

Advertising Design

By Nikki Elert



Although advertising may seem like a relatively recent endeavor, promoting goods and services available for sale, trade or barter occurred even in ancient Egypt, where sale announcements and advertising posters appeared on papyrus. Excavations at the ancient Roman city of Pompeii revealed walls covered in graffiti scratched into the surfaces, an apparently socially acceptable form of communication that included political campaign ads. The earliest evidence of printed advertising, however, comes from China during the Song dynasty (960-1279): A bronze printing plate promoting a needle shop even incorporates a rabbit logo. A number of printing innovations took place in China, including moveable type and printing presses, predating Johannes Gutenberg's press, which he began using commercially in Germany in 1450.

Until that time, advertising in Europe, in addition to signage, often took the form of oral promotion via town criers and the use of trademarks on crafted items. Gutenberg's press allowed for messages to reach not only broader audiences but also to reach them more easily, making its use for advertising ideal, particularly for text-heavy descriptions of products and directions to shops. The advent of newspapers and magazines further encouraged sellers to promote their products and services, giving rise to mass media advertising.

Technological advances that allowed for the use of color in printing spurred additional creativity in advertising design, and graphics became much more prominent. The late 19th century French artist Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec produced exciting and colorful advertising posters that relied almost entirely on visual images to promote various performers and venues in Paris. In early 20th century Russia, particularly after the Russian Revolution, posters touting everything from socialism to the state-run airline to beer could be found on any available surface. Strong typography and diagonal lines coupled with a limited palette of primarily black, red, and off-white were hallmarks of the constructivist design style that developed in Russia at this time. Constructivism also took advantage of advances in photography that made the medium more affordable and photomontages were incorporated into poster designs.

Developments in technology continued to push advertising into new realms in the 20th century. Eventually, photographs replaced illustrations altogether in ads, and the rise of television meant that print advertising often played a supporting role. Advertising agencies developed ad campaigns that coordinated messages across various media, ensuring consistency in branding strategy. While backlash against the advertising industry for unethical practices has occasionally occurred, there is no doubt that advertising plays a vital role in our lives, imparting information and furthering popular culture. The internet has in some ways now brought advertising full circle, where individuals with an online presence working as influencers and brand ambassadors have become the town criers of the digital age.

Sources

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