services after 1900 by saying that they would be “almost as much your representative as if he were actually in your employ. He will become for the time being an additional and valuable part of your business machinery, while remaining a part of ours and participating in its constant impetus.” The Thompson Method brought “inevitable success.”

Touting advertising service as the key to professional legitimacy at the turn of the century fit into wider changes in business practices and mainstream attitudes. In the nineteenth century, the success and esteem of business owners and managers most often derived from their acumen in developing and using innovative technologies or financial tools to produce goods or to build communication and transportation networks; at least, the popular ethos ascribed to that generalization. To keep public favor, great successes also required philanthropy, or stewardship, as Carnegie called the wealthy classes’ control over material assets. In the early decades of the twentieth century, however, service to the community joined the acceptable justifications for success. This change occurred in part because managers of productive wealth seldom owned it after
1900, because Progressive era reformers vigorously critiqued the notion of stewardship, and because managers became an important new class in need of legitimation. The Chicago businessmen who founded the Rotary Club in 1905 captured the mix of social and material ambitions in this new ethos by inventing a “service club” that also addressed businessmen’s social and business needs. In the 1920s, they adopted the slogan “He Profits Most Who Serves Best.” The increasing complexities of doing business (just as of living in cities) also called for new and expanded services to facilitate operations. Working in this context, advertising practitioners had recognized all along that service was their only commodity, and therefore they prefigured the overall shift from production and stewardship to service as publicized justifications for business activities and success. They were, in function as well as title, agents, and after the general shift in attitudes, they could place some pride in serving. Accordingly, in 1913, the Associated Advertising Clubs of America made public service their declared goal as part of their quest for professional stature. As one agent described his firm, “The difference is service—The Power Service for Advertisers is enthusiastic, personal service that vitalizes and animates every separate and distinct form of effort and welds them all into a perfect business-bringing chain.”

In 1910, the Inland Printer reprinted an article from Harper’s Weekly stating that the advertising solicitor “wants to succeed, by making others succeed.” More than that, this was the only way to succeed. By the 1917 formation of the Association of American Advertising Agencies, service to clients had become the expressed focal point of professional purpose. Even so, and even among those pursuing professional cooperation, practitioners widely disagreed on what service should entail. But they generally did agree that setting standards for service was a high professional priority. In 1918, therefore, the association adopted a definition of service prepared at the J. Walter Thompson agency shortly after its reorganization under Stanley Resor. According to this statement, those “on whom we must depend for our business,” both media and advertisers, “have a right to demand” such a standardized service.

Advertising specialists initially defined their profession’s progress and successes pragmatically, according to individual financial accomplishments, including their own. When the field’s champions began to describe their contributions to the business community explicitly and deliberately as service to clients, they also began to develop another category of legitimation: they began to reinterpret the range of advertising’s impact far beyond individual business successes. It would now encompass the nation’s economy, national industry, and prosperity. This was progress writ large.