

# PUBLICIS AND THE FRENCH ADVERTISING WORLD, 1946-1968

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*The French advertising agency, Publicis, experienced a renaissance after the Second World War. While today, the Publicis Groupe is known as the fourth largest advertising agency in the world, few outside of France were aware of the firm's existence in 1946. Publicis' growth occurred within the framework of France's post-war economic boom—the expansion of the advertising industry, in particular. This paper will review several factors for the firm's rise: key connections with the French government, the company's use of symbols to promote itself, and the agency's ability to attract diverse clients.*

My first success, basically, was not difficult. I had a lot of audacity, but I also [had] a lot of luck. One thing led to another and I found myself carried by a kind of avalanche of success. The second success was much more difficult to earn.

Marcel Bleustein-Blanchet<sup>1</sup>

In August 1944, Marcel Bleustein-Blanchet returned to Montmartre, Paris, to the door of his pre-Second World War advertising agency, Publicis. The office place was no longer identified as his, as the government had closed down the “Jewish owned” business, deemed by Vichy France. After the war, Bleustein-Blanchet had virtually nothing; no apartment, no furniture, or possessions, except for his firm's records, which he had to use to rebuild his agency from the ground up. The office locale was still the same: small, dark and grubby. The visit inspired him. From such humble beginnings, he had built a successful agency in the 1920s and 1930s. He hoped that perhaps he could begin again.<sup>2</sup>

Publicis enjoyed remarkable success in France from its post-war reincarnation in 1946

to 1968. Publicis grew in this period from a few pre-war accounts to over one hundred accounts. Its billings increased from zero to one hundred and fifty million francs and its number of employees grew from fifty to four hundred, making the firm the second largest ad agency in France, just behind its chief competitor, Agence Havas.<sup>3</sup> The agency's accomplishments provide a case study for the acceptance of advertising in French society and for the France's entrance into the consumer culture. Publicis had the fortune to expand during the period the French call the *trente glorieuses* (the "thirty glorious years" of 1945-1974).<sup>4</sup> Publicis in this post-war period was not just a story of one firm's success but of how its expansion mirrored broader socio-economic changes. Advertising arguably did not cause economic growth to occur, but one may call it a "lubricant" for the economic engine that helped to promote consumption.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, the Publicis story provides a case study for the dynamism of the post-war French service sector. The maturation of Publicis reveals the power advertising agencies had in shaping (or reflecting) social values that would help to embrace the new market culture.<sup>6</sup>

A pillar of Publicis' success was Bleustein-Blanchet's ability to win over people, especially those with connections to the French government. A tireless promoter, he worked ceaselessly to recapture his old clients and gain new ones. Bleustein-Blanchet exemplifies what historian Pamela Laird describes as "pull" or the ability to gain access to social capital as it "exists and flows through personal connections and individuals' potential for making connections."<sup>7</sup> During the 1930s, Bleustein-Blanchet had developed a decent amount of "pull," securing a great deal of contacts in both the public and private sectors. The war only provided him with more pull. After the war, Paris offered Bleustein-Blanchet a vast array of valuable contacts. Paris's, political, industrial, and cultural capital, offered an arena where the Publicis owner could rub shoulders with leaders of government, business, and entertainment, and he quickly made the most of these connections. During The Second World War, Bleustein-Blanchet escaped France and found himself in London with the Free French, who assigned him as press officer to General Marie Pierre Koenig. After the war, Koenig became the military governor of Paris. As Bleustein-Blanchet later recalled, "this provided me with useful contacts."<sup>8</sup>

Undoubtedly, some of Bleustein-Blanchet's most practical contacts were those he had with the various governments of the Fourth and Fifth Republics. After 1946, the Publicis owner continued to interact socially with important government ministers. Leaders of the Fourth Republic sought advice from Publicis several times. In 1952, the fiscally conservative Prime Minister, Antoine Pinay, asked Bleustein-Blanchet to promote a new government loan.<sup>9</sup> Bleustein-Blanchet convinced the Prime Minister to tie himself personally to the loan. Pinay accepted the risky suggestion. One of the first loan advertisements covered a full page, concluding with a personal handwritten appeal from Pinay that said, "You can bring a necessary and decisive contribution toward national recovery."<sup>10</sup> According to Bleustein-Blanchet, the loan was the most successful French issue of the century, bringing in 428 billion francs.<sup>11</sup>

Bleustein-Blanchet also associated with Pierre Mendès-France in the 1950s. Mendès-France, of the Radical Party, had the reputation of being the most dynamic, charismatic, and forceful Prime Minister in the Fourth Republic. The two men had much in common

and according to Bleustein-Blanchet, they had a good rapport.<sup>12</sup> In 1954, Mendès-France called upon Bleustein-Blanchet for advice in an ill-fated campaign against alcoholism. Bleustein-Blanchet agreed to help and suggested that the French polling agency, IFOP, conduct a survey on alcohol awareness in France. Subsequently, Publicis helped to create the *affichage* (posters) for the crusade.<sup>13</sup> Contemporary commentators have deemed the campaign a failure, not because of the advertising, but because Mendès-France had angered a powerful lobbying interest: the wine growers and home distillers.<sup>14</sup> Mendès-France simultaneously embarked on an alternative to wine: a promotion to drink milk instead of alcohol. The rising demagogue Pierre Poujade successfully vilified this advertising campaign so much that the Prime Minister felt forced to abandon it.<sup>15</sup>

That same year, Bleustein-Blanchet advised Mendès-France to conduct what would be the first public opinion poll on political leaders in France.<sup>16</sup> Mendès-France scored poorly in the poll, and to improve his image, Bleustein-Blanchet recommended that the Prime Minister take to the radio in a series of “fireside chats” similar to those once given by FDR in the United States. The talks were successful in improving the image of Mendès-France.<sup>17</sup> However, the chats were almost too successful, and the cult of Mendès-France grew, fanned by the weekly *L'Express*. Mendès-France became too prominent a figure and too easy a mark in the vicious political arena of the Fourth Republic and his ministry fell after only ten months.<sup>18</sup>

After working with Mendès-France, Bleustein-Blanchet received calls for advice on his public relations strategies from other Prime Ministers of the Fourth Republic, such as Guy Mollet, Félix Gaillard, and Maurice Bourgès-Maunoury. By the mid-1950s, Bleustein-Blanchet met with these luminaries in a more relaxed setting; a weekend home he'd purchased at Villennes on the banks of the Seine, a few miles west of Paris. With his friend Carmen Tessier, *France-Soir's* society columnist, Bleustein-Blanchet sponsored an annual tennis match at Villennes. Present and future government notables, such as Gaillard, Bourgès-Maunoury, Mitterrand, and Chaban-Delmas, played in the matches that the *publicitaire* referred to as a “proving ground for future Prime Ministers.”<sup>19</sup>

With the coming of the Fifth Republic in 1958, Bleustein-Blanchet expanded his governmental contacts.<sup>20</sup> Soon after Charles de Gaulle's return to power, Bleustein-Blanchet provided advice about the General's first television appearance. De Gaulle's appearance in that speech was terrible in the eyes of the practiced image-maker. Wearing his uniform and hat, he read a prepared text with his glasses on his nose. At times, one could not see the General's eyes because the visor of his hat was so low. Moreover, lighting and camera angles portrayed De Gaulle unfavorably, adding years to his face. Bleustein-Blanchet called Colonel Bonneval, De Gaulle's personal aide, and delivered his critique. As a result, the General himself summoned Bleustein-Blanchet to a tête-à-tête where the two discussed the speech. The *publicitaire* reportedly told De Gaulle, “they literally massacred you.”<sup>21</sup> De Gaulle followed the advice: he removed the glasses and memorized his speeches for his subsequent television appearances.<sup>22</sup>

Bleustein-Blanchet met with De Gaulle a few other times, including a private dinner with the General and his wife. Despite these encounters, De Gaulle was never a guest at Villennes, for he eschewed such private gatherings. Bleustein-Blanchet's support for the Fifth Republic was to be expected. As a businessman, the instability of the Fourth

Republic's ministerial ranks and political factionalism could only have disturbed the *publicitaire*. To Bleustein-Blanchet, Mendès-France represented the Fourth Republic's last chance to save itself. He saw De Gaulle as another great man of state that could change France's course. However, one question remains: what did this support earn Bleustein-Blanchet and Publicis?

No records exist that demonstrate how many clients Publicis gained due to Bleustein-Blanchet's association with government officials. In 1959, a London J. Walter Thompson executive wrote, "Their [Publicis] political influence is considerable and that is where they make their money."<sup>23</sup> While this statement is hyperbolic, surely the agency gained more accounts because of its connections with government officials. However, Claude Marcus, Bleustein-Blanchet's nephew and a Publicis manager, noted that Publicis had (and has) a policy of not working for political campaigns or political parties because, "we can't test the product."<sup>24</sup>

Bleustein-Blanchet could portray himself as a man above politics. If he had to position himself within a political ideology, he avoided the political fringes, posing as a centrist. Thus, he had the ability to reach out to the Socialists in the 1950s and to the Gaullists in the 1960s. As long as those parties supported and promoted consumer consumption, Bleustein-Blanchet would be a ready ally.

Why did these politicians seek out Bleustein-Blanchet? First, he had proven himself to be a successful entrepreneur, not once, but twice, considering Publicis' post-war rebirth. Moreover, he was a charismatic figure. People simply liked him. Bleustein-Blanchet made a point of befriending luminaries of society, business, government, and the media, and his many contacts in these areas made him a nexus of power. His skills as a *publicitaire* earned him the reputation of a deal maker. Such skills made Bleustein-Blanchet valuable to politicians and others and ultimately strengthened Publicis. Publicis' good relations with the French government likely helped bring in the state-run Renault account as well (see below).

Publicis' governmental relations indicate the growing importance of advertising in France and the personal power and "pull" of Bleustein-Blanchet. Ad agencies were prominent molders of opinion and wielded considerable financial influence. No longer could one look upon agencies as sellers of quack pharmaceuticals as had been the prevailing public view before The Second World War.<sup>25</sup> As France's service sector grew, advertising became an honorable arena of business. Bleustein-Blanchet editorialized in newspapers and journals, such as *Le Monde* and *Entreprise*, to promote advertising as an acceptable business like older, more established industries, such as steel or railroads.<sup>26</sup>

Publicis capitalized on its owner's pull by the use of symbols that further enhanced the agency's status. Publicis chose symbols that associated prestige with the agency, which helped to legitimize advertising in France as a respectable sector of the business community. First, and most importantly, Publicis' two locations after 1946 were both on the Champs-Élysées, Paris' premier business address. Publicis' first postwar address was on the lower Champs-Élysées, in a Napoleon III-era apartment, (complete with a kitchen) that it shared with the Régie-Pressé. By 1957, the firm had outgrown the building. Bleustein-Blanchet purchased the then-dilapidated Astoria Hotel, facing the Arc de Triomphe, for five hundred million francs (two million dollars).<sup>27</sup>

The Astoria had been a minor Parisian landmark. Built in 1904 by the Austrian diplomat Emile Jellinek, the Astoria had been the grandest hotel in Paris but by 1954, it was empty. Bleustein-Blanchet remarked that his friends and colleagues thought he was crazy to buy the building. He went to the roof of the building and walked along the terrace. He later wrote of his feelings:

I could see Montmartre, where I was born, in the distance. I recalled my childhood days riding on the handlebars of my brother Georges' bike. I realized that for the last forty years I had only desired to be there and look at the houses, the streets, the sky, the people. I understood that during all those past years of struggle, success, and tragedy, I had done nothing but advance inch-by-inch to this miraculous spot.<sup>28</sup>

Publicis renovated the Astoria at a great cost. Bleustein-Blanchet provided three requirements for the completed structure: efficiency, comfort of the employees, and prestige. The achievement of those goals took a great deal of work, as the building required drastic remodeling.<sup>29</sup>

While profit figures are not available, Publicis must have been a prosperous company in order to afford such luxurious accommodations. The building also housed a private apartment for Bleustein-Blanchet's guests, a whole floor reserved for receptions, a dining hall, a cafeteria, showers on every floor, automatic elevators, closed circuit televisions, double ceilings, and sound baffles. There were also two types of decorations: modern for work places and more traditional for waiting rooms and reception areas.<sup>30</sup> Claude Marcus commented about their new surroundings:

We had the impression of being in a much bigger firm, a much more important company. The first building was really Third Republic and we were moving into modern times. Especially to the other agencies it seemed so modern. We had offices that had nothing in common with most offices in Paris...it was from that time that working at Publicis became a kind of social promotion.<sup>31</sup> A designer favorably reviewed the renovated offices in 1958. The architects soberly used marble, glass, and leather on the floors, walls, and doors in order "to convey a real sense of dignity." North-facing offices with little light had warmer colors, while lighter offices had paler tints. Each of the three *groupes de publicité* had individual color schemes for their offices: light green for textiles, champagne for industrial firms, and yellow salmon for consumption goods. The designer concluded that the skilful use of color and materials in the decor acted to promote the building's technical refinements.<sup>32</sup>

Such new accommodations served as proof of Publicis' success, not only to the French advertising profession, but also to clients and potential clients of the firm. Publicis' previous office buildings were anonymous spaces, and had been unimportant to the firm's image. By 1958, the agency demonstrated its link to the past by occupying a historic building. The agency also showed its connection to the present (and future) by making its

offices the most modern in Paris.

Bleustein-Blanchet used images of France's past in various ways to promote his business. In 1953, Publicis sponsored a fifteenth-birthday party gala for its subsidiary, the Régie-Pressé, the firm's seller of advertising space, at the Orangerie of Versailles. The highest members of the government, society, and press attended. Guests included the President, Vincent Auriol; former Prime Ministers Paul Reynaud and Edgar Faure; Maurice Schumann (later a foreign minister); and the writer and university professor, Raymond Aron.<sup>33</sup>

The setting was a masterful blend of the old and the new, and of course, not just a birthday party, but also an attempt to demonstrate to members of government and business the legitimacy of the advertising profession. Versailles had represented the center of French, and indeed, European civilization in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By locating the birthday party at Versailles, Publicis grafted the traditions of grandeur of the French past onto the present. The trade journal *Vente et Publicité* wrote, "Our government officials attest, by their presence, that the government is taking more and more seriously the importance of advertising as an economic factor."<sup>34</sup> Such attention would undoubtedly bring Publicis more clients. If Publicis specialized in creating images for their customers, they also created an image of themselves as a dynamic agency, a symbol of the future certainly, and one that remained respectful of France's past traditions. One can only imagine the expense of the soirée. Photos of the event show many tables and guests, the latter probably totaling one hundred. To feed and entertain these guests in style cost Publicis and the Régie-Pressé dearly. The sum spent was likely well worth the results, however, in terms of goodwill from the government and from business.

Publicis gained notoriety for its use of another symbol, America, to promote its business in 1958.<sup>35</sup> During the remodeling of the Astoria, the architect left the ground-floor dining room untouched. Bleustein-Blanchet visited the building just before the opening and was horrified at the sight. He thought the room resembled a mausoleum. According to Bleustein-Blanchet, a "bizarre" idea came to him at that moment: he would transform the dining room into an emporium. That mausoleum of a space became "The Drugstore."<sup>36</sup>

The Drugstore was not a place to buy pharmaceuticals, but a swank café and retail outlet, where one could buy magazines, electronic gadgets, gifts, and tobacco, and eat in a café. Bleustein-Blanchet translated his image of the American drugstore (a pharmacy, ice-cream counter, and newsstand) into a French equivalent: "I knew that French distribution had to evolve from its petty practices and reliance upon specialty stores. I wanted to be the first to try something new."<sup>37</sup>

The Drugstore was a marketing innovation for late-1950s France. The French writer and commentator, Sanche de Gramont, characterized the attitude of French storekeepers then as follows: "If you don't like our product, that's your hard luck."<sup>38</sup> The customer is "that barely tolerable nuisance." In the 1950s, economist David Landes noted that the great Parisian department stores, notably the *Bon Marché*, had deteriorated into an "inertia that has chased thousands of small customers back into the small specialty shops." The seller, according to Landes, accepted no responsibility for the quality of goods. In case of a dispute, "the customer is always wrong."<sup>39</sup>

Bleustein-Blanchet insisted that his Drugstore take a different tack: "the customer is king." The Drugstore offered a wide variety of goods, ranging from the most expensive caviar to inexpensive baubles. This gamut of products, of course, drew in a varied clientele: the Duchess of Windsor, as well as shop girls, bought their papers there. The owner demanded, likely from a sense of his own humble origins, that all customers be treated the same.<sup>40</sup>

Publicis promoted the opening of The Drugstore with a party, inviting political and business dignitaries, similar to the Régie-Presse's birthday gala. Thousands of people waited in line to enter. During a period of growing anti-American political rhetoric in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the French eagerly sought American goods and patterns of consumption, which The Drugstore seemingly represented. Janet Flanner, writing as Genet for the *New Yorker* in 1961, commented:

The Drugstore had been the most vital center of Americanization for them, for it was a complete replica of what an American drugstore is and means in the American way of life, and had more influence on Paris youth than any American book translated into French, or any Hollywood film ever shown there.<sup>41</sup> Flanner's comment demonstrated the cultural power that the Drugstore had acquired in only a few brief years of operation. What did The Drugstore do for Publicis, then? Claude Marcus remarked that The Drugstore helped Publicis acquire a "[...] very modern image. It was something totally different from any retail outlet that existed in Paris and the key word was modernity."<sup>42</sup>

Marcus added that the new building and The Drugstore presented a challenge to rival advertising agencies that were stunned after seeing the new site, and "realized that the competition was going to be difficult now." Besides being a great moneymaker, or as one writer called it, a "gold mine,"<sup>43</sup> The Drugstore gave Publicis broader recognition. Publicis was not just France's largest private advertising agency, it had become a retailer as well, and a seller of American images. The Drugstore provided another way to heighten the image of Publicis to the Paris consumer and to the potential advertiser. Bleustein-Blanchet's use of symbols raised the prestige of Publicis and undoubtedly brought more notoriety to the agency, as well as more clients.

An advertising agency's primary requisite is to gain and to retain clients. After the war, Publicis renewed ties with three of its longtime Parisian accounts: Léviton, Brunswick Furs, and Chaussures André. However, in order to grow, Publicis needed to gain larger, international clients. In 1947, Publicis' first break came with the American firm, Colgate-Palmolive. Colgate organized a competition for the launch of their Ribbon Dental Creme that would compete with Gibbs, the market leader in toothpastes. Previously, Colgate had only worked with American advertising agencies in France. Publicis won the competition. Soon after, Colgate granted Publicis the Palmolive shaving cream, shampoo, and razor accounts. The association of the two companies was mutually beneficial. Claude Marcus commented that Publicis brought creativity and knowledge of the French market to Colgate. In return, "they [Colgate] taught us how to have rigor in our operations, how to prepare estimates that were accurate, how to handle media planning. Before then,

decisions depended more or less on the feeling of a situation by a few people.”<sup>44</sup> Colgate could help Publicis at a critical time. As the fledgling agency tried to rebuild, it could potentially benefit from Colgate’s technical expertise and experience and then apply that knowledge to the French market.

Because of its connection with Colgate, Publicis acquired the cachet of having a large, multi-national firm as an important client. Furthermore, many French firms were attracted to Publicis. In 1947, Publicis launched its largest-ever national campaign for Timor, a DDT-based insecticide. The trade journal *Vendre* examined the organization of the campaign. Publicis’ slogan for the product was “Où Timor passe, l’insecte trépassé” (Where Timor is used, insects die). First, Publicis held a competition amongst sales agents to choose the best of them. Then, the sales agents came to Paris where Timor engineers trained them to demonstrate the product (first introduced in 60-liter bottles) and its proper use to stores that would sell Timor. Publicis briefed the sales agents on the major arguments in the advertisements and how Timor would live up to them.

With Timor, Publicis arranged the commercial organization for the sale by establishing a “sales council” between the two firms to coordinate the system of sales, manufacture, accounting, and delivery of the product. According to the article mentioned above in *Vendre*, this coordination was vital because of the seasonal use of Timor by farmers. Timor did not wish to over-produce its product and have an idle surplus. Through the “sales council,” the two firms set up a production schedule based on a sales projection that began low in January and peaked in June at the heart of the growing season.<sup>45</sup>

Publicis planned a comprehensive advertising campaign for Timor by using cinema, radio, the Parisian and provincial press, posters, store displays, and trade fairs. Publicis launched the ads in January and slowly increased their frequency over the following months. *Vendre* called the campaign a “sensational success,” as Timor became the “insecticide of France.”<sup>46</sup> Timor gave Publicis experience with the exigencies of a large national campaign, and Publicis could then apply what it learned to other accounts. Timor also established Publicis as a dynamic agency, which undoubtedly brought other clients to the firm.<sup>47</sup>

Publicis’ greatest catch was yet to come. In 1963, Publicis proposed housing a new Drugstore in the Champs Elysées showroom of Renault, France’s largest automobile manufacturer. Renault made a counter-offer. First, Renault asked Publicis to conduct a survey of the French public’s perception of the company. Publicis followed through with a survey that found the French public was unimpressed with Renault. The French government had nationalized Renault at the Liberation, due to the wartime collaborationist activities of its owner, Louis Renault. Louis, who had great sales successes in the late 1940s and 1950s with the economical 4CV model, produced over one million units during that time.<sup>48</sup> By the early 1960s, the underpowered and modestly equipped 4CV had lost its appeal to a wealthier France that desired something flashier. Renault became a model of last resort for French consumers, a “state enterprise that produced cars for the average French person.”<sup>49</sup>

Publicis proposed a long-term plan to raise the firm’s prestige in the eyes of the public. Renault accepted the plan and subsequently hired Publicis as its agency.<sup>50</sup> This was quite a coup for Publicis, since Renault was France’s largest single advertiser in all of the major



media: newspapers, billboards, and radio (the French government did not allow television advertising until 1968). The Renault account required some restructuring within Publicis with the establishment of a virtual agency within the agency by late 1963.<sup>51</sup>

Through Georges Peninou, Roland Barthes, in his brief association with Publicis, suggested that the automaker name their cars by an “R” and an accompanying number.<sup>52</sup> Publicis decided to “rebuild” the Renault image around its newest model, the R16. According to a rival advertising executive and *publicitaire*, Marcel Germon, Publicis brought a sense of estheticism to Renault that previous ads (which had been rather unimaginative) lacked. The Publicis ads for the next few years stressed Renault’s research, technical prowess, and elegance of design.<sup>53</sup> Bleustein-Blanchet commented that after five years, Publicis had succeeded. According to Publicis’ consumer surveys in 1966 and 1970, Renault had become synonymous with quality, modern research, and even a “touch of sophistication.”<sup>54</sup>

The Renault account pushed Publicis to expand nationally in 1964. Nearly all of France’s large advertising agencies were in Paris (save for a few in Lyon)<sup>55</sup> and at this time, only Havas had regional offices. Since Publicis had to work with some 450 Renault dealers, the agency decided to open ten regional branches in the countryside to better serve the needs of its clients. Publicis saw the Renault dealers as the core of a potentially regional business, one that could challenge Havas’ best strength. Marcus also envisioned the regional offices as a way for Publicis to develop local firms into national firms with Publicis acting as a sort of prospector for small businesses with growth potential.

Marcus admitted that most of Publicis’ regional offices, at least in the 1960s, lost money, while the Renault dealers consistently brought in revenue. In fact, they spent more on advertising than Renault did on the national level. However, other clients came slowly. Marcus credited this to the pre-existing “Havas network, the attitude of the regional press, and the general attitude of France towards advertising.” Many firms wanted to work with agencies in Paris, despite the advantages a local agency could provide. Executives preferred trips to Paris, which were easy, fast, and cheap due to France’s efficient rail service, in order to escape the tedium of *la France profonde*. A visit to Paris was also an opportunity to meet with various government ministries in an attempt to try to solve regulatory formalities. Thus, Publicis’ attempt to diversify regionally reveals the firm’s limitations: it could not yet successfully challenge the centralization of France.

These brief case studies of successful Publicis campaigns—Colgate, Timor, and Renault—document the various strengths of Publicis, which could promote small French firms, large companies, and even multinationals. Publicis also kept up long-term relations with many of its clients, an unusual feat in the advertising trade on both sides of the Atlantic, when clients shifted agencies every several years. Marcus noted that Publicis had a rare but beneficial mix of large and small clients. Publicis learned modern techniques and their application from its large clients. The company could then tailor the new methods quite readily to small clients with whom they had the advantage of immediate reaction to see if the new methods worked.<sup>56</sup>

In 1963, Bleustein-Blanchet wrote an editorial for the Publicis internal newsletter entitled “Il n’y a pas de ‘petites clients’” (there are no “small clients”), in which he stressed all Publicis clients were important, regardless of account size. According to the owner,

some potential advertisers were afraid to come to Publicis with their small advertising budgets. They feared that their accounts would be lost in the midst of such a large agency. Bleustein-Blanchet wanted his employees to reassure clients that this was not the case.

One can credit the personality and management style of Bleustein-Blanchet for Publicis' success. He ran his firm with a light hand, allowing his senior officers to make their own decisions. Claude Marcus remarked, "He was head of state and we were head of government."<sup>57</sup> Bleustein-Blanchet remained informed of daily firm operations through his two-hour meetings (called the *courrier*) with seven or eight of his top managers and then would be off for lunches with clients. Marcus further added that in comparison with Publicis, other French agencies were too centralized. Their owners, unlike Bleustein-Blanchet, wanted to be everywhere at once unwilling to accept surrogates.<sup>58</sup>

During its post-war expansion, Publicis' management began a transformation from a family-run, paternalistic company to a bureaucratically managed and organized firm. This transformational process, as theorized by the American business historian, Alfred Chandler, is more applicable for large industries.<sup>59</sup> Publicis partially fits Chandler's model after the war, as the firm grew more diversified. Bleustein-Blanchet employed few family members in the firm. His nephew, Claude Marcus, was the only family member in upper management or on the board of directors. Publicis was unlike most French businesses; the family members and relatives supported it as they took on various positions within the firm. According to David Landes' rather pessimistic view of French business, entrepreneurs believed that the family could safeguard the company's interests better than any outsider could and that, "The social register or the family tree is often a better credit reference than the most profitable series of annual statements."<sup>60</sup> Other historians, such as Andrea Colli, note the efficiency and durability of the European "family firm" in the twentieth century and observe that family firms were not as likely to disappear in the face of post-Second World War competition as their public counterparts were.<sup>61</sup>

Publicis' lack of family ties likely made the firm more dynamic and less risk averse. Landes argued that the French family firm was so committed to its independence that it rarely sought to expand, which could leave the firm too reliant upon the credit of others. As a result, many firms nearly "drowned in their own liquidity."<sup>62</sup> Bleustein-Blanchet did not have familial ties to weigh down his decisions. He acted as a maverick, and luckily, many of his choices succeeded. Instead, Publicis fits Colli's typology of the "open family firm" that even with "unquestioned" family control, what matters is the "presence of outsiders in key positions."<sup>63</sup>

As Publicis grew in the 1950s and 1960s and became a multi-departmental firm, Bleustein-Blanchet tried to keep his presence felt amongst the units (though he could no longer remember all of his employees' names), but he had increasingly delegated his authority to managers below. By the mid-1960s, Publicis had several departments such as Public Relations, Industrial Advertising, and International, which necessitated three levels of management: upper, middle, and lower. Yet, despite this transition to a bureaucratic firm with over 400 employees, Publicis remained family-owned. Publicis was still a hybrid firm, bureaucratically managed and organized, but family owned, and through this entire period of slow managerial change, the firm grew quickly.

It was France's second largest advertising agency, just behind its main competitor, Agence Havas, (though in some years during the 1960s, Publicis did surpass Havas in total billings). By 1969, the firm had also become the 45th largest agency in the world with billings of \$48 million and over two hundred clients.<sup>64</sup> It was a mega-agency, providing not only advertising services but also an entire package of media planning, with public relations, market research, and consumer panels. What was the lesson of Publicis' material prosperity? Was it a follower, a creator, or a passenger of France's post-Second World War Renaissance? This paper argues that the firm performed as a significant innovator within France's service sector, creating for itself the image (and reality) of an agency with roots in France's past preparing France for modernity, material progress, and the new urban life of the 1950s and 1960s. Its success carried France closer to the "Concorde than to *Clochemerle*,"<sup>65</sup> nearer to "le Big Mac" than to "le pot-au-feu."

## NOTES

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1. Marcel Bleustein-Blanchet, *La rage de convaincre* (Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1970), 273. Recreating the history of Publicis is challenging considering since a fire gutted the firm's headquarters in 1972. Some of the information here comes from Bleustein-Blanchet multiple autobiographies: *Sur mon antenne* (Paris: EDF, 1947), *La Rage de convaincre* (Paris: Laffont, 1970), and *Mémoires d'un Lion* (Paris: Presses Pocket, 1988) and *The Rage to Persuade: Memoirs of a French Advertising Man* (New York and London: Chelsea House, 1982), translated by Jean Boddewyn. Marcel Germon, an advertising colleague, wrote a praise-laden biography entitled, *Monsieur Publicité* (Paris: Editions Molière, 1989).
2. Bleustein-Blanchet, *La rage de convaincre*, 276.
3. *Publicis Informations*, no. 89, January 1965, 2.
4. The French economist Jean Fourastié coined this term for the title of his book. Jean Fourastié, *Les trentes glorieuses* (Paris: Fayard, 1979).
5. French consumption of goods and services per capita increased 68% from 1950-1964. Jean Broizat, "Où en est le niveau de vie des Français?," *Réalités*, March 1964, 40-43.
6. For more on the history of French advertising see the broadly synthetic Marc Martin, *Trois siècles de publicité en France* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1992). Other recent histories focus on the first half of the twentieth century such as Marie Chessel, *La publicité, naissance d'une profession, 1900-1940* (Paris: Editions CNRS, 1998), Stephen L. Harp, *Marketing Michelin: Advertising and Cultural Identity in Twentieth-Century France* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), and Marjorie Beale, *The Modernist Enterprise: French Elites and the Threat of Modernity, 1900-1940* (Stanford,

- Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999). For the Franco-American experience see Clark Eric Hultquist, "Americans in Paris: The J. Walter Thompson Company in France, 1927-1968," *Enterprise and Society* 4 (2003): 471-501. For broader works on modern French business history see Michael Stephen Smith, *The Emergence of Modern Business Enterprise in France, 1800-1930* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006) and Patrick Fridenson, *France: the relatively slow development of big business in the twentieth century in Big business and the wealth of nations*, Alfred D. Chandler, Franco Amatori, and Takashi Hikino, eds., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
7. Pamela Laird, *Pull: Networking and Success since Benjamin Franklin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 2.
  8. Bleustein-Blanchet, *The Rage to Persuade*, 65.
  9. For more on the Pinay Loan, see Jean-Pierre Rioux, *La France de la quatrième République*, vol. 2 (Paris: Seuil, 1983), 13-15.
  10. *Le Monde*, 6 June, 1952, 5. The ad's text begins, "De l'or qui rapporte, pour la défense du franc, SOUSCRIVEZ, à l'emprunt de la confiance." The border of the ad is ringed by a circle of 20-franc gold pieces of 1907. See Bleustein-Blanchet, *Mémoires d'un lion*, 192-193, and Sylvie Guillaume, *Antoine Pinay ou la confiance en politique* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1984), 80-81.
  11. One can only partially credit advertising for the loan's success. The loan paid a then-favorable 3.5% and was exempt from taxation and death duties. A popular slogan of the time was "Get into Pinay before getting into your coffin." Frank Giles, *The Locust Years: The Story of the Fourth French Republic, 1946-1958* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1991), 163.
  12. For more on Pierre Mendès-France, see Jean Lacouture, *Pierre Mendès France*, trans. George Holloch (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1984). The circle around Mendès-France referred to him as "PMF," à la FDR. Lacouture's biography makes no mention of Bleustein-Blanchet (nor do any of Mendès-France's own writings). According to Lacouture, PMF, because of his reformist nature, attracted many "modernist managers" (such as Bleustein-Blanchet) to "bombard him with suggestions, opinions, warnings, and criticisms." See 257-264.
  13. One ad showed a young man hobbling on crutches with the accompanying slogan, "When parents drink, children get drunk." *Mémoires d'un lion*, 190.
  14. Mendès-France hoped not only to fight alcoholism, but to reduce the tax privileges of home distillers. The alcohol lobby consisted of some five million people. Maurice Larkin, *France since the Popular Front* (Oxford, U.K.: Clarendon Press, 1988), 245.
  15. Giles, *The Locust Years*, 234-235.
  16. Bleustein-Blanchet, *Mémoires d'un lion*, 190-193. This 1954 poll provided a list of 12 politicians to the poll-takers. The question asked, "Among the following, whom do you trust most to resolve France's problems in case of national danger?" The list included Antoine Pinay, Henri Queuille, Edgar Faure and René Pleven. Guy Mollet came in first and Charles De Gaulle second.
  17. Even at the time of the fall of PMF's ministry, public support remained high. In a rank ordering of ten political leaders, PMF outdistanced by far his nearest competitor, Antoine Pinay. See "Le Gouvernement Mendès-France et l'opinion," *Sondages*, no. 1

- (1955), 35-42.
18. Frank Giles, the *London Times* correspondent, liked Mendès-France to Leon Blum, the Socialist Prime Minister of the Third Republic, who both had the ability to “attract loyalty and enthusiasm, calumny and loathing.” Giles, *The Locust Years*, 237. Mendès-France lasted some ten months in office: his ministry fell in February, 1955. One of Mendès-France’s ministers, Diomède Catroux, served at Publicis as Financial Director from 1957-1961. Catroux had been Air Minister and Armament Minister.
  19. At Villenes, Bleustein-Blanchet befriended his new neighbor, the airplane magnate, Marcel Dassault. Bleustein-Blanchet, *Mémoires d’un lion*, 205-206.
  20. The Publicis owner recounts in his memoirs how he served as midwife to De Gaulle’s accession to power in June, 1958. André Le Troquer, the Socialist Speaker of the Lower House, was obstructing the transfer of power from President Coty to De Gaulle. According to Bleustein-Blanchet, a Gaullist (with whom he had done business) called upon the publicitaire for assistance. Could Bleustein-Blanchet go see Le Troquer and convince him not to impede De Gaulle? Bleustein-Blanchet won over Le Troquer by telling him that if De Gaulle did not accede to power, Le Troquer would soon become the “most hated man in France.” With Le Troquer’s acquiescence in the Lower House, De Gaulle was able to take over from Coty. The Gaullist who sought out Bleustein-Blanchet was Michel Boloré, the proprietor of OCB, which made cigarette paper. OCB had been a post-war client of Publicis. Bleustein-Blanchet, *Mémoires d’un lion*, 213-216. For more on Le Troquer, see Frank Giles, *The Locust Years*, 352-356.
  21. Bleustein-Blanchet, *Mémoires d’un lion*, 215-219.
  22. Bleustein-Blanchet, *The Rage to Persuade*, 97-98.
  23. H.A. Paniguian to Sam Meek, 13 August, 1959. In the J. Walter Thompson Company Archives, E.G.Wilson Papers, Special Collections Department, Duke University Library, North Carolina.
  24. Publicis forbade its foreign agencies to do the same. Interview with Claude Marcus, 6 February, 1992, Paris.
  25. Martin, *Trois siècles de publicité en France*, 165-167.
  26. Marcel Bleustein-Blanchet, “Il est temps de défendre la publicité française,” *Le Monde*, 14 October, 1964, and “Considérez-vous la publicité comme un facteur essentiel de l’essor économique?” *Entreprise*, 21 November, 1964.
  27. Bleustein-Blanchet, *The Rage to Persuade*, 69-71.
  28. Bleustein-Blanchet, *La rage de convaincre*, 291.
  29. One company source estimated that 4,000 five-ton trucks took away 17,000 tons of rubble to start the process. After that, the remodeling required 300,000 meters of electric and telephone wires, 1,000 tons of plaster and cement, 600,000 hours of work furnished by more than 30 businesses, 500 tons of iron, 150 cubic meters of wood, 35,000 square meters of paint, 800 square meters of windows, 6,000 square meters of sound-proofed ceiling material, 3,000 square meters of carpeting, and finally, 5,000 meters of piping and 3,000 meters of conduits for heating. G. Tallet, *Petite Histoire de l’Agence Publicis*, unpublished work, collection of Claude Marcus, 17. This “history,” is a handwritten account of developments at Publicis from 1927-1960, produced for the management of Publicis. The building had seven floors and three underground levels.

30. Tallet, *Petite Histoire* 25-27. Such descriptions of Publicis' building sounds similar to other authors' descriptions of J. Walter Thompson's Madison Avenue headquarters, located in the Graybar building. JWT's office space took up four floors of the building, each floor about an acre in size. The firm placed a heavy emphasis on style and design, ensuring elegant accommodations to impress its clients. See Stephen Fox, *The Mirror Makers*, 90-91, and Martin Mayer, *Madison Avenue USA*, 7, 93-94.
31. Interview with Claude Marcus, Vice Chairman of Publicis, 19 February, 1992, Paris, France.
32. Madeleine Fuchs, "Si nous visitons..." *Le Journal de la Publicité*, 5 December, 1958, 6.
33. *Vente et Publicité*, 15 July, 1953, 1, 3-5.
34. *Vente et Publicité*, 15 July, 1953, 1.
35. For the "Americanization" of France see Richard Kuisel, *Seducing the French: the dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993) and Victoria de Grazia *Irresistible Empire: America's advance through twentieth-century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).
36. Bleustein-Blanchet, *La rage de convaincre*, 293-294.
37. Bleustein-Blanchet, *La rage de convaincre*, 295.
38. Sanche de Gramont, *The French: Portrait of a People* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1969), 431.
39. David Landes, "French Business and the Businessman: A Social and Cultural Analysis," in *Modern France: Problems of the Third and Fourth Republics*, ed. Edward Meade Earle (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), 342-343.
40. Bleustein-Blanchet, *La rage de convaincre*, 298-299.
41. Janet Flanner, *Paris Journal, 1944-1965*, ed. William Shawn (New York: Atheneum, 1965), 491.
42. Interview with Claude Marcus, Vice Chairman of Publicis, 19 February, 1992, Paris, France.
43. Germon, *Monsieur Publicité*, 104.
44. Interview with Claude Marcus, Vice-Chairman of Publicis, 6 February, 1992, Paris, France.
45. One perhaps could compare this system of production/marketing to the "just-in-time" system favored by Japanese automobile makers.
46. Guy Houel, *Vendre*, June, 1947, 141-142. Bleustein-Blanchet noted that Publicis used public relations as well to promote the sale of Timor, to try to create a favorable climate around the brand. Potential buyers came to cocktail parties where they were given menus cadeaux in order to make them more favorably inclined towards Timor. Bleustein-Blanchet, *Mémoires d'un lion*, 160.
47. *Vendre* did a follow-up study on Timor two years later. Forty-nine percent of the people they polled knew Timor was an insecticide (though 3% correctly knew as well that it was an island in the Pacific). The poll also revealed that a key market for Timor, farmers in localities with less than 2,000 people, had the lowest recognition level of Timor. Urban professionals recognized Timor the most. This disparity of target audience probably came from the fact that farmers bought fewer newspapers and owned fewer radios than any other social group. Gilles Perrin, *Vendre*, May, 1949, 177-181.

48. Hubert Bonin, *Histoire économique de la IV<sup>e</sup> république* (Paris: Economica, 1987), 302.
49. Bleustein-Blanchet, *La rage de convaincre*, 305.
50. Publicis replaced Promos, Renault's in-house agency. Boutelier and Subramanian, *Le grand bluff*, 29.
51. Publicis took on fifty more employees to service Renault: for a firm of some 300, this was a significant addition. Jean Terramorsi, a "Sciences Po" graduate, headed the new internal *groupe*. Terramorsi had briefly worked for Publicis in the cinema and radio department in 1948-1949. Later, he was managing director of Propag (Ford's advertiser before JWT) and then was *directeur technique* of Promos, Renault's in-house agency at the time of Publicis' takeover of the Renault account. *Balzac 7800*, September 1963, 2 bis.
52. Georges Peninou, a semiotician, headed Publicis' Research Department in the 1960s. He brought in Roland Barthes to work briefly for the firm. Boutelier and Subramanian, *Le Grand bluff*, 38.
53. Germon, *Monsieur Publicité*, 124.
54. Bleustein-Blanchet, *La rage de convaincre*, 306. Publicis' ads for Renault won many advertising awards from the 1960s to the 1980s, such as five "Grands Prix E.S.C.P." For more, see Germon, *Monsieur Publicité*, 124. Despite this advertising success on the national level for Renault, Publicis faced problems on the regional level. Provincial newspapers confronted Publicis. The regional press syndicate, the SNPQR, did not want to pay Publicis a commission for Renault dealers' advertisements. According to Marcus, the syndicate felt that Publicis was earning something for nothing. Publicis negotiated with the syndicate for two years and finally came to a commission agreement that Marcus signed with the syndicate head, Gaston Defferre, the Socialist mayor of Marseille and president of the paper, *Le Provençale*. As a result, Publicis would receive a commission from the regional press for the Renault ads they placed for the regional dealers. Interview with Claude Marcus, 13 February, 1992, Paris, France.
55. Lyon had agencies because of its newspaper, *Le Progrès de Lyon*, which, according to Marcus, was one of the only newspapers that commissioned local agencies without any discussion.
56. Interview with Claude Marcus, Vice Chairman of Publicis, 6 February, 1992.
57. Interview with Claude Marcus, Vice Chairman of Publicis, 19 February, 1992.
58. Interview with Claude Marcus, Vice Chairman of Publicis, 9 March, 1992. In this same vein, Dilip and Subramanian wrote that in the 1950s, the PDG of Dupuy, Roger Louis Dupuy, himself wrote and designed his firm's campaigns for Danone. See *Le Grand bluff*, 62.
59. Alfred D. Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1977).
60. David Landes, "French Business and the Businessman: A Social and Cultural Analysis," in Edward Mead Earle, ed., *Modern France: Problems of the Third and Fourth Republics* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), 336-337.
61. Colli discusses the post-1945 success of the family-owned Italian automobile manufacturer Fiat. Andrea Colli, *The History of Family Business, 1850-2000*, (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 53-54 and 65-66.

62. Landes, "French Business and the Businessman," 338-339.
63. Colli, *The History of Family Business, 1850-2000*, 76.
64. "World's Biggest Agencies," *Advertising Age*, 31 March, 1969, 44. Havas had billings of \$54 million and was ranked 41st. The world's largest agency, J. Walter Thompson, had world-wide billings of \$638 million. If Publicis were an American firm, it would have ranked 43rd in the USA.
65. *Clochemerle*, a novel written in 1934 by Gabrielle Chevallier, lampooned and satirized French village life of the 1930s, depicting the townsfolk as homespun rustics. John A.M. Rothney, "French History as World History: Some Suggestions for Interpreting France since De Gaulle," *Western Society for French History*, 18th Annual Meeting, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1990, 3.