

One Stop Shopping – 1817 Style

by Kevin A. Sives

If you think that full page newspaper advertisements and “full service shopping” are recent inventions, then you are mistaken. One of the pioneers in marketing used these attention grabbing devices more than 180 years ago. Reading one of the full page advertisements from yesteryear gives you a unique glimpse back in time.

“Approved Family medicines, which are celebrated for the cure of most diseases to which the human body is liable, prepared only by the sole proprietor, T.W.DYOTT, M.D., Grandson of the late celebrated Dr. Robertson, of Edinburgh, and for sale in Philadelphia, only at the proprietor's wholesale and retail drug and family medicine warehouse, north-east corner of Second and Race streets, and by retail of his agents throughout the United States”.

Thus begins a full page of advertising in the Wednesday morning edition of “*The American and Mercantile Advertiser*”, printed in Philadelphia on September 3, 1817.

Dr. Thomas W. Dyott, one of America's early marketers, took a fledgling boot blackening operation and turned it into one of the largest drug, medicine, and glass manufacturing operations in the United States during the first half of the 19th Century. Dyott didn't perform this miracle overnight, nor did he keep his operation from collapsing in 1838, but what he created in the space of less than 30 years is a model of manufacturing, marketing, and distribution which is still amazing today. And the cornerstone of his empire building was his heavy reliance upon advertising.

Back before the passage of The Pure Food and Drug Act, manufacturers could pretty well claim any benefit from their products, without the threat of government repercussions. Outrageous claims ran rampant, with everyone trying to out hype the competitor. Dr. Dyott jumped into the fray early, and kept up with the best of them.

Appearing as separate advertisements one after the other, on the same page, Dyott promotes no less than 13 different products, each with its own description, and price. A typical example of one of his shorter ads reads,

“Dr. Robertson's Celebrated Gout and Rheumatic Drops, price two dollars. A safe and effectual cure for the gout, rheumatism, lumbago, stone and gravel, swelling and weakness of joints, sprains, bruises, and all kinds of green wounds, the cramp, pains in the head, face and body, stiffness in the neck, chilblains, frozen limbs, &c.”

Basically, what the advertisement says is that if you've got it, this stuff will cure it.

Some of Dyott's medicines were purported to cure diseases for which there is no cure even now. For example, Dr. Dyott's Anti-Bilious Pills (priced at 25 cents, 50 cents for the large size) cures, among other things, Yellow Fever, Pleurisy, Epileptic fits, Hypochondria, colds, asthma, and, amazingly, flatulence!

Many of Dyott's advertisements contain a listing of the symptoms of the disease, so that if you weren't sure 'what ails you', by reading his advertisement, you could diagnose yourself! One of my favorite advertisements is for Dr. Robertson's Infallible Worm Destroying Lozenges.

“A medicine universally esteemed for destroying every species of worms -- price 50 cents. Symptoms -- The common symptoms of the Worms are, paleness of the countenance, at other times flushing of the face, itching of the nose and about the seat, starting and grinding of the teeth in sleep, swelling of the upper lip, the appetite sometimes bad, at other times voracious; looseness, disagreeable breath, a hard swelled belly, great thirst, the urine frothy and sometimes of a whitish colour, griping or choleric pains, an involuntary discharge of saliva, especially when asleep; frequent pains in the side with a dry cough and unequal pulse; palpitations of the heart, swoonings, cold sweats, palsy, epileptic fits, &c, &c.”

After reading this, I'm sure I have Worms!

Other Dyott advertisements offer, in addition to a list of the diseases to be cured, a list of directions for the proper usage of the product. An advertisement for the 'Spring Physic', Dr. Dyott's Anti-Bilious Pills, contains the following passages,

“Dr. Dyott here, under the strong conviction of the power of his Pills to relieve the afflicted, when other medicines have failed, recommends the use of them (at least once a fortnight) during the spring and summer months, in which he feels assured that those who attend to his advice will find the benefit they seek”.

Following this suggestion to use these pills six months of the year, is the following passage,

“Directions for using the Pills. For a purge, from three to six Pills are to be taken at bed time or early in the morning, which may be done as often as the state of the body or circumstances may require, warm gruel, barley-water, or any diluted liquids may be drunk to aid their operations. Children under one year old may take from half to a whole Pill; those of two years, from one to one and half, and in proportion as they advance in years”.

“In weak and debilitated constitutions, female complaints, and in chronic disorders, they are to be used as an alternative medicine, and then taken by one pill at night, if the constitution can bear it, till six or seven pills have been taken; and then three or four pills must be taken as a purge -- thus continuing the alternative and the purge, till the obstructions are removed and the desired relief obtained”.

“For the scurvy, surfeit, scorbutic, blotches, and for carbuncles, &c. and impurities of the blood, or vitiated humors -- a full dose of these pills must be taken every three or four days; at the same time Dr. Robertson's much esteemed Vegetable Nervous Cordial or Nature's Grand Restorative, may be taken according to the directions with good effect, as it will not only aid the cure, but prevent a return of any scorbutic complaint”.

“The female of the most delicate frame, or the infant, may take these pills with the greatest safety, their composition being perfectly innocent. The price of the above pills is fifty cents per box - small boxes, twenty-five cents, with a very liberal discount to those who purchase to sell again, or for family use, purchasing not less than one dozen boxes”.

“Take notice -- each genuine box of the above Pills is signed by the only Proprietor. His signature is on a piece of paper, pasted on the outside wrapper. None other can be depended on. T. W. Dyott, M.D.”.

This advertisement is also fascinating for a number of reasons in addition to giving dosages. Dyott has shown us how effectively 'cross selling' can be used. He recommends the use of another product, Dr. Robertson's Vegetable Nervous Cordial, as part of the treatment with Dr. Dyott's Anti-Bilious Pills. Not only will Dr. Robertson's Cordial help, it also will prevent the return of symptoms. Of course, Dyott manufactured both of the products, so taking both products also helped his bottom line.

Another interesting thing in the above advertisement is that Dyott has informed us that there are apparently competitors, selling counterfeit products, which somehow resemble his own product. A very common practice in the unregulated medicine days, many competitors created similar sounding products, or utilized similar packages to fool the undereducated population. Dyott tried to solve his problem by pasting his signature on the outside wrapper of the product!

Included in this full page of advertising is one for Dr. Dyott's own medical practice. If his medicines could not cure you, and you had to go see a doctor, it might as well be Dyott. The advertisement begins (in capital letters, of course), “DR. DYOTT”, and continues:

“Having for a long series of years made the various cases of Debility, and every species of Venereal complaint the particulars of his studies, the result of long experience and extensive practice in the city of London, the West Indies,

and for the last ten years in the city of Philadelphia, has enabled him to remove, by a peculiar and salutary method those complaints, however inveterate or complicated, without the use of MERCURY, and without any confinement or inconvenience to the patient, and in slight venereal cases, on early application being made, a cure is generally performed in the short space of three or four days”.

The advertisement goes on to state that:

“persons requiring the aid of Dr. Dyott, are solicited not to feel tenacious in applying to him, as the most strict secrecy, attention, and satisfaction, will be objects of his particular care and endeavors”.

Also,

“appropriate apartments are furnished for separate consultations, at his residence, No. 137, north east corner of Second and Race streets, where patients will receive attendance from an early hour in the morning till ten o'clock in the evening”.

Dyott was indeed a very busy man!

The advertisement finally concludes with the charitable statement “advice given gratis as usual”. Later in the same column is an entirely separate advertisement showing that Dyott, perhaps because of his own humble beginnings, continued to have compassion for the 'down and out'. The advertisement reads,

“For the Benefit of Poor People. Medicines at Half Price. The Labouring Poor of this city, and from all parts of the union, who unfortunately want medicines, will in the future be charged only one half the usual prices paid. They may also come and receive advice gratis, either from myself, or at any time in my absence, by a Gentlemen who has made the complaints of Females and Children a particular branch of practice, for thirty years past, and he constantly attends the Medicine and Drug Store, to see that every prescription is correctly compounded”.

Interestingly, Dyott seems to make a distinction between what he labels 'the laboring poor', who will get a discount, and the idle poor.

Finally, to round out his package of goods and services, Dr. Dyott spends the remainder of the page reminding the reader that he sells more than medicine at his store. In one advertisement, Dyott announces that the Olive Glass Works is in full blast, and that orders for bottles, vials, or other hollow glassware, of any form, can be placed at Dyott's store. Also,

“A large and general assortment of vials, from half ounce to eight ounces, patent medicine vials of every description, mustards, cayennes, capers, anchovies, also, rappee and other snuff bottles, half pint, pint, and quart seltzers; pint, quart, and half gallon bottles and jars; sweet oil; camphor, globes, tubes, retorts, etc. etc” is always available at his store.

The page concludes with a line drawing of Dyott's “wholesale drug and medicine warehouse”. Below the illustration is a list of what Dyott currently has for sale. Included in the listing, of course, is all of the medicines Dyott has advertised previously. In addition, such appetizing items as Essence of Peppermint, Worm Tea, Oil of Worm Seed, Oil of Spike, Red Precipitate, Fine Powdered Bark, Pure Lemon Acid, Clout's Durable Ink, assorted Teeth Brushes, Bayley's Patent Blacking Cakes, Camel Hair Pencils, Marking Brushes, imported Water Colors, and Toy Paints for the use of children.

Thus we see Dr. Thomas W. Dyott, an immigrant to the newly created United States, has become an early 19th Century Sam Walton, of Walgreen and Walmart fame. His 'one stop shopping' at the corner of Second and Race Streets in Philadelphia, had 'something for everyone'. You could come to see the Doctor, be treated, have your prescription filled, and even buy other necessities -- all at one place. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

SUMMARY

Dr. Dyott, who had recently given himself the title of 'Doctor', offered a large 'Family of Medicines'. At the time of the printing of this newspaper in 1817, this 'family' included: Dr. Robertson's Celebrated Stomachic Elixir of Health, Dr. Robertson's Vegetable Nervous Cordial, Dr. Robertson's Celebrated Gout and Rheumatic Drops, Dr. Robertson's Patent Stomachic Bitters, Dr. Robertson's Infallible Worm Destroying Lozenges, Dr. Dyott's Anti-Bilious Pills, Mahy's Plaster Cloth, Dr. Dyott's Patent Itch Ointment, Dr. Dyott's Infallible Tooth-Ache Drops, The Circassian Eye-Water, The Restorative Dentifrice, The Balm of Iberia, and Dr. Godbold's Vegetable Balm of Life.

REFERENCES

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