

Communication Gear Shift

Ralph J. Ballew

John E. Culp

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Abstract

At 8:30 A.M. the telephone rang. It was the signal that telephone communication had been established between the international trainees at TVA and Gardner Advertising Co., St. Louis.

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RALPH J. BALLEW and JOHN E. CULP

AT 8:30 A.M. THE TELEPHONE rang. It was the signal that telephone communication had been established between the international trainees at TVA and Gardner Advertising Co., St. Louis. On the other end of the line was Elmer J. Dapron, Vice-President of Gardner who specializes in agricultural advertising accounts.

What followed was a 1½-hour presentation by Dapron on advertising, using a portable Telephone Conference Unit.* Several color slides of Dapron were shown to help break the distance barrier and make the presentation more personal. An instructor operated an overhead projector and listed major items on the chalkboard as they were discussed. The last half-hour was devoted to questions and answers.

The session climaxed a week-long advertising and promotion presentation by TVA's Educational and Communications Services Unit (E+CS). One final day would be spent with trainees reporting on solutions to special advertising and promotion problems assigned to them at the beginning of the course.

During the week the trainees received information in the following areas: the communications process; techniques of advertising—radio, TV, direct mail, newspapers, magazines, billboards, cinema, point-of-sales, etc.; the audience, the message, and the media; advertising budget workshop; advertising plan worksheet; and visits to local radio, TV, and daily newspapers.

* The Portable Telephone Conference Unit consists of a trimline telephone connected to an amplifier unit. Two portable extension telephones or microphones are connected with the unit for two-way group communication. The unit is rented from the telephone company for \$25 per month.

Other features of the eight-week course included detailed discussions of marketing concepts, market planning, product management, fertilizer education, organizing and managing a sales organization, financial management, and field trips to fertilizer industry places of business.

Specialists from TVA's National Fertilizer Development Center at Muscle Shoals, Alabama, have been conducting fertilizer-related projects for developing countries for the past decade. The knowledge and experience gained in domestic programs have propelled the Center into international prominence in fertilizer expertise. Cooperating with USAID, more than 45 technical teams have worked in 23 developing countries on fertilizer production and marketing needs. TVA has also concentrated on teaching formal production-oriented fertilizer courses at the Center. About 200 students from 23 countries have participated.

Marketing Becoming Important

In recent years, many developing countries have built their own plants and are producing chemical fertilizers. This has created an overall need in many countries for marketing information—getting the fertilizer used. It brought additional course emphasis by TVA oriented to fertilizer marketing.

The major change in direction for the E+CS staff, from basic instruction in communication principles to the more persuasive form of communication—advertising and promotion—started over a year ago. Shifting gears into this field required much literature study and consultation with advertising experts. For basic information, the staff turned to the Dartnell series of books on advertising and promotion. Contacts were made with Gardner in St. Louis, E. H. Brown Advertising Agency in Chicago, and SSC + B-Lintas World Wide Advertising Service in New York. Visits were made with these groups to discuss basic advertising and promotion principles.

Teaching advertising and promotion is only part of the overall responsibility in the subject assigned to the E+CS Unit by the International Staff. The most far-reaching venture in teaching advertising is the preparation of a teaching manual on advertising and promotion for use in developing countries. This manual will be used by TVA teams on foreign teaching assignments in fertilizer marketing.

Again, experts in the advertising industry—including Dapron—helped provide background information useful in producing the manual. The book consists of the following sections: Communication in Theory and Practice; Philosophy of Advertising; Trademarks and Tradenames; Packaging and Advertising; the Role of Advertising Agencies; Developing a Marketing Plan; Techniques of Advertising; Setting Campaign Objectives; Identifying the Audience; Developing the Message; Selecting the Media; Launching the Campaign and Measuring Results. One full section is devoted to advertising problem solving. Mythical advertising problems are posed and an answer is presented—complete with examples of copy, visuals, media.