

True Story Magazine

HOW MACFADDEN PUBLICATIONS CREATED A NEW MARKET OF NATIONAL CONSUMERS

15¢
A MACFADDEN
PUBLICATION

ABOUT TRUE STORY MAGAZINE

Launched in 1919 as part of bodybuilding guru Bernarr Macfadden's publishing empire, True Story was one Macfadden's most popular magazines. A confessional magazine with the slogan "truth is stranger than fiction," True Story solicited readers' personal experiences for print, advertising that it was written by real people, not professionals. Because True Story often dealt with themes of sex, infidelity, and crime, and was written in colloquial language, the publication was derided by mainstream media and vice officials as lowbrow and morally vulgar. However, in recounting stories of underdogs, outcasts, and young girls struggling to make it in a modern world, and with the help of a design strategy utilizing bright colours and engaging fonts, True Story built a unique readership combined of the working class, immigrants, and women. These readers not only saw themselves reflected in the magazine, but were themselves able to contribute, with the possibility of compensation. For this project, I surveyed dozens of True Story magazines, identifying how, both in its content and advertising, the publication created a new market by helping marginalized readers envision themselves as American consumers.

LISTERINE & THE INVENTION OF HALITOSIS



True Story, December 1938

In nearly every edition of True Story, a Listerine ad lines the inside cover. Just as True Story reached marginalized readers eager to ingratiate themselves into American society, Listerine built a marketing campaign inventing and then targeting social and medical anxieties, namely bad breath. Listerine was founded in 1865 as a surgical antiseptic; however, the brand was unsuccessful until the 20s. It was in 1921 that the company owner's son, Gerard Lambert, coined the term "halitosis" in an attempt to scientifically legitimize bad breath. He combined "halitus," the Latin word for breath and "osis," to make the word sound more medical. In the ad campaign that followed, smart and beautiful individuals, often women, found themselves socially isolated for no apparent reason—until they discovered they had halitosis. With the help of

Listerine, they were able to realize true social and economic success. Listerine is one of many examples of advertisements in True Story magazines targeting the fears of marginalized Americans, and encouraging them to become consumers as a means to alleviate these anxieties.

STARS, THEY'RE JUST LIKE US!

Alongside Photoplay, the motion picture magazine that Macfadden launched in 1919, True Story offered readers an in depth look at celebrities' lives. For a magazine that promoted upward mobility, movie stars, with their essential combination of wealth, beauty, and whiteness, symbolized the pinnacle of American culture. Advertisers like Lux, which promises that 686 out of the 694 "important actresses in Hollywood" use the company's soap, allowed readers to idolize movie stars from afar, while also providing concrete steps, vis a vis consumption, for attaining such status.

You can have the Charm men find irresistible —

JEAN HARLOW'S complexion care will make *your* skin enticing!

If you have seen Jean Harlow on the screen—and, of course, you *have* seen her—you have noticed what an alluring complexion she has. Smooth. Velvety soft. The kind of skin men find irresistible.

Do you realize that the right care—followed *regularly*—will do wonders for *your* complexion?

Jean Harlow, like most of the lovely Hollywood stars, has discovered the secret. Listen to her own words:—

"The great actresses of the stage and screen take exquisite care of their skin," she says—"and I have found their secret—regular care with Lux Toilet Soap."

9 out of 10 Screen Stars Use It

Of the 694 important actresses in Hollywood, including all stars, 686 use Lux Toilet Soap. It has been made the official soap in all the big film studios. Begin now to use this fine, fragrant, white soap for your skin.

The Beauty Soap of the Stars

LUX Toilet Soap

True Story, April 1933

PARTICIPATORY PASTICHE

One of the most hallmark components of True Story magazine was its involvement of reader input, regarding everything from personal essays, to tips on house maintenance, to feedback on the publication itself. Each of these features allowed readers to engage in the process of a "participatory pastiche", wherein readers themselves contributed to True Magazine's imagining of American society. By submitting their own stories, advice, and opinions, for the first time, readers who had long been ignored by other mainstream media found themselves represented in the magazine's pages, with the opportunity to win cash prizes. The Home Problems Forum offered participants up to \$15.00 in exchange for writing in domestic dilemmas and giving advice on other contributors' struggles. True Story created a community within its pages for readers to share their experiences in modern American life.

HOME PROBLEMS FORUM

PRIZE LETTER: On liquor and the younger generation
ALSO: A new problem about a wife who ran away

She would take hours to dress, letting the house take care of itself

True Story, June 1929

INVESTING IN READERSHIP

True Story magazine marketed to new immigrants not only as consumers, but as distinctly American consumers. Editions of True Story throughout the 20s are filled with advertisements promising to help readers achieve whiteness with products such as nose-shaping devices, English language lessons, and skin whitening creams. In addition, True Story also offered traditional American household advice, allowing readers to look at the magazine as an investment in social integration. For working class subscribers, the 15 cent price was surely worth the return in potential social and economic mobility.

A PERFECT NOSE FOR YOU

SPECIAL SIZES

BEFORE AFTER

FOR CHILDREN

SEND NO MONEY

ANITA - The Original - NOSE ADJUSTER

PATENTED

If your nose is ill-shaped, you can make it perfect with ANITA NOSE ADJUSTER. In a few weeks, in the privacy of your own room and without interfering with your daily occupation, you can remedy your nasal irregularity. No need for costly, painful operations. ANITA NOSE ADJUSTER shapes while you sleep—quickly, painlessly, permanently and inexpensively. There are many inferior imitations, but the ANITA NOSE ADJUSTER is the ORIGINAL and ONLY comfortable adjuster highly recommended by physicians for fractured or misshapen noses. Self adjustable. No screws. No metal parts. Gentle, porous, firm and perfectly comfortable. Write today for FREE book, "Happy Days Ahead," and our blank to fill out for sizes. Return blank to us and your nose adjuster can be paid for when it reaches you.

THE ANITA COMPANY, 825 Telephone Bldg., SOUTH ORANGE, NEW JERSEY

True Story, July 1922