

A Hardware Retailer Plans Ahead

TODAY much thought is being given to postwar planning. Our Government and private business are working hand in hand on this problem. They are giving it an enormous amount of publicity through publications of all types, over the radio, before service clubs, Chambers of Commerce, trade association meetings and in many other ways. They are trying to bring to business and the people of the nation the seriousness and absolute necessity of a postwar program—a program that will prevent depression and assure prosperity.

We hardware retailers must have a planned program if we expect to successfully continue in business in the postwar period. Our planning for that period must start NOW—not after we reach it. Then it will be too late.

After the war we are going to be faced with more and keener competition than at any time before the war. There will be all of the competitors we have had for years, plus new chains, syndicates, co-operatives, and others. They will be bidding for the same business that we are after.

Competitors Aren't Waiting for the War to End

Are these competitors sitting back, marking time—waiting for the war to end—before they start making definite plans?

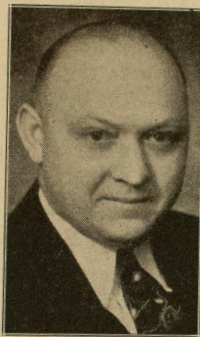
No. They are busy right today, making their plans for the future. They will be ready to put their plans into operation immediately after the war.

What type of planning are they doing?

They are making surveys for new store locations, planning new and more effective merchandising methods, contacting manufacturers and establishing new sources of supply and, in some cases, making contracts for merchandise to be delivered immediately after

the war. They are planning to be leaders in the retail field.

I mention these competitors because they are wide awake. *It is time for us to wake up and get busy, and make our plans for the future.*



A convention address

By Carl A. Miller

Kendallville, Ind.
NRHA Director

You may think that we should first be concerned with the present. But it has been proven that the present will take care of itself. As long as demand is greater than supply, we will experience very little trouble in the operation of our business.

Today we are on an equal basis with our competitors. We need not fear them from the standpoint of underselling us and cutting prices. They are having just as much trouble securing merchandise for sale as we are, and they are selling their merchandise at a profit. Our biggest job today is securing merchandise to sell. No effort or salesmanship is necessary to sell it.

Step Ahead and Keep Ahead!

After the war this picture will change. We will be back again in the field of competition.

Our competitors, as I have mentioned, will be many. We should plan now a program which will put us ahead of all competition. We have been doing business in the horse-and-buggy age for years. We have been followers instead of leaders. Let us step out and take the lead!

We can do it with just a little planning now and be in readiness to put our plans in operation as soon as practical after the war.

What changes can we make?

I would suggest that we plan a program of complete remodeling of both our places of business and business methods. We have been doing business for years in the same old rut. We must get ourselves out of this rut. It is time to sit down and take stock—to take a good look at our business.

Is Your Front Up-to-date?

Start with the store front.

Is it modern and up-to-date? One that we can be proud of, and a credit to our Main Street? Or, is it the same old front that has been there for the past 50 years?

When a new competitor opens a store in our town, the first thing he does is to construct a new and modern front. He knows that the public will be attracted by it. They like to trade with a merchant who is up to the minute.

If we still have that old front, let's make a reality of that dream we have had for years, of a nice, shining, new front. We have all made some money during the past few years and we are now financially able to do it.

How Old Are Your Fixtures?

What about the interior fixtures in our stores?

Are they in the same condition as the front? Are they the same fixtures that our grandfathers and fathers used and handed down to us? If they are, we had better plan on changing them.

New fixtures will not only make our stores more attractive, but they will give us better display and make selling much easier. They are volume builders.

In looking around our stores today we see many shelves that are empty. We are rather proud of those empty spots here and there because these places had been filled with merchandise that had been with us for years. It had become obsolete and we thought

almost worthless. With the scarcity of merchandise, these articles became salable again and we have turned them into cash.

When the war is over and good merchandise is available again, we are going to put this cash to work. We are going to buy good, salable merchandise with it—merchandise that will give us turnover, not shelf warmers.

We would invest this money in merchandise today but too much shoddy merchandise is offered us and we are going to be a little cautious. The postwar period should give us quality goods again.

What and Where Will You Buy?

Now is a good time to talk about how and where we are going to buy merchandise after the war.

Today we are buying it wherever we can find it. We have numerous sources of supply—too many to continue with after the war.

After the war we must have a more efficient and economical distribution of merchandise if we are to meet our competitors successfully. We must be placed in a position to buy our merchandise at prices comparable with our competitors.

This can be accomplished only through our purchasing agents, the wholesaler. His interest in us must be more than just that of selling us merchandise for so much money. He must have enough interest in us to try and buy his merchandise better, keep distribution costs down, so that he can furnish us with our merchandise at prices that will enable us to meet all competition.

Price isn't everything, but it is very desirable. Our jobber should have a plan for us to help us merchandise our goods. His existence depends upon our existence.

We cannot expect to receive this kind of service from our wholesaler without some cooperation from us. We must pick our wholesaler, or wholesalers (not too many or we will defeat our purpose) and give him or them all of our business. We must give them volume enough to justify the things that we are asking of them.

In picking our sources of supply for the postwar period, we must pick those who are going to help us, and we in turn must work with them.

Keep Telling People About Your Store

How much publicity have we given our business in the past?

Very little. *We independent retail hardware dealers are very poor advertisers.* We seem to think that because we have been established in our town for 50 years or more it isn't necessary to advertise our business.

That is where we are mistaken. It is the consistent advertiser who gets the business and we will have to be consistent in it. We can't run an ad this week and stop for the next three or four weeks. That is just a waste of money.

We should run a special sale at least twice a year. The whole idea back of advertising is to keep the consumer conscious of our store. *We want to keep the name of our business so strongly impressed upon their minds that when they think of hardware they will think of us.*

"More and better advertising" is our postwar slogan.

Plan to Train Your Salespeople

Let's give some thought to our personnel.

Most of us are not too well satisfied with the help we have today. We have salespeople who have been with us for years but during this period have become rusty because salesmanship has not been necessary.

We have other help with very little experience. We must plan some course of training for the help we now have and the help that we will employ after the war. They will need some special training in salesmanship. A sales training course for our salespeople will be one of the most important parts of our postwar program.

How About Your Records?

Another part of our business to which we must give serious thought and special attention is our accounting system.

If we are still trying to keep records the hard way, and inefficient way, we should plan to install a new system—one as simple as possible but also efficient and practical.

With the numerous reports which we are required to make to our state and federal government, we must have accurate informa-

tion at our finger tips—information and figures that are correct.

A new system of accounting will pay for itself many times over in taxes. We will save by having the correct information at all times.

I am going to mention one more change which will help in making the changes I have already named.

We are all members of the hardware association. We pay our dues each year and accept information which our secretary mails to us. But how often do we call on our association for help? Very seldom.

Our secretary has a world of information and dealers' helps at his command. The help that we will need in carrying out our postwar program can be had for the asking from our association.

A New Start When War Ends

We are going through a period in business today which we will never experience again—a period where demand greatly exceeds supply, a period without price-cutting competition, and where salesmanship and merchandising are not a factor.

We have been able to turn our obsolete and shelf-worn merchandise into cash at a profit; collected our old accounts and reduced our outstanding accounts to a minimum. We have made money, paid off our obligations, have money in the bank and some merchandise in our stores. We are in an ideal condition to enter the postwar period.

It will be like starting into business anew, with a clean slate. But in this new start we will have the location, a certain following and years of experience to guide us. Let us plan and carry into practice the kind of business that we have always dreamed of having.

Let us plan on having the best looking store on Main Street, filled with good, clean merchandise that will sell, and a personnel of well trained salespeople. Then let us tell the people of our communities about stores by the use of all types of advertising.

If we will keep these points in mind and carry them out in the postwar period, then we will be in a position to laugh at competition. We will put our business out in front, leading the race—the position we have been trying to gain for years.