A Textiles Journalist Talks Shop

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A Textiles Journalist

Ida Halpin, '41, describes her work as an advertising coordinator for Sears, Roebuck and Company.

If anyone had told me before I graduated in June that I would ever read anything bigger than the book I had for freshman history, I most emphatically would not have believed him. I would now! In my work as advertising coordinator in the Sears, Roebuck and Company parent offices in Chicago, I read all "soft line" copy for catalogs and informative labels. "Soft line" is a merchandising term to cover clothing, millinery, hosiery, gloves, sheets, towels, table linens and textiles.

The division in which I work, Merchandise Comparison and Inspection, is divided into five parts. The Informative Labeling and Packaging Division is responsible for everything from copy to art work on the tags labeling most of our merchandise. These labels are of the type suggested by the National Consumer-Retailer Council, which says that a good, informative label calls for a statement of what the article is, what it is made of, how it is made, what it will do, and how it should be cared for. For example, copy attached to muslin sheets gives thread count for warp and filling separately, breaking strength for warp and filling, weight in ounces per square yard, the percentage of sizing, and the torn size before hemming.

The people in the Shopping and Comparison Division make quality comparisons to keep our value standards high. They make competitive price checks to determine market trends, to prove value claims and to aid in pricing items.

Most of the women who shop "soft lines" are home economics graduates. Mary Gardner, '40, and Cleora Oldham, Ex. '31, are from Iowa State. The shoppers buy and examine merchandise in Chicago stores, nearby suburbs, Detroit, Des Moines, Minneapolis, New York and other mail order houses.

The Merchandise Review Division has shoppers who make comparisons of one complete line of merchandise and set up displays from which proper merchandise assortments, quality, pricing and the best manner of presentation is determined.

The Inspection Division makes mail order tests to analyze merchandise and order handling to determine whether the customer will be satisfied. The condition of the merchandise when it is received, the way it is packed and wrapped and any substitution on the original order is checked. Irregularities are taken up with the various departments for correction.

It is the work of the Advertising Correlation Division, of which I am a member, constructively to criticize and contribute toward strong, factual selling copy.

We make sure that there are no violations of the Fair Trade Practice Rules, Better Business Bureau recommendations for honest advertising, federal laws such as the Wool Labeling Act, restrictions of the Federal Trade Commission and our laboratory's findings from tests of merchandise.

We work with copywriters, compilers, advertising managers, editors and buyers to help produce a catalog which honestly describes and illustrates every piece of merchandise in terms which give the prospective customer all of the information she needs to make the best purchase.

All claims such as those on fiber content, washability, sunfastness, moth-resistance and shrinkage are carefully checked. There are standard tests set up by nationally recognized authorities for these claims. Before such statements as "washfast" and "sun-resistant" are approved by our office for use in advertising they must be verified by our laboratory tests.

We read the original typewritten copy made by the copywriters and the first and second proofs of all copy. Wherever we find a claim that needs to be verified we check with our laboratory and if a test has been made and the merchandise passed it, the claim stands as made. If not, the buyer is contacted and he in turn gets in touch with his manufacturer and the merchandise is either improved to meet the claims or the claims lowered to fit the merchandise.

We must be able to supply an acceptable statement from an advertising point of view as well as one which is technically true. It is our job to help eliminate descriptions which might confuse or mislead the customer. To further help our customer with wise buying in the textile field we have a set of terms describing care required for fabrics and garments which may be washed, defined in the catalogue's information section.

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