

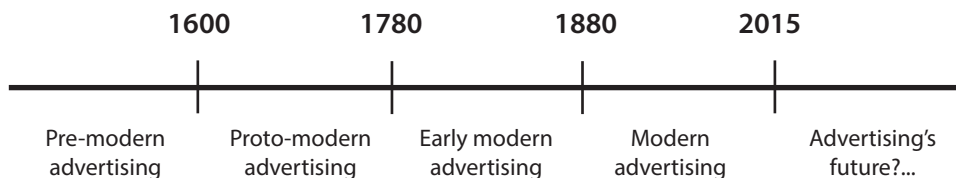
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History of Advertising

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Advertising is a huge field with significant political, social and economic ramifications globally. To try and address all these concerns in global perspective is not possible in a chapter of this scope – here a chronological development of advertising broadly applicable to Western Europe and North America is provided, with more detailed examples from British advertising history used to illustrate the factors that drove change in the industry, and with a brief look at advertising history, written with a focus on ‘non-Western’ examples at the end of the chapter.

The chapter is largely structured chronologically, following an adapted version of MacRury’s (2009) advertising history periodization:



It should be borne in mind that such periodization can only give a loose indication as to the manner in which something like advertising develops. This does not suggest significant changes occurred exactly at the turning points where one period ends and another begins, but rather a loose application of the term (Hollander et al., 2005; Witkowski & Jones, 2006).

Earliest advertising

Though we do not know at which point the term advertising – derived from the Latin *advertere* meaning to turn towards – came in to usage, it has at its root the notion of getting a person’s attention or a warning (MacRury, 2009). We can therefore examine early historical analyses for examples of attention-grabbing

practices as predecessors of what is often termed 'modern advertising'. Many scholars suggest some practices now understood as advertising must have been in existence as long as trade has existed, in order to facilitate exchange between people; and examples of both oral and written efforts to increase the sale of goods or services can be traced back many centuries (Russell & Lane, 1996; Tungate, 2013). Babylonian tablets are often claimed as the earliest examples of lasting advertisements and were hung above sales locations, in addition to the use of oral advertising methods, to attract passers-by (Barker & Angelopulo, 2006; Presbrey, 1968). Though these early communications certainly played a role in facilitating change, they do not really represent anything like what we understand as advertising or marketing communications in this day and age. In order to try and trace that we need to consider the development of marketing and try to situate advertising amidst this.

Though the origins of marketing are equally difficult to place with an exact date, Shaw (1995, 2015) highlights that it was during antiquity that we can find the origins of features we now understand as the underpinnings of a marketing system, and in the work of Plato the first dialogue exploring the socio-economic foundations of marketing thought. He claims that during antiquity trade underwent its biggest transformation of any time from the Stone Age to the modern day due to the introduction on a large scale of three things: centralised marketplaces, sedentary retailing and coined money. Having started in Athens in the sixth century BCE, they were spread by merchants around the Mediterranean Sea and along ancient trading routes. As a result buyers and sellers were brought together efficiently, could ensure trade and production remained at their optimum and had a viable means through which to exchange and store value. Given the scale of this transformation, the increase in trade, and the increasing centralisation of retailers, we can assume that techniques for increasing sales by drawing people's attention to available products must have also increased. Fletcher (2008) claims that in Athens during this period town criers would interrupt announcements with paid-for oral advertisements such as that below from a cosmetic seller.

For eyes that are shining, for cheeks like the dawn,
For beauty that lasts until girlhood is gone,
For prices in reason the women who know,
Now buy their cosmetics from Aesclyptoe.

Sage (1916), using a four-point classification of advertising activities – Roman newspapers and magazines; shop signs and frontage; posters and billboards; and methods akin to modern direct mail advertising – found support for all

but the last. Further, Beard (2008) quotes an example of promotional material for the leasing of property in Pompeii which offered “an elegant bath suite for prestige clients, *tabernae*, mezzanine lodgings [*pergulae*] and upper floor apartments [*cenacula*] on a five year contract”, and others have suggested the Roman period was key in the intensification of promotional activities that evolved into modern advertising (Wharton, 2015). Vennarucci (2015) has argued that shopkeepers in the Roman period used shop design as one of their primary means of advertising, in an attempt to promote a respectable urban identity and build reputation in the face of a society that treated such traders with inherent suspicion. The use of shop signs and frontage is highlighted by other authors as a key method of promotion during the period (Holleran, 2012), and would further support Shaw’s (2015) assertion that the development of marketing systems during this period is of importance. With retailers increasingly collected in centralised locations, methods such as these were necessary to make it clear to shoppers what was available and to distinguish between traders. Some example shop signs and shop frontage from the Imperial Roman period are shown in Figure 2.2, overleaf.

Given the evidence above we can see that both trade and the activities associated with modern marketing, particularly retailing and promotional activities, became increasingly embedded during antiquity. By the Middle Ages these activities had begun to be spread around the world along with trade, and we can presume they continued in the centuries that followed. Though this is likely the case, it is unlikely that there was much change in written advertising beyond the types discussed above which generally focussed on images to signify the types of trade. Given the continuation of, at best, semi-literate societies during the Middle Ages, written advertising would not have undergone any kind of radical transformation. Beyond this, the means for mass written advertising were not available: papyrus, parchment, inks and dyes were expensive and difficult to obtain for many traders. Paper, though invented in China during the Han dynasty around 200 BC and further developed under Cai Lun a century later, only arrived in Europe in the 11th century, having spread very slowly along the Silk Road and via Muslim settlers in modern-day Spain and Portugal (Carter, 1925). Paper mills spread through Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and proved important in increasing the availability of writing materials across the continent, though literacy remained very poor and printing techniques were slow and limited (Basbanes, 2014). Given this, we can assume many of the methods which grew during antiquity remained centrally important in the promotion of trade.