

Oral History Interview

with

John Soughan

November 20, 1984

at

Cleveland, Ohio

By Scott Ellsworth

For the "Pepsi Generation" Oral History Project

Archives Center

National Museum of American History

Smithsonian Institution

TAPE ABSTRACT AND INDEX

Soughan, John Cleveland, Ohio, November 20, 1984
Interviewed by Scott Ellsworth

An advertising and marketing veteran since 1944, John Soughan provides good background material on Walter Mack's tenure at Pepsi-Cola; Pepsi as a "working class drink"; John Toigo; Milton Biow; the "Light Refreshment" campaign; the logo design change; the change of the account to Kenyon and Eckhardt; and the "Sociables" campaign.

The interview was conducted in the Cleveland Hopkins Airport.

Abstract of interview with John Soughan
Cleveland, Ohio, November 20, 1984
Interviewer: Scott Ellsworth

Tape 1, Side 1

1:15

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Soughan began working with the Pepsi-Cola Company shortly after being released from the military in 1944. His first job was a promotional position making disc recordings of military personnel for them to send to their families. Times Square was one of the most famous places that they recorded. Discusses anecdote of one disaster during a recording session.

6:30

JOBS BEFORE PEPSI-COLA

Prior to Pepsi Soughan worked in an advertising agency. He was transferred to the advertising section of the Pepsi-Cola Company.

The company at that time was in Long Island City. He gives a description of the company. Pepsi-Cola was printing the labels and making the crowns for the tops of the bottles.

Walter Mack was the president of the company. Soughan lists some of the other people there and their positions. Al Goetz was vice president of advertising. Many people in the company were engaged in company politics.

14:20

WALTER MACK'S SUCCESSFUL YEARS

Walter Mack reached the peak of his success during the "Twice As Much For a Nickel Too" campaign. The bottlers were aggressive and enthusiastic, while many of Coca-Cola's bottlers were rather complacent. After the war the Pepsi-Cola could not keep its price at five cents.

16:30

PEPSI MUST INCREASE PRICE

They increased the price of the twelve-ounce bottle to six cents. Coca-Cola had an extremely strong fountain business which allowed them to keep their price down.

19:20

TWO LAW SUITS

He discusses the history of two law suits; Coca-Cola vs. Pepsi-Cola for the use of the word, "cola," and the Loft Candy Co. case concerning the ownership of the Pepsi-Cola Company.

23:00

ADVERTISING IN THE THIRTIES

Pepsi used the comic strip cops and other color comics to sell to young people. Pepsi was the first to use skywriting as a promotion.

When Pepsi had to raise its price to six cents they had problems. Most of their advertising had been built upon "Twice As Much For A Nickel Too." At this point, Soughan was in the advertising department.

The company was relying upon radio, signs and point-of-purchase materials. One of the classical radio stations in New York City made a classical rendition of the "Twice As Much For A Nickel Too" jingle.

28:20

AL STEELE

Al Steele was executive vice president.

29:40

Pepsi began using U.S. Testing Company to test the quality of Pepsi-Cola.

Tape 1, Side 2

:25

PEPSI KNOWN AS WORKING CLASS DRINK

Pepsi's identity as the working class drink caused two problems; how were they to sell the drink for a higher price and how to upgrade the quality-image of the soda.

Once inflation pervaded other sectors of the economy, the price increase of Pepsi-Cola did not seem as large to people.

5:50

RADIO LARGE AREA OF CONCENTRATION

The company was concentrating on radio advertising, posters, skywriting promotions and magazine advertisements in the New Yorker Magazine. These

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magazine ads were subtle in their humor and they targeted an upper class audience.

10:50

COMPARISON BETWEEN PEPSI AND COKE

Al Steele was involved with the U.S. Testing Company activities. Coke had strong radio advertisements at this time. They had a large advertising budget. Pepsi-Cola was more innovative because of its headquarters being in New York, the small size of the company, and the company's assertiveness.

14:30

STEELE BRINGS TOIGO IN

Steele and John Toigo worked together at Standard Oil. Steele brought Toigo onto the Pepsi account at the Biow Agency. Steele had just switched the Pepsi account to the Biow Agency and Soughan was working in the international advertising department.

18:35

MILTON BIOW

Milton Biow was famous for inventing the shortest radio ads with "Bulova Watch Time." He was an early advertising pioneers.

20:40

SOME SUGAR TAKEN OUT OF PEPSI

The company had been taste-testing Pepsi. They changed the formula and took some of the sugar out. This was the precursor to diet drinks. Pepsi used "Less sweet, reduced in calories" in the advertising at this time.

24:50

"THE LIGHT REFRESHMENT" CAMPAIGN

Pepsi ran ads with small amounts of copy for this campaign and changed the logo to script to make it look lighter. Describes one of the ads from this campaign. The bottlers questioned this kind of theme advertising; they liked product-oriented ads much more.

27:20

ATMOSPHERE AT PEPSI-COLA COMPANY

There was quite a bit of momentum in the company. The bottlers were getting stronger. The product was being heavily promoted and advertised. The company was a highly political one. Al Steele was building his power base.

Tape 2, Side 1

:50

PEPSI ACCOUNT MOVES TO KENYON AND ECKHARDT

Soughan left Pepsi in about 1953 or 1954, and went to the Kenyon and Eckhardt agency, where Pepsi had moved its account. The Biow Agency had changed to Biow, Bern and Tiogo. There were problems at Biow's Agency. Al Steele had a falling out with John Tiogo. Steele also had some personal and financial problems that affected his work and leadership capabilities.

6:20

SOUGHAN MOVES TO KENYON AND ECKHARDT

Soughan worked as the vice president handling international advertising at Kenyon and Eckhardt. Soughan felt that staying in international advertising was limited. At K & E he became the creative coordinator on the domestic account. Soughan hired Alan Pottasch and Joe Lieb as account executive. Recalls some of the people on the Pepsi account at Kenyon & Eckhardt.

13:35

PROBLEMS

Al Steele was out of the country quite a bit. People began to question his leadership. Joan Crawford, Steele's wife was traveling with him.

During this period Pepsi-Cola bottling was extremely prestigious for international bottlers.

20:55

"THE SOCIABLES" CAMPAIGN

Soughan and Steele worked on "The Sociables" campaign. Joan Crawford influenced it. The campaign itself was a good idea but the execution was terrible. It used an absurdly glamorous image. The company was defensive about its image.

Joe Lieb was nice but had little creative talent. Soughan links and compares "The Light Refreshment" campaign and "The Sociables."

29:15

SOUGHAN GOES TO PEPSI

Pepsi-Cola called Soughan and offered him the job as vice president of advertising. Al Steele died. Don Kendall was in international at that time

Tape 2, Side 2

:20

REMINISCENCES ABOUT AL STEELE

Al Steele had a great presence, capturing people's attention with clever phrases. Recounts trip to Washington, D.C.

Charles Derrick was the ad manager. Soughan went in as vice president of advertising at Pepsi-Cola Company. Kendall told him he would get Soughan stock option. Soughan worked at the job for six months. When Pepsi was reorganized Soughan was made vice president of marketing services, advertising, sales promotion, market research, training and vending. Field forces reported to Bill Durkee. Herb Barnet was president during this time.

9:50

BARNET AT PEPSI

Barnet was the bottlers' patron saint when Al Steele died. He was a good administrator.

12:40

SOUGHAN'S STRENGTHS

Soughan worked with the creative people at Pepsi-Cola. Soughan has an excellent visual sense and good taste. He changed the logo and discontinued the use of the old jingle. He was instrumental in switching from Kenyon and Eckhardt to BBDO.

17:55

Reasons for leaving K & E. They weren't handling the job well. The campaign was bad.

Pepsi looked at several agencies including Norman B. Norman's agency. Pepsi chose BBDO. Soughan presented the decision to the Board. Charlie Brower at BBDO impressed them as being quite creative and down to earth.

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