

## How Persuasive Advertising Affects Our Language

*by Liz Gibbons*

Advertising uses many techniques to persuade us to buy a product, use a service or act in a recommended way. These techniques include repetition, celebrity endorsement, bribery as in buy one/get one free, expert's recommendations, testimonials, and warm and fuzzy associations with the product or its effect. Sometimes ads are so effective and the product becomes so popular that the brand name is used as a generic term. This speaks to the popularity of a product but often causes the trademark to lose its legal status because it has become genericized. Here are some common examples:

- Linoleum refers to a type of floor covering but was originally a trademark. It is thought to be the first product to lose its trademark protection after a lawsuit in 1878 ruled that it had "become a generic term."
- Xerox is a brand name. Do any of us ever say we are going to photocopy something? No, we say we are going to Xerox it. Xerox has been trying for years to get people to stop using Xerox as a verb or even as a noun.
- Most of us ask for a Kleenex instead of a tissue?
- There are many books of Crock Pot recipes. But Crock Pot is a brand name for a slow cooker that was originally developed to cook beans.
- Microsoft says if you use their software for your presentation you can say it is a PowerPoint presentation. Otherwise it is a "presentation and graphics program."
- Wite-Out is a general term that we use to refer to correction fluids.
- Popsicle is a trademark that became generalized to refer to a frozen treat on a stick.
- Gauze and tape were sold separately to make bandages until Earle Dickson, a cotton buyer for Johnson and Johnson, tried to make an easy to apply bandage that would stay in place for his wife who was frequently cutting her fingers when preparing meals. Thus the Band-Aid product was born which became a household word.
- Hospira Inc. sells Procaine Hydrochloride under the name Novocain which has become a generalized term for a pain killer used in dentistry and some other pain relieving situations.
- Thermos is the trademark name for a vacuum flask, but do any of us speak of a vacuum flask?

Advertising's persuasion not only influences many of our decisions but also changes the common usage of words in our language. The trademark name becomes the generic name for the general class of products.