



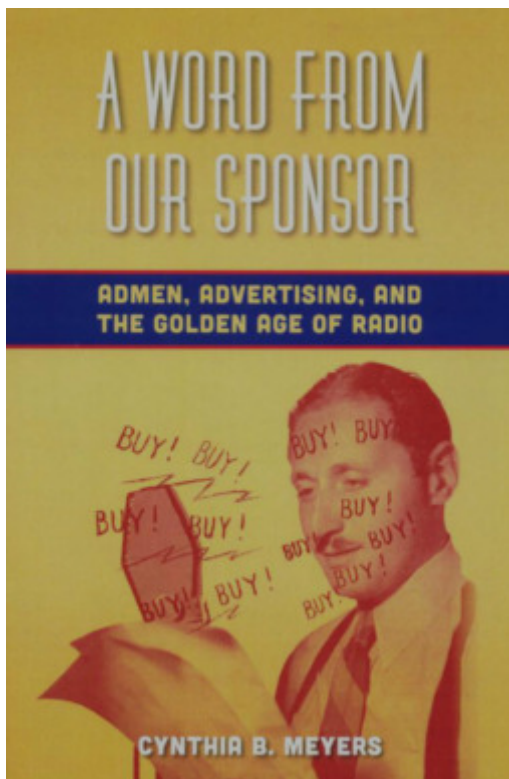
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DAILY NEWS

'A Word from Our Sponsor' explores world of advertising, communication

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"A Word from Our Sponsor: Admen, Advertising, and the Golden Age of Radio" by Cynthia B. Meyers. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2014, 391 pages, \$32.00.



Jack Benny: "Oh, come on in, Dennis. I'll be with you in a minute. I'm calling Mr. Duffy of Batten Barton Durstine & Osborn, my advertising agency."

Dennis Day: "Why do you need *them*?"

Jack Benny: "Well, Dennis. They put on my program for Lucky Strike. They handle all the publicity, the exploitation, the advertising, the commercials. They hire the musicians, the writers, the actors. They do *everything!*"

Dennis Day: (after a beat of silence) "Why do they need *you*?"

So begins "A Word from Our Sponsor: Admen, Advertising, and the Golden Age of Radio," the new book by Cynthia B. Meyers, a faculty member in the Department of Communication at the College of Mount Saint Vincent in New York City. The author received her Ph.D. in Radio-Television-Film from the University of Texas at Austin; she also has degrees from Hunter

College and Ohio University. This is her first book, although she is the author of 17 papers on the subject matter which forms the core of this latest literary effort.

Nearly a hundred years after its introduction on a large scale, it is easy to forget the preeminent place the development of wireless communication occupies in our history; the ability to instantaneously reach a majority of the population was a game changer of the first order.

"NBC's chief rival, the Columbia Broadcasting System, founded in 1927, reshaped the commercial broadcasting business model," Meyers observes in the second chapter. "Originally formed by a music recording company concerned that radio's distribution of free music would destroy the recording business, it was bought in 1927 by William Paley, the son of a cigar

advertiser, who noticed that when the Paleys advertised La Palina cigars on the radio, their sales rose dramatically.

“Paley entered broadcast networking not to provide a high-minded public service but to sell things. By the late 1920s, the linkage of stations into networks that could efficiently share programming and connect advertisers with national audiences provided the infrastructure for radio’s emergence as a national medium of American popular culture. Amid a booming economy, urbanization, modernization, and a growing consumerism that was reshaping daily life, radio quickly found a place in American homes that were simultaneously adopting other technologies, such as refrigerators, washing machines, and private automobiles.”

Many of the concerns she so eloquently describes seem as applicable in 2014 as they were during the 1920s, ’30s and ’40s. For example, consider the perennial issue of regulatory oversight: “When networks attempted to limit or control advertiser-produced material, they risked offending and possibly losing the source of their revenues, the advertisers,” the author explains in the fourth chapter. “NBC’s method for ensuring appropriate broadcasts was to review scripts at the Continuity Acceptance Department, headed by Janet MacRorie, and to delete from the scripts any potentially offensive references or double entendres in advance of the broadcast.”

Then it was radio; now it’s the Internet and the progeny it continues to spawn on what seems like a daily basis. Although the delivery of content has evolved tremendously over the past few decades, we are still living in a world fundamentally transformed by the introduction of wireless communication technologies. The importance of advertising has only increased with each successive innovation in the mediums that continue to permeate our lives. Marketing has been such a ubiquitous part of our existence over the last century it is sometimes easy to forget there was a time when mass consumption played a decidedly less significant role in society. Although advertising in its various forms had been around for millennia, it took the advent of radio to elevate it to its undeniable status as a primary driver of economic activity.

“In the 1920s unending economic growth seemed possible, and the advertising industry appeared to be its motor,” Meyers explains in the third chapter. “By the end of the decade, advertising industry revenues reached a record \$3.4 billion.”

For a while, the sky seemed to be the limit. But as any student of history can attest, and as we have experienced more recently, things tend to change dramatically as time inevitably marches forward. This is especially true when it comes to disruptive technologies.

It is obvious Meyers is an authority on the content about which she writes. Her prose has a characteristically confident flavor; the reader is left with the sense that her narrative is firmly grounded in reality. Older readers will no doubt enjoy the numerous references to radio shows that once dominated water cooler conversations the way TV and YouTube do now. If you want a more comprehensive understanding of how mass marketing came to define our culture, then “A Word from Our Sponsor” is definitely a book you’ll want to pick up. I recommend it highly.

— *Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.*