

## AN ATTEMPT TO MEASURE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF WHITE SPACE IN AN ADVERTISEMENT ON THE BASIS OF ACTUAL SALES

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The psychologist, when he sets out to investigate a problem dealing with advertising, usually devises a method which will not take him out of the laboratory. He can study many problems in this manner quite satisfactorily. He can ascertain which advertisement is most often noticed, which is best remembered, or which seems the most pleasing. All these findings are important, but it is also desirable to determine what kind of advertisement is effective in the promotion of sales. This latter type of investigation is more difficult than the others, since it involves a departure from the artificially simple world of the laboratory and a venture into the real world of business, where it is harder to arrange for satisfactory controls.

The present paper is a report of two attempts to study the effectiveness of white space in an advertisement. In each case various articles, offered for sale by the Kresge Co., were advertised in the local paper of a small city. In each of these cities, there was but one paper, and this had a wide circulation. The sales after the advertising were then compared with the normal sales of these articles at times when they had not been advertised.

TABLE 1  
*The First Experiment*

Product	skin softener	curl set	shaving cream talcum powder	
Cost	10¢	10¢	10¢	10¢
White space in advertisement	18%	37%	67%	not advertised
Normal Sales	10½	13½	14	10½
Sales after advertising	11	16	18	12
Gain <sup>a</sup>	5% <sup>b</sup>	19%	29%	14%

<sup>a</sup> The gain in sales for the entire store was 17%.

<sup>b</sup> This gain is less than that for the store as a whole. However, in view of the small number of sales, no very great significance can be attached to this result.

In the first experiment, three articles were selected to be advertised and a fourth to serve as a control item. The normal sales were determined by averaging the records on the two Saturdays preceding the experiment. The advertisements appeared on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, their positions in the newspaper being rotated. The only significant difference in these advertisements was supposed to be the amount of white space around the copy material. Illustrations were not used, since unless they were of exactly the same degree of agreeableness, they would

introduce an uncontrolled variation into the experiment, and the attempt was made to say the same sort of thing about each article. On Saturday the sales data were again secured. The best laid plans, however, go oft astray, and this experiment failed for the reason that the public did not buy in quantities large enough to make the results reliable. The data are, however, presented in Table 1 in order to make possible a comparison with the data of the second experiment.

The results of the first experiment, in so far as they go, support the theory that white space is effective. The problem was to find some way of increasing the volume of sales, and the obvious solution was to offer articles at a price reduction.

The second experiment was carried on in another city, but also in cooperation with the local Kresge store. Only two articles were employed, selected by the store manager from a list of those which he was authorized to offer at a special price. The normal sales were computed by averaging the records of the Saturday before the experiment and the Saturday three weeks after the experiment, when the articles were sold at normal price. The advertisements were run on Thursday and Friday, the positions in the newspaper being interchanged. On Saturday, when the articles were offered at the reduced price, the sales were again recorded. The data are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2

*The Second Experiment*

Product	salad bowl	men's hose
Normal cost	10¢	10¢ pr.
Sale price	2 for 15¢ limit 4	2 pr. for 15¢ limit 4 pr.
White space in advertisement	20%	70%
Normal sales	32	54
Sales after advertising	112	221
Gain *	250%	309%

\* The gain for the entire store was 9%.

In Table 2 the enormously greater effectiveness of the price reduction is illustrated. The results, which are offered merely as part of the evidence bearing on the case, again support the view that white space is advantageous, and this finding is in agreement with previous experimentation not based upon the criterion of actual sales.