

APPENDIX D:

A REPORT ON

TELEVISION COMMERCIALS

Report on Television Preservation: Television Commercials

There has not been as concerted an effort to preserve television commercials as there has been for television shows. Archives tend to collect them sporadically, mostly as gift collections from donors with little attention paid to selection criteria. For many archives, preserving commercials ranks relatively low on their priority list. Still, there are several institutions that maintain substantial collections of television commercials.

The William R. Perkins Library of Duke University, for example, has been the recipient of commercials ranging from the 1950's to the 1990's which were donated by two advertising agencies. The library has also received from USA Today quarterly reels of commercials made by advertising agencies and from the magazine Art Direction tapes of commercials considered for review. The library has collections on both film and videotape formats.

The American Advertising Museum in Portland, Oregon, has approximately 5,000 commercials on both 35mm film and 3/4" videotape in its archive. Its collections are especially strong in commercials from the 1950's and ones from the 80's and 90's, the latter owing to the archive's direct appeal to agencies to donate commercials to them.

The Library of Congress also has substantial holdings of television commercials. Approximately 3,000 are available through finding aids to various collections while an indeterminate amount (probably several thousand) have come to the Library as copyright deposits. There are also commercials lodged within television programs in the collections, but they have been cataloged under the program name making it impossible to estimate the number that are available this way. The commercials in the Library's collections are on various formats, mostly on 35mm, 16mm, and 3/4" videotape.

The Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History has the Center for Advertising History in its Archives Center. Its emphasis is on collecting the documentation to various advertising campaigns, as well as obtaining the actual commercials from these campaigns.

In addition to these archives, the Museum of Broadcast Communications has approximately 8,000 commercials available on 3/4" and VHS tapes, while the Museum of Television and Radio has approximately 10,000 commercials in its collections.

Many private organizations maintain their own specialized archives of television commercials that may or may not be available to the public. For example, the Clio Awards holds an archive of approximately 2,500 notable television commercials (not all Clio winners), but only those from the last three years are available for rental. Advertising Information Services, Inc., keeps an archive of over 60,000 commercials which is made available to advertising agencies, but not to the general public. International Air Check has approximately 700,000 commercials on 3/4" videotape from 1975 to the present for purchase. Corporate archives also tend to keep commercials of their own products (for example, General Mills), as do some advertising agencies.

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