

Personality Profile

This week's Personality Profile, Edward V. Hickey, Director of Advertising and Public Relations at Boston's New England Merchants National Bank, needs little introduction to our readers.

Five nights a week, between the hours of 11:00 and 11:10 P.M., Mr. Hickey explains to approximately 350,000 viewers of WHDH TV Channel 5, the advantages of doing business with New England Merchants, sponsor of the newscast appearing at that time.

Mr. Hickey's background on television coupled with his position as head of public relations for the bank made him the natural choice to emphasize the "personal touch" in selling when New England Merchants decided to sponsor the news program. Previously he had handled the bank's commercials on Channel 4 and some six years ago, he produced and moderated the popular television program entitled "Thinking Out Loud."



Edward V. Hickey

"Although TV was a new field for us and we were to employ an unusual format, the thought of appearing before a vast audience fortunately didn't bother me, particularly," he noted. "I guess I can thank my Army career for this aspect as a part of my time was spent lecturing to hard-bitten non-coms and nobody could be a tougher audience than that."

Mr. Hickey was quick to point out the direct benefits accruing to the New England Merchants as a result of sponsorship of the newscast. "When an employee speaks for his firm, it appears to carry more weight with the viewer than if a 'middleman' carries the message," he noted. He recalls, how shortly after one program in which he explained the Bank's service of setting up an estate plan, (a very large share of New England Merchants' business), he received a telephone call from a gentleman who was interested in more information on the subject. The caller's first words were, "My wife saw you on TV last night...." This kind of thing happens often enough for us to know we are reaching people," states Mr. Hickey. "The personal advertising technique can be a real shot in the arm for selling trust service, which is, oftentimes a long range proposition."

"Advertising has its limitations, though," he said. "Advertising must be backed up with the proper personnel, and I'm proud to say that we are strong on back-up at New England Merchants. Our Department only opens the door, and our bank staff really carries the ball."

"There is another point I would like to stress," Mr. Hickey continued. "Too many times, without an understanding of banking procedures, the public feels that when a bank advertises its loan services, its attitude is, 'Just prove you don't need a loan and you'll get it; prove you need it and you'll be refused;' This simply isn't so. If a bank doesn't loan, it doesn't do business. When some people are refused, it is usually that they are already too 'over-extended' and to grant a loan would do them more harm than good. Therefore, equally as important as loaning money is the giving of sound financial counsel. Many a time, a loan is not the answer to a money problem, and some good advice can solve existing problems without adding another debt to the load."

Television is only one portion of Mr. Hickey's busy schedule in bringing the New England Merchants name before the public. The daily Metropolitan newspapers play a large role in the Bank's advertising budget, while at the same time affording New England Merchants the opportunity of contributing a public service. "A case in point," cites Mr. Hickey, "was the series entitled, 'Problems of Boston'. Over a 1 1/2 year period, the Bank took ten full-page ads in the three leading Boston dailies to present, in detail, subjects of interest concerning the 'New Boston'. These articles, written by Messrs. Myerson and Banfield of the Harvard-M. I. T. Joint Center for Urban Studies, evoked a tremendous reader response for reprints—a response that averaged 7,500 requests per issue."

Other media for the Bank include business and trade magazines and the New England Merchants' own monthly business letter sent out to commercial customers. Add to these items the art work and copy for the annual calendar and annual report, and the picture begins to focus on the part played by Mr. Hickey's department at New England Merchants. He notes that banks began to give serious attention to projecting their image shortly after World War II and that since that time the momentum has increased. "After all," he states, "advertising is just one arm of public relations in helping to build the character of a bank."

What of the Bank's future? "At present we have twelve offices, with more planned. It is well known that we will be moving into our own 70,000 sq. ft. building in the Prudential Center in January, 1965. Our moving does not mean that we are leaving the present State Street quarters, which will continue to provide our downtown customers with the same service they have received in the past."

The question arose as to how New England Merchants was THE bank to locate in the Prudential Center. Explained Mr. Hickey, "I do not know the full story but I understand many banks were interested and perhaps an influencing factor in reaching a decision back in 1956 was the fact that New England Merchants was the first to express a willingness to locate its main office there."

Ed Hickey was born in Wakefield, Massachusetts, in 1915 and is a graduate of Boston Latin and Exeter Academy. He received his A.B. degree from Williams College in 1938 and served in the Signal Corps of the U. S. Army, from which he received his discharge in 1946. Mr. Hickey's original contact with New England Merchants came via the Bank's advertising agency where he was employed in 1953. In 1955, he went over to the Bank, at which time its own Public Relations Department was created.

Mr. Hickey has served on a number of community and civic organizations and his hobby, "believe it or not", is "national and international affairs." He resides in West Newton with his wife and four children.

"I feel lucky to work in a bank where there is a keen sense of excitement and movement. There is never a dull moment at New England Merchants," he concluded.