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Glamour Is Her Business

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Glamour Is Her Business

From comparison shopper to buyer is Clara Dollar's history, tells Mary Margaret Ryan

YES, glamour is her business. Clara Dollar, '42, meets it every day as a cosmetic buyer for the Sears and Roebuck Company.

Miss Dollar's work entails purchasing all lines of cosmetics for 100 retail stores and 10 mail order branches. She also plans the cosmetic copy for the eight catalogs published each year and decides what items should be featured and what quantities of each item the company should buy.

"It is interesting to see how accurate your estimates are in ordering," Miss Dollar states. "For example, I might secure 50,000 units of an item for sale in a given catalog. Sometimes I wake up in the night from a bad dream of seeing car loads of lipsticks or jars of cleansing cream idling away on railway sidings. Fortunately, the sales figures usually are most gratifying."

Another phase of Miss Dollar's occupation is in merchandise and retail development. At present this work concerns setting up cosmetic departments in 80 new retail stores which will open this year, establishing improved displays and retail selling. It also involves formulating new lines and designing new packaging.

Miss Dollar's career in cosmetics began when she worked as a comparison shopper. She shopped all her company's retail competitors to determine the quality of their merchandise. The best features of all could be included in her firm's products. According to Miss Dollar, comparison shopping provides excellent training in merchandising and gives one a detailed familiarity with retail methods and information on many types of commodities.

Comparison shoppers work both inside and outside the store. They may compare values and prices, check the parent store's completeness of stock or report competitor's scoops. They also check quality of service, courtesy of salespeople or completeness of stocks in the home store. Only home economics graduates are engaged for this work.

As a result of one of her reviews in the cosmetic line, she was made assistant buyer in the cosmetic department of the company. Later she was appointed buyer.

Miss Dollar states that there are excellent buying positions with mail order firms or with large department stores. More than 3 billion dollars worth of business is transacted in the fabulous department store world each year. Women do 90 percent of the buying and constitute three-fourths of the store employees. There are varied opportunities for women in the department store field, but the road to the top is a hard one.

"Every student with an eye on merchandising should be cautioned," Miss Dollar advises, "that about a 2-year training period at a fairly low salary is required before one is considered eligible." Many firms conduct courses in merchandise, salesmanship, fashion, cos-

metics, textiles, interior decoration, according to the department for which they are preparing the employee.

A general background in home economics is necessary for anyone planning a career as a buyer. Miss Dollar mentions that art, sales psychology and advertising psychology were courses most useful in training her for her present position. An understanding of art and textiles is fundamental to phases of work concerning fashion and design.

"I believe a judicious sprinkling of college activity is important in preparing one for merchandising," states Miss Dollar. During her years at Iowa State, she was active in the League of Women Voters.

Besides this, to be successful a buyer must be enough of a gambler to trust to luck. She must have confidence in her own ideas and the drive to put them over. She must be able to meet success with modesty and dismal failure with a smile. She must also possess a touch of the spirit of Janus, the two-headed Roman god. She needs the ability to see merchandise from the consumer's viewpoint.

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