

I Know...I Was There

Ads without Animals? You're barking up the wrong tree.

By Clandy Strock, Contributing Editor

MORE THAN A CENTURY AGO, an Englishman noticed that his dog was puzzled by the sounds emerging from the man's newfangled gadget called a phonograph.

The little fox terrier, "Nipper", would sit by the hour listening to it. Eventually, the man's brother, Francis Barraud, painted a picture of the fascinated pooch. Before long, The Gramophone Company bought the rights to use the picture, known as His Master's Voice, in its advertising. Nipper's first appearance in ads was in 1900. A year later, the Victor Talking Machine Company bought the trademark, only to sell it to RCA, which acquired Victor in 1929.

About that same time, a comic strip appeared in the United States, featuring a kid named Buster Brown and his mischievous dog, Tige. The folks at the Brown Shoe Company in St. Louis knew a good thing when they saw it and bought the franchise to use Buster and Tige in the company's ads for children's shoes. Thus was the magic of animals in drawing attention to ads again confirmed.

In the 1930s, Borden created a cartoon cow named Elsie for its ads. Elsie was a comely lass of the Jersey breed and an enormous hit in the Borden exhibit at the New York World's Fair in 1939. A year later, she "married" a Jersey lad named Elmer (later used to promote Elmer's glue).

When the happy union produced a calf, Borden asked the public to suggest a name for the newborn bull. More than a million entries flooded in. The winning name: "Beauregard."

Forest fires in 1944 threatened an important wartime national resource. The U.S. Forest Service launched a poster campaign featuring a cartoon bear, complete with forest-ranger hat, urging national park visitors to always douse their campfires. The bear, called Smokey, pointed out, “Only you can prevent forest fires.”

The original Smokey was named in honor of a former New York City fire department officer. Then, a New Mexico forest fire nearly was the end of a lovable little cub. Soon he, too, was dubbed “Smokey” and became something of a national icon.

By 1953, NBC decided to shake things up with a new idea in television. It involved a morning show—the original version of the show *Today*—with easygoing Dave Garroway as its star. For good measure, NBC added a chimpanzee named “J. Fred Muggs.” The personable chimp was an instant hit with the show’s audience. Before long, it was a toss-up whether Garroway or J. Fred was the star of the show.

Ever alert to ideas that increased attention, advertisers soon moved in. Kellogg’s Sugar Frosted Flakes adopted Tony the Tiger. He assured kids that the cereal “tastes gr-r-r-reat!”

Sales jumped.

Well, one good tiger deserves another, and eventually the Esso petroleum company began urging us, “Put a tiger in your tank!”

And speaking of felines, surely you remember “Morris,” the cat that was used to promote 9Lives Cat Food. He was a true “aristocat” and soon was known as “the Clark Gable of Cats.” Indeed, in 1988 and 1992, he ran for President, losing by a whisker to George H.W. Bush and then Bill Clinton.

Yes, the list of two- and four-footed hucksters for all sorts of

products goes on and on. We've had the Budweiser Clydesdales, the comical Hamm's Beer bear, the Coca-Cola polar bears, the fluffy little Bon Ami cleanser chick ("Hasn't Scratched Yet") and, currently, the Aflac duck and the Energizer Bunny.

And now for today's trivia question: What was the name of the Taco Bell Chihuahua? (The answer appears at the end of this story.)

I'm sure you can remember the name of your first animal pal. Mine was a splendid collie given to me by my grandfather. Naming him was easy. Someone had given me a book by Albert Payson Terhune, a prolific author of over 30 books, including *Lad: A Dog*. So my pooch was immediately given the name "Laddy."

Over the years since, there have been many two- and four-footed critters in my life, including four dachshunds, countless cats, a monkey, a parakeet and, briefly, a vagabond white snowy owl.

But Laddy has a special place in my heart, because he was my constant companion. Yes, that even includes the two or three times I resolutely decided to run away from home. Laddy and I would usually make it to the end of the farm, where I would sit down and explain to him how unfair life could be for a 10-year-old. Then we'd share a sandwich and trudge back home.

A major disappointment in my business career had to do with an ill-starred venture that was started by a friend of mine. He decided to create an airline that solely served the smaller communities in Wisconsin.

He planned to use a fleet of 10-passenger airplanes. And he wanted a name for his company. We developed a cartoon kangaroo wearing goggles, white scarf flowing back from his throat...just like those World War I aces. Our proposed slogan for the company: "Kangaroo Airline: Best for the Short Hops."

Rats. As they say, it never got off the ground.

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P.S. The Taco Bell Chihuahua was named "Gidget."