

PROFITABLE SHOWMANSHIP

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Profitable showmanship by Kenneth Goode & Zenn Kaufman

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KENNETH GOODE & ZENN KAUFMAN

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by

KENNETH GOODE and ZENN KAUFMAN

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vast Radio City Music Hall. Not with a famous personality; not with a Hollywood superproduction. No. His picture was hardly more than an hour's showing of unpretentious little painted sketches: familiar fairy-tale characters moving quaintly and demurely across the huge screen.

A whole year earlier a Paris silk house had wagered on the success of Disney's showmanship by buying for France the first merchandising rights to the Snow White motif in fabrics, and Cartier the jeweler was only a few months later. And their wisdom was justified on the first showing. As Mickey Mouse had succeeded, so "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs." Not *because* they were drawings instead of photographs! Not by any manner of means! Desperately in spite of it! For Walt Disney carries to its illogical conclusion—beyond any believable distance—the flat proof of the complete error in the thoroughly reasonable and practically unanimous prediction of all experienced motion-picture producers, ten or twelve years earlier, that the public would never accept the incongruity of human voices coming out of photographs. They are wiser today. Convinced now it's the *appeal*, and not the vehicle, that matters—Hollywood even considers Deanna Durbin with cartoon background in "Cinderella." The one shrewd executive who spoke most convincingly of all as to the flat impossibility of having moving photographs also talk is said to be planning a feature length, big-time musical comedy to be *sung* by drawings.

Forgetting the movics for a moment, let's travel 3,000 miles for another angle on the improbable possibilities of profitable showmanship. While Sunday morning crowds

waited to see "Dopey," filling the whole length of one of New York's longest blocks for hours in winter winds, an intelligent Canadian minister was postponing his Sunday evening services from seven o'clock until eight to give the young people in his Manitoba congregation a chance to *hear* Charlie McCarthy over the radio. As all know, Charlie McCarthy is a ventriloquist's dummy!¹

"Dopey" and Charlie McCarthy thus moved together into the toyshop windows and shared together the soap designs that Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck once found so profitable.² I. F. Lauks brought out a special line of cosmetics for ventriloquists' dummies. Sieberling Rubber signed up to make Snow White and the seven dwarfs in molded rubber toys, Snow White to retail at a dollar, the dwarfs at fifty cents apiece. Joseph Dixon, Lionel, Mangel, and National Dairy were first among the enterprising to hook a ride on the Disney bandwagon, while Owens Illinois Glass laughed off the depression by filling its factories with glassware decorated in Disney designs. Not surprising. They are likeable, colorful, and picturesque—as toys!

The year before this new Disney enterprise took the

¹The carefully nursed "feud" between Charlie McCarthy and W. C. Fields is an excellent example of the promotive value—for both sides—of natural tie-ups. Fields, they say, took the first crack at the up-and-coming McCarthy. Bergen had his little dummy retort, "Mr. Fields, if they were going to carve your face out of wood, they would have to use redwood for a nose!"

The "redwood" phrase swept the country. Since then Fields has publicly threatened to slice young McCarthy into a set of Venetian blinds. Frequently claimed the dummy was full of termites. "Charles, my diminutive little chum," said Fields over the radio, "Why don't you go ride piggyback on a buzz saw?"

²The conservative New York *Times* ran a house ad showing Mickey Mouse boasting that he pulled 4,000 orders at one dollar apiece from a full page in the *Times* magazine section.