Sponsor Promotions Popular With Radio Listeners Part II

"Sit right down after tonight's adventure
and print your name and address plainly on a piece of paper.
Send it in along with the thin metal foil seal
from under the lid of a can of sweet chocolate flavored *Ovaltine."*

--Pierre André

Lincoln, Me. (DG)—

Part I of this series focused on contests that were heard on radio. There was no doubt the radio listeners enjoyed participating in the different contests heard on the air. Contests were fun, but there was a noticeable disadvantage. Out of the millions of people who sent in entries, only a few actually won a prize. Unfortunately, that meant the vast majority of those millions of people didn't win anything at all. Luckily, the sponsor had another promotion where everyone were guaranteed to receive something--- provided they sent in the correct amount of change and a part of the product's anatomy. This was the premium offer.

Like the contests, premium offers were also a test of the popularity of the product and the program that product sponsored. Money wise, premiums couldn't compare with the thousands of dollars in prizes contests provided--- but they were just as popular with the radio listeners.

Although major sponsors like ***Procter & Gamble, Lever Brothers, General Foods, Colgate-Palmolive-Peet, Sterling Drug, General Mills,*** and ***American Home Products*** participated in premium offers, this article will focus on the other sponsors who also had their share of premium offers on the radio.

The earliest premium I have come across was also one of the most unusual. It was heard on a 1933 broadcast of ***THE ADVENTURES OF FRANK MERRIWELL*** serial program over **NBC's Red Network.** During the commercial, announcer Harlow Wilcox informed the young listeners of a chance to own a "**Racing Turtle."** The turtle Wilcox described was not a toy, but a real live turtle. It was 1½" long, and it was easy for the children to take care of. With each turtle, instructions were included on how to take care of it. Unlike other premiums, there was no money needed. All was required was to send in 2 ***Dr. West's Tooth Paste*** cartons to a special address, care of the local radio station where the broadcast was heard.

Many premium offers heard on the air were involved in the program's story. A good example took place in 1935 on ***LUM & ABNER.*** With the "**Jot 'em Down Store"** temporarily out of business, Lum Edwards

acquired the rights to sell a handy aluminum pocket flashlight. The idea was to sell enough flashlights in order for Lum and his partner Abner Peabody to restock and eventually reopen the store. Lum told Abner that he wrote a letter to the ***Horlick's Malted Milk Company*** (the program's sponsor) about the flashlights. He was hoping the company would be interested in sponsoring them. In a reply, Mr. Horlick stated that he was impressed with the flashlight, and the company will sponsor them as a premium offer. Once Lum finished reading Mr. Horlick's reply, the premium was official. Announcer Carlton Brickert informed the listeners that they could receive the same handy aluminum pocket flashlight for only 10¢ and a wrapper from a jar of ***Horlick's Malted Milk.*** Brickert also stated that it was **ONLY** from ***Horlick's Malted Milk.*** The wrappers from ***Horlick's Malted Milk Tablets*** were not eligible.

As the story and the premium offer progressed, Lum and Abner received enough money from the premium sales to restock the store. This was good news for Lum & Abner, but a difference of opinion developed between the 2 men as to who would be the president of the "**New"** Jot 'Em Down Store when it officially reopened. It was a difference of opinion where the listeners could participate.

With the flashlight premium still in full force, Brickert asked the listeners who were about to send for the flashlight to vote for the store's president. The listeners voted by writing either "Lum" or "Abner" on the ***Horlick's*** wrapper they were sending in. There was no compensation by voting, except it gave the listeners a chance to participate in how the story turned out. When the election ended, Dick Huddleston, Grandpappy Spears, and Squire Skimp counted the votes in the back room of the Jot 'Em Down Store. With the counting going on, Lum and Abner were anxiously awaiting for the results. When all the votes were finally counted, Lum won the election by a narrow margin. He would then turn over his newly elected office over to Abner.

The response to ***Horlick's*** Flashlight Premium was overwhelming. So much so, Brickert informed the listeners that demand was exceeding supply. He asked the listeners to be patient. The flashlights were being made and sent out as fast as humanly possible.

2 popular brands of cleanser, ***Bab-O*** and ***Old Dutch*** to be exact, both had a lot of premium offers during their years as radio sponsors.

B.T. Babbitt's bouncing baby cleanser, ***Bab-O*** (it's easier to write it than say it), sponsored premiums that not only were involved with the programs it sponsored; they also brought out the talents of the lead characters of those programs.

On the ***DAVID HARUM*** serial program, hero David Harum was in trouble with the law. This trouble was serious enough that if convicted, he may have to serve a jail sentence. Confusing to his friends and the radio listeners, David didn't appear to be particularly interested in clearing himself of the crime. Instead, he was focusing his attention on learning how to use a camera. By sheer coincidence, announcer Ford Bond offered a candid style camera to the radio listeners. This camera wasn't a toy, but a real ***Uniflex Candid Style*** camera that took quality pictures. Bond informed the listeners that all it took to receive this camera was to send it 25¢ and a dark green band from a ***Bab-O*** can. Although I don't know how David overcame the trouble he was in, more than likely it was his ability to take pictures that helped him and the law catch the guilty party.

On the ***LORA LAWTON*** serial program, the radio listeners found out for themselves how talented heroine Lora Lawton really was. On the program, Lora designed some Christmas cards to send to her friends and family. Since she was an all round good egg, Lora graciously offered her creations to the radio listeners. Announcer Ford Bond mentioned the premium contained 10 different cards. They were French fold cards, decorated in all the Christmas colors. In order to obtain this premium, Bond offered the listeners 2 different options. For 10 cards, the listeners sent in 25¢ and the green band from a ***Bab-***

O can. If the listeners wanted 50 cards, the listeners sent in $1 and the green band from a ***Bab-O*** can.

As far as I know, ***Old Dutch Cleanser's*** premiums on the radio didn't involve the programs it sponsored. The premiums I have come across consisted of either costume jewelry or handy household items.

On a 1939 broadcast of ***BACHELOR'S CHILDREN,*** announcer Russ Young described the latest ***Old Dutch Cleanser*** premium. It was a piece of costume jewelry known as a "**Floral Spray Pin.**" Young stated it was a 14-karat gold pin that was specially made for ***Old Dutch*** by one of America's leading jewelers. The pin was 2 ½" long and featured 3 flowers, 1 large and 2 small, with long stems intertwined together. The Floral Spray Pin was ideal as a lapel pin or brooch to be worn with afternoon or evening dresses. In order for the listeners to obtain this premium, the listeners had to send in 25¢ and the windmill pictures from the back of 2 ***Old Dutch Cleanser*** cans.

Even before the premiums were presented on the air, the listeners automatically knew in order to obtain the premiums from these 2 products, the dark green band on the ***Bab-O Cleanser*** can, or the windmill pictures from the back of 2 ***Old Dutch Cleaner*** cans were sent in--- along with a small amount of change.

For those people who really wanted the premiums A.S.A.P., this might be interesting. Cleaning the kitchen sink was adventurous with ***Old Dutch***--- with a hole at the bottom of the can where the windmill picture used to be. If you think that's bad, imagine pouring cleanser from a ***Bab-O*** can with the dark green band missing from the top of the can. Instead of pouring a small amount of cleanser, ***Bab-O's*** newly ventilated can poured out **ALL** the cleanser!

Premiums weren't just for the adult radio listeners. Although there were many premium offers for adults, the majority of premiums on the radio were heard on the juvenile serial programs, under the sponsorship of breakfast cereals, candy, and malted milk products. Just like the premium offers for adults, all was required was a small amount of change and part of the product's packaging.

The majority of these premiums involved the program the product sponsored. Unlike the premiums for adults, the announcers on the juvenile serial programs displayed a very persuasive tone in their voice. They made the premium they were selling very hard to pass up by the young listeners.

For the young listeners who listened to ***LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE,*** they found out ***Ovaltine,*** the program's sponsor, tasted a little bit better when it was drunk out of a Little Orphan Annie Shake Up Mug. It was an unbreakable dark green mug with the picture of Little Orphan Annie and her dog Sandy ***(ARF!)*** on the front. The mug also included a bright red top. The object here was to create an "***Ovaltine*** **Shake Up.**"

Ovaltine and milk were poured into the mug; the red cap was applied to the top; and some vigorous shaking took place. When the constant shaking was starting to wear out the young listeners, the red cap was removed, and they enjoyed their ***Ovaltine*** **Shake Up.** It was a milk shake in the truest sense of the words.

Whether or not ***Ovaltine*** really tasted better in a Little Orphan Annie Shakeup Mug depended on the individual's opinion. Announcer Pierre André made a convincing point on the commercial that it did taste better in the mug. André's sales pitch was so convincing, the young listeners just had to have the Little Orphan Annie Shake Up Mug. Although other premium offers for the Little Orphan Annie Shake Up Mug ranged from 10¢-50¢ (depending on what year the premium was offered), it was offered absolutely free for this 1940 promotion. Of course, the metal foil seal from an ***Ovaltine*** container still had to be sent in.

Ralston, Instant Ralston, and ***Shredded Ralston*** had a hand in numerous radio premiums featuring the legendary cowboy Tom Mix. Like Pierre André did in selling the premiums for ***Ovaltine,*** announcer Don Gordon also used a very persuasive sales pitch to convince the young listeners they had to have that particular premium. It didn't take much convincing, because it was exciting for a young listener to own something with Tom Mix's name or picture on it. The same holds true for the other heroes and heroines on the juvenile serial programs.

How popular were premium offers on the radio? Herbert Brean's article *The Box Top Business* in the March 14, 1949 issue of ***Life Magazine*** indicated they were very popular. The article estimated about 120,000 requests for premiums were received in a day's time. With that many entries, extra post office boxes were rented and extra people were hired to handle the avalanche of mail--- talk about job security!

Premiums during radio's golden age were a profitable and never ending business for the people in charge of creating the items and the companies who sponsored them. If any of the premiums were kept to this very day, they are now collector's items. Maybe the children of today wouldn't appreciate a Tom Mix pocketknife or a Jack Armstrong Pedometer, but for the people who either owned these premiums or listened to the programs offering them, they had a special meaning.