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NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR AERONAUTICS. 159

TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM 159

SELLING AIR TRANSPORT.

By Edward P. Warner.

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SELLING AIR TRANSPORT.*

By Edward P. Warner.

It is very noticeable in the prospectuses which are sometimes prepared to set forth the glowing possibilities of air lines that in the estimate of expenses insufficient allowance is generally made for selling and advertising costs. Air travel is still too new to be strictly a standard method, and its competition with older means of getting about can only be made effective by keeping the virtues of the airplane constantly before the eyes of the potential purchaser of transportation. This fact has been learned very completely in Europe, and methods of catching the public eye and attracting public patronage have been much elaborated.

The traveler who goes to London or to Paris, particularly the former, cannot fail to observe the extraordinary quantity and variety of posters and placards of the various air lines which decorate the show windows in Dickens' two cities. While no exact census is available, I never have seen in London a travel agency of any sort which did not display the poster of at least one air line, usually reinforced by a model airplane hanging in the window. In the stretch of Pall Mall from the foot of the Haymarket to St. Martin's, a distance of perhaps a quarter of a mile, there are at least a dozen agencies where air transport is advertised and sold. All of this advertising expense and multiplication of selling agencies is justified by the results,

* Taken from the Christian Science Monitor, October 30, 1922.

in the opinion of those who have gone in for it on the large-scale. The justification is particularly clear in respect of advertising which is directly combined with the sale of transportation, as a cardinal principle of air transport salesmanship is to present the idea to the prospective purchaser and then to make it possible for him or her to buy a ticket immediately.

The essence of the advantage of flying is in its speed, and the utilization of a speedy means of transport should not require the party to be transported to go in search of a ticket office having once decided to book a passage. Such advertising as is furnished by sandwich men marching in procession through the streets of Paris is not likely to be of so much value as is the show-window type. As for newspaper advertising the most effective type is that which is indirect, coming in the form of editorials on the value of the airplane and of enthusiastic articles about the delights of air travel by those who have actually tried it.

Newspaper support is invaluable and even indispensable to any aeronautical enterprise, but the small amount of classified advertising which the transport companies can at present afford to carry is of little value to the companies themselves, except in so far as it conveys specific information as to schedules, and brings no appreciable revenue to the newspapers. As the use of the airplane becomes more of an every-day matter, and as the general traveling public becomes accustomed to employing it, direct newspaper advertising setting forth the merits of particular lines on competitive routes will come to have an increasing value

Since the air lines must depend in an increasing degree on ordinary business traffic, the tourists furnishing a relatively smaller part of their income as the total extent of the operations is increased, the sale of transportation should be so conducted as to make particular appeal to the business man. This can best be done by proving to him that the regularity and speed of the service can be counted on. A very commendable action in this direction has been taken by one of the French companies having an office in London, which posts in its show window a bulletin of the flights made during the current day, the arrival and departure of each airplane in London or Paris being marked up as soon as word can be received. The board thus presents every afternoon a mute evidence of the extent of the aerial traffic between the two capitals and of the consistency and the scarcity of forced landings and other trouble with which that traffic is carried on.

So far as the tourist business is concerned, the most effective advertising is that which shows what other tourists have done. Those who travel in Europe for pleasure are, on the whole, extremely gregarious in their tastes and it is axiomatic that when a rush of tourists toward a given place is once started it will continue quite by its own momentum, especially if the journey can be regarded in the nature of an adventure worthy of relating.

No better method of attracting the tourists can be found, therefore, than to display permanently the statistics of the number of passengers carried and of the scarcity of accidents. The

traveler for pleasure may not be much concerned with speed, and forced landing which results in no damage to himself may not seriously disturb him and may even be regarded as a pleasant little adventure, but the question of safety is always to the fore in his mind and should be correspondingly emphasized when an appeal for his patronage is to be made.

One point in respect of which American companies should aim to improve on present European practice is in connection with automobile transport. Practically all of the traffic in London, for example, starts from the fashionable West End hotels or from the business section of the city. At the present time each traveler must take on himself the obligation of getting himself and his baggage to an assigned starting point at some specified hotel or in front of one of the tourists' agencies. If he has heavy baggage to carry, and the practice of carrying in the airplane all of one's packages up to small-sized trunks is constantly increasing, he must attend himself to its shipment to the designated official starting point and to its transfer to the official bus.

Although this is usually a minor inconvenience, to be sure, the payment which travelers are making for their air journey would seem to justify making a tour of the city with the bus, and picking up the prospective air voyagers at any spot that they designate within reasonable limits. Although this practice would admittedly be only temporary, and would be abandoned as air travel becomes more extensive and standardized, it would be worth while at present. I write with particular fervor on this subject, be-

cause I once had the unpleasant experience of having to fly from Paris to London with a large amount of baggage on a day when the Parisian labor unions had declared a general strike, and when no a taxicab wheel was turning in the city. Only by mobilizing the forces of the entire staff of hotel porters was I able to get my property to a point where I could connect with a bus for the flying field, and even then I had to plead as a special favor that the bus should pause momentarily on the way out to the field to allow me to get aboard.

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