

## **Bonus #5: What Bernice Taught Me About Advertising**

Bernice Fitz-Gibbon revolutionized department store advertising back in the 1940s and 1950s. She invented the famous slogan "Nobody but nobody undersells Gimbels" for Gimbels department store. She also created the slogan "It's Smart to Be Thrifty" for Macy's. Her ideas and copywriting helped both stores skyrocket sales. She was a genius.

Bernice is long gone, but she wrote a wonderful book back in 1951 revealing her story and her ideas. It was titled "*Macy's, Gimbels, and Me.*" Bernice lives and breathes in that book. I call her "Bernice" right now because I feel I know her. All I really know is what she told me in her book. I thought I would pay homage to her and revisit some of her ideas.

Here goes:

**1. "A good headline should create a disturbance."** Bernice wasn't afraid to scare people to get their attention. She once wrote an ad for children's shoes that scared the hell out of parents. The ad said that wearing the wrong shoes deformed children's feet. Shoes sold.

**2. "Use short simple blunt words."** Bernice told me, "Stylists should learn that 'begin' is better than 'commence' and that 'happen' is better than 'transpire' and that 'sleep' is better than 'slumber' and that 'bloody' is better than 'sanguinary.'" How true.

**3. "Food interests all women."** Bernice was writing in the 1950s, and was heavily focused on women as the housekeeper. She learned that women could never get enough food recipes. You could get attention for any product by tying it to food. Today she would see that men AND women are equally interested in recipes. She once wrote an ad that said a new pie "trembled as it was placed on the table." People packed the restaurant, asking to see "the pie that trembles."

**4. "You don't have to be brilliant to write a good ad."** Bernice said a little research can pay off in gold. She discovered that the human body has 210 bones. She wrote an ad for curved corsets that read: "There are 210 bones in the human body and ALL of them are curved." Sales soared.

**5. "There are four rules for a good slogan."**

Here they are:

- a. It should contain five to seven words.
- b. It should have a swinging rhythm.
- c. It should have the name of something that will identify the product.
- d. It should promote a universal truth and not just be self-serving.

**6. "There are four ways to make ads more enticing."**

Here they are:

- a. Get urgency into your message.
- b. Be specific---don't generalize.
- c. Be easy, relaxed, informal.
- d. Be FRIENDLY.

**7. "Sometimes the smartest thing you can do is the opposite."** Once the department store was selling dolls that could walk, talk, burp and do everything but scrub the sink. Bernice advised the company to go against the trend, and to create a an

old-fashioned doll. She wrote in her ad: "... this is not the latest mechanical jerk in the doll business. She is simply ... meant to be loved." They sold hundreds of this "new" doll.

Women aren't always appreciated for their contributions to any field, let alone marketing. Yet I've read of many, and met many, who are as brilliant as the more famous men in the same profession. Bernice Fitz-Gibbon is one of the greatest. She belongs in the same category as John Caples and David Ogilvy. I miss her.