

RAILWAY PUBLICITY BRANCH.

When the Publicity Branch of the Railways was established in October, 1927, the motor competitor, assisted by years of extensive and very expensive publicity, had a strong hold on the public. The branch was faced with a formidable task in helping the railways to regain some of the lost ground and in opening up new avenues of profit. A campaign was carefully planned, and preparations were quickly made for effective operations. While, of course, it is not possible in our business any more than in any other business to measure the advantages accruing from publicity work in terms of definite money values the results have, I believe, justified this enterprise.

A very important function of the Publicity Branch is in the expert planning and preparation of many kinds of advertising required by the Head Office and District Offices, in such a manner as to assure substantial savings.

Other railways in older and more developed countries than New Zealand find it increasingly necessary to develop the railway-travel sense amongst potential patrons and also to make known the details and advantages of their passenger and goods services by making full use of publicity in its many forms. This was the inevitable result of the growth of competition and the activity and enterprise of railways the world over in publicity work is a striking feature of their efforts to retain and attract business.

The amount being spent on railway publicity in almost all countries is increasing, advertising in its many forms being recognized as an essential function now that competitive forms of transport have become more active.

For land transport (particularly over the longer distances) the railways can offer the public a service that is efficient, cheap, safe, and comfortable, but it is necessary to bring under the notice of prospective travellers not only the advantages of railway transport, but also particulars of those places famous as health and holiday resorts, or for their scenic beauty, and generally to make known places of public interest served by our railways. The broadcasting of news regarding excursions, special trips, holiday fares, and the many other inducements to travel has become a definite necessity.

The experience of business enterprise has been that expenditure on publicity is profitable, provided it is properly organized after a careful survey of the field, and concentration is made upon definite objects. The effort must be continuous in order that the best results might be achieved.

The expenditure of the Publicity Branch for the year amounted to 0.264 per cent. of the gross earnings. When due consideration is given to the fact that the adoption of modern publicity methods for the railways is comparatively recent, this ratio—little more than $\frac{1}{4}$ per cent.—must be regarded as low. Indeed, it is only half the ratio of the Canadian National Railways (0.5 per cent.), and is also considerably lower than the ratios of many other railways throughout the world. In many commercial businesses the average expenditure is 4 per cent., and in retail business from $1\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. to 3 per cent. of the earnings.

From the above it will be seen that the New Zealand Railways have been quite modest in their publicity appropriation.

The press of the Dominion has materially assisted in creating a very favourable public "good will" towards the railways. The newspapers have been most liberal in affording space for the various news items in connection with railway activities, and we have reason to believe that this added publicity has been largely instrumental in obtaining additional revenue.

With the co-operation of a large number of newspapers throughout the Dominion a "Travellers' Information" paragraph, giving the arrivals and departures of the principal trains and other information has been featured.

In addition to newspaper advertising much attention has been given to providing suitable booklets with attractive cover-designs, setting forth the attractions of scenic, holiday, and health resorts. The quality of the publications issued by the branch is now so well recognized that in several cases local bodies and private persons interested in the promotion of tourist traffic have helped to bear the cost of "Travel by Rail" booklets.

It is interesting to note that the "South African Railways and Harbours Magazine," commenting on the souvenir booklet issued by the Publicity Branch of the New Zealand Railways in connection with the tour of New Zealand by British farmers, writes as follows: "Had the brochure been published as a piece of propaganda literature it would have been in the first class of such publications. As an informative booklet for the touring party it is excellent. The illustrations are first class and the text is educative. The opening phrase of the foreword breathes friendliness: 'In a manner worthy of the importance of their mission representative farmers of Great Britain, Canada, and South Africa are being warmly welcomed to New Zealand.' Tours of this nature serve good publicity purposes as well as being educative." Folders have also been provided, and arrangements have been made for their distribution to the best advantage.

Amongst miscellaneous publicity media, window-displays have been continued, and from time to time novel and attractive windows have been arranged at town booking-offices. Business people have also assisted in displaying show-cards and other propaganda. Lecturettes on suitable railway subjects have been broadcast by wireless throughout the year, and these short talks, we find, have been popular with a large circle of listeners. Particular attention has been given to electric signs, and the one nearing completion on the Queen Street Booking-office at Auckland promises to be most effective.

Poster advertising has been largely exploited, and economies have been made by improving the design and lay-out. In some cases this has enabled similar posters to be used over the whole Dominion, with a direct saving in cost. The advantage of the screen as a medium for certain types of advertising has not been forgotten, and slides advertising special events and other features of the Railway business have been exhibited from time to time. The Railway's exhibit at the principal winter shows throughout the Dominion has been well received, and much effective work has been done in connection therewith. The contour maps of New Zealand for sale and leaflets made available for the public have been extensively requisitioned.