

*A Three-fold Program of Improvement, Instituted since
The War, Promises Better Service for Customers and a
Consequent Gain in Revenue for the Bell System*

Public Telephones: They Serve Everybody

T. Hunt Clark

ONE of the first big post-war sales and servicing jobs to get under way in the Bell System's Associated Companies, and one which is already showing important results, is aimed at improving public telephone service*—and thus public telephone revenues. Important as public telephone service is at present—it handled more than *two billion calls* last year—the companies are moving aggressively ahead on a plan to make it still more so.

Three outstanding factors have made this one of the lead-off post-war sales projects:

1. It is a job on which a good deal can be done with only minor demands on the already overloaded outside telephone plant and central office facilities.

* This article refers only to public telephones; i.e., coin and attended telephones which are provided for the use of the general public. Not included in the discussion are the semi-public telephones provided primarily for the subscriber, with public use more or less incidental.

2. It is needed to insure the adequacy of the service on which the entire public depends so much, not only in emergencies but for business and all sorts of other occasions as well. It is particularly important at this time because of the number of people who have been unable as yet to obtain telephone service of their own.

3. It offers attractive opportunities for increasing revenues substantially.

The public telephone promotion forces of the Associated Companies are pushing forward on three primary fronts:

A. Improving service and revenues at existing public telephones by improving the convenience, comfort and attractiveness of the service.

B. Relieving congestion and improving revenues by providing additional public telephones.

The size and importance of public telephone service is indicated by the fact that in 1947 the more than two billion calls made at public telephones produced some \$150,000,000 in gross revenue.

While public telephones comprise only 1.5 percent of the System's main telephones, they contribute 7 percent of the total billing.

And every call is an opportunity to create better public relations.

C. Encouraging the general public to place calls at public telephones rather than to use the private telephones of subscribers in stores and other business places.

Proof of the Pudding

WHAT can a well integrated, aggressive public telephone promotion program such as this really accomplish?

Perhaps the easiest way to visualize it, and to prove it, is to see its results in a medium sized city—one of the many where this work is under way. Let's look at what happened in Winston-Salem, N. C., recently.

The Winston-Salem exchange area has a population of 119,000; and last summer, when the public telephone promotion man came into town to start work, it had 300 coin telephones in service. The representative visited all these locations, and carried out such a program.

He saw to it that locations, and directory, lighting, and ventilating facilities, were improved where needed.

He arranged for refinishing any booths in poor condition, and enlisted the coöperation of the public telephone agents—the owners or lessees of the premises where the tele-

phones are located—in providing adequate day-to-day janitor service.

Fourteen businessmen were persuaded that public telephone calls had no place on their business lines.

In all, he found ways to improve 124 installations, and he found good spots for 43 more coin telephones.

So attractive to the public were the service improvements he was able to achieve that, a few months after the job was done, revenue from the coin telephones was found to be running 50 percent ahead of the same period of the previous year. That contrasts sharply with the increase of only 0.7 percent in revenues from coin stations in the rest of the state of North Carolina during the same period.

Certainly this is proof of a mighty good pudding.

NOW LET'S LOOK a little more closely at the three aspects of this big promotion job.

IMPROVING SERVICE

Conditions at all existing installations are being thoroughly reviewed for opportunities for improving service to the public. Special attention is paid to low revenue producers.

Take the nickels, dimes, and quarters collected from public telephones last year—

Stack them up in one pile and you would have a monument over 3,000 miles high.

Lay them end to end and you would have a metal ribbon over 36,000 miles long.

Load them in boxcars and you would need a 300-car train over two miles in length.

For example, here are some of the measures being taken by the Associated Companies at such locations to improve—

Convenience: by moving the station to a more accessible location; or by providing shelves or tables for directories which are now hung from chains; by replacing directories with torn or missing leaves.

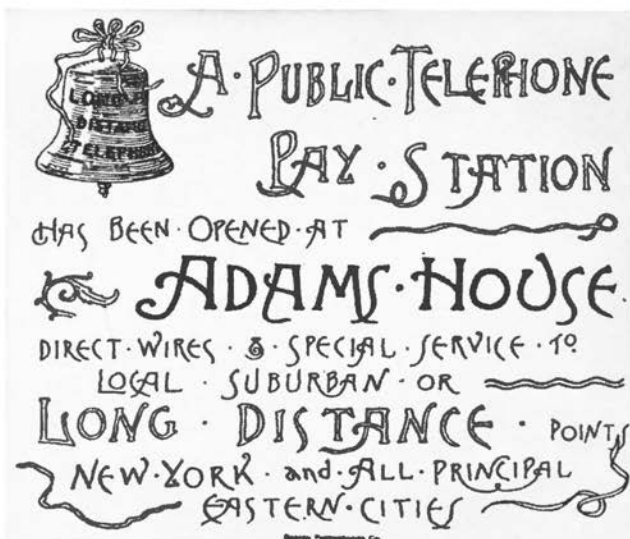
A bank of five booths in a store off the lobby of an office building was made more accessible by moving them out into the lobby. Result: an increased patronage which brought with it an 80 percent increase in revenue, or \$3,400 more a year.

Comfort and Appeal: by better lighting, installing fans and seats, improving janitor service, and moving from excessively noisy locations.

A telephone near a juke box is not pleasant or easy to use, and the public will avoid it; whereas it can be a real public servant in another spot on the premises. The ceiling lights in booths are now being changed from 25-watt to 40-watt bulbs for better visibility when dialing, making notes during conversations, etc.

Privacy: by providing booths for public telephones which formerly were simply mounted on a wall.

Recently such an open telephone in a five and ten cent store was replaced by two telephones in booths. The greater privacy was appreciated—to



Installation of a public telephone was once a particularly noteworthy occasion

the tune of a 200 percent increase in revenue—\$1,200 more a year.

Prominence: by adding signs, or changing their type or location, to obtain greater coverage and visibility.

Illuminated signs are coming into greater use at appropriate locations. Moving the station to a more conspicuous location is also an effective means of making it more convenient—as was illustrated earlier. Brightly painted booths at selected locations are making their appearance around the country, giving public telephone locations a bright new look.

To carry out a job such as this, involving about 300,000 public telephones, requires a well planned, closely coordinated program of inspection, prescription, and corrective action. The principals concerned are the Commercial, Plant, and Engineering Departments and our friends the public telephone agents.

Work begins with a thorough inspection of each location by the Commercial public telephone promotion people. In addition, as a regular and continuing thing, the public telephone coin collectors make it a point to be on the look-out for and to report any conditions which may affect service adversely. They are in an excellent position, for example, to spot missing equipment, damaged parts, and unsightly conditions.

In the plans for increasing the attractiveness of service at existing public telephone locations, the agent plays a particularly important part. The telephone company looks to him

to provide suitable space for the equipment, to keep the facilities clean, and to furnish current for booth and directory lights. Thus he shares with us the job of maintaining the installation in good condition.

For his part he is recompensed, generally by a commission on the receipts, so he has a stake in seeing to it that his public telephones are inviting to the public.

The Bell System pays the tidy sum of about \$28,000,000 yearly to its public telephone agents.

To get the agent off to a fresh start, and to make sure that a good housekeeping job is done, some of the companies say, in effect, "Mr. Agent, this time we'll clean up the booth for you and then you'll see what a difference a little more 'spit and polish' makes to appearances—and, incidentally, to the size of your commission check at the end of the month." More often than not Mr. Agent is impressed by the results and this has a salutary effect on his caretaking activities in the future.

The Plant Department majors in the important job of scheduling and taking the necessary action to make such improvements as refinishing booths, relocating the facilities, adding signs, and so on.



This elaborate telephone booth of half a century ago had many of the important features of its modern counterpart

RELIEVING CONGESTION

Busy, congested locations are getting first attention, and new telephones are being added in localities where facility conditions permit. Close coordination with the central office equipment schedule is maintained, to make sure that this new installation work is intensified as additional central office equipment is installed.

In the meantime, the program provides for assuring that the best use is made of what we have. We want to be sure that existing public telephones are in locations where they do the most good.

Usually the amount of money collected from a public telephone is a good index of how well it is serving the public. So, if receipts from a low payer cannot be improved by the various corrective measures mentioned earlier, it is moved to a location where it will be more useful to the public.

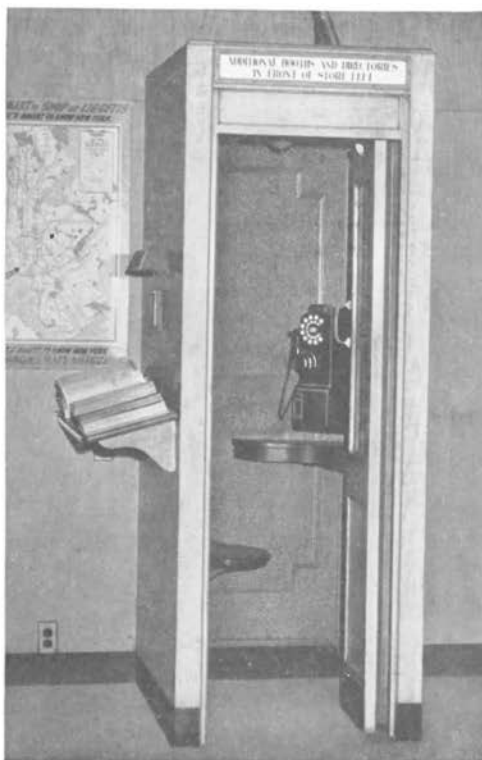
However, there are exceptions to this. Some public telephones are comparatively little used but are left where they are because many people in the locality have no other telephone to use in an emergency.

USE OF SUBSCRIBERS' SERVICE

The channeling of bona fide public telephone calls over coin telephone lines is another part of the public telephone promotion man's service improvement job.

In many instances, without realizing the disadvantages, a business subscriber permits his customers and the general public to use his business telephone for calls which public telephones are intended to handle.

He is unaware that this needlessly



An average modern public telephone installation: clean-cut, functional. Note particularly such points as the seat in the booth, directories on a well-lighted shelf and memo-sheet holder above them, and the sign at the top of the booth giving the location of other public telephones

ties up his line and he may lose important calls.

He may find he has not collected for toll calls that were made.

If there are enough calls, he may be depriving himself of commissions on these calls if they were made over a public telephone on his premises.

The corrective action taken is to make sure that attractive, convenient coin telephone service is available nearby and to move the subscriber's service to a spot less accessible to the public.

In a Texas city, the public tele-

phone people worked with 19 large downtown businesses which were making their own business lines available to the general public. They included department stores, banks, theaters, etc. The businessmen were convinced by the telephone representatives that it would be to their advantage to discontinue this practice and to encourage the public to use the coin telephones. Sixteen public telephones were installed for public convenience and the business telephones were moved. Public telephone revenues at these locations are now \$14,400 a year—and the businessmen are getting nice commissions.

Good Service Is the Aim

GOOD public telephone promotion pays off in more than nickels, dimes, and quarters.

The public relations stake in the job is also big. Big because each day millions of people all over the country who use these facilities are impressed favorably—or otherwise. The influence, good or bad, is cumulative, and therefore of great importance in molding public opinion of the telephone company. There is plenty of evidence of this.

That people do appreciate clean, well-equipped, conveniently located public telephones is being clearly evidenced in Winston-Salem and other places where this work has been under way.

Also from time to time there are the dramatic occasions when public telephones and public telephone people can render unusual and much valued service.

Take, for example, the recent com-



Modern design and architectural treatment make this attended public telephone center attractive

ment of a commuter who said "That job was worth four full pages of newspaper advertising in building good will."

This is what inspired his remark.

He was one of thousands who were marooned in a railroad station when the "big snow" hit the New York area right after Christmas and badly disrupted train and bus service. The situation at this station was particularly acute, and the public telephones in the station were jammed in the emergency.

To do what they could to meet the urgent needs of the situation, the New York Telephone Company dispatched a number of special representatives to the location. Equipped with armbands reading "Telephone Company," they stationed themselves at the public telephones and rendered all kinds of special assistance. They made change, gave out long distance call information, and made additional directories available.

Because of the excessively heavy traffic, there were long dial-tone and circuit delays. Some users became impatient, and with others unfamiliar with dial coin telephone service did not wait for dial tone and lost their nickels. As well as they could, the representatives made refunds.

Several of the representatives, with the railroad company's assistance, set up shop in a ticket seller's



An outdoor public telephone. When shortages of equipment have made it impossible to provide residence telephones, booths such as this have brought service to housing developments which otherwise would have been entirely without it

booth and hung up a sign reading "New York Telephone Company Representative." A special line to the "A" board was installed, and when anyone was particularly overwrought and ran into delay in completing his call, the representative undertook to relay the message to the called number. This ticket window did a land office business and in a small way assumed the proportions of a general information bureau.

For the better part of a week, as long as the emergency lasted, these special emissaries of helpfulness and good will were on the job.

Special Services and Equipment

THIS AWARENESS of public needs and reaction shows itself in a variety of



A telemobile brings the convenience of telephone service to a dog show which, like many other public gatherings, would otherwise be without it



Interior of a telemobile, showing the arrangement of space to accommodate booths, waiting customers, and attendant

other very practical ways in the public telephone promotion job. For example, the increasing number of public telephone installations at outdoor locations recognizes that they are sometimes better public servants out-of-doors than indoors.

The end of a transit line, or a transfer point in the outskirts of a city, is illustrative. Here people often need to make calls after the stores in the neighborhood are all closed.

Missed the bus! Train delayed! Must call home! The outdoor public telephone meets the need. Many more of them are coming into use.

The outdoor location is also playing an important part in many new residential areas where facility shortages prevent furnishing main-station telephone service for the time being and where suitable indoor locations are not available.

In some places they are also being placed experimentally along super-highways where roadside commercial establishments to house indoor public telephones are often non-existent or few and far between.

There are other new developments designed to do whatever can be done to provide convenient public telephone service wherever it is needed.

The telemobile, an attended public telephone center on wheels, with about six booths, space for an attend-



One type of telecart, which brings coin-box telephone service to bedridden patients in veterans' hospitals

ant, and seats for customers, is often used to meet the special needs for service at county fairs, important golf tournaments, dog shows, and similar occasions. They get around.

Their war record is distinguished. Some of them served on the decks of battleships in dock, and others served at desert military posts. They were widely used where indoor space could not be obtained immediately and where speed in establishing service was important.

The telecart, the tea wagon telephone, is a war baby originally developed to bring telephone service to the bedridden patients in military hospitals. It did its job well and is still used widely in the hospitals of the Veterans Administration.



Colorful booth installations attract attention—and customers. This pair is in a New York City subway station

Today, advance planning in cooperation with the V. A. is making it possible to equip these hospitals with suitable telephone outlets, with the result that a nurse can plug in a telecart for service at the bedside of any bedridden veteran.

For the wheel-chair patient, public telephones are installed in oversized booths, big enough to accommodate his chair. For those with injured hearing, hard-of-hearing (amplifying) sets are provided; and for men on crutches there are booths with and without seats, so they may choose whichever is more convenient.

You may never have seen Gelett Burgess' purple cow, but in New York City and perhaps in other places you can see gay red telephone booths. They are intended to and do attract attention and custom-

ers in places where they might otherwise be overlooked.

So far, the attention-getting record of these booths is remarkable. Repainting a booth red, and thus impressing on passers-by its convenient availability, generally increases the revenue about 25 percent.

Coupled with other improvements, revenue increases have been even greater. Public telephone people have, for example, removed a group of four booths, installed three red booths a few feet away at a better location with improved lighting and directory facilities, and have found that the increased usage thus stimulated has stepped up revenues by 780 percent—a rate of \$1,600 a year.

Outdoor booths at gas stations are going up in the color motif of the gasoline company whose products are

sold there—another example of the variety of possibilities for using color in this field.

The use of striking color is, of course, appropriate only at selected locations and, as you might expect, intelligence and taste are necessary to achieve pleasing and effective results.

Multiple Objectives

THE ATTRACTIVE color treatment is illustrative of the new attention which the promotion people and engineers are turning to the job of improving public telephone service and revenues.

The possibilities of improving lights, booths, directory facilities,

signs and booth ventilation are all being studied. The result will no doubt be still further improvements in the appearance, as well as the general convenience, of public telephone installations. Meanwhile, the present fuller utilization of existing facilities—booth fans, illuminated signs, special exterior finishes, and the like—is already bringing benefits to the users of this most necessary service.

More modern and convenient public telephone service, more widely used by a more satisfied public, with increasing revenues to the companies, are the aims of this big nickel, dime, and quarter job.

Who's Who & What's What

(Continued from page 3)

1944 he was at W. E. headquarters in New York, where his duties included contract negotiations. In 1944 he became assistant general patent attorney of the A. T. & T. Company, and since 1945 has been general patent attorney.

SINCE 1937, when he transferred to the then Procurement Division, now the Bureau of Federal Supply, of the U. S. Treasury Department at Washington, GEORGE E. DESJARDINS has been interested in the Federal Government's utilities services. With a background of an electrical engineering degree from the University of Maine, he has, as engineer and economist in the service of the Federal Government, been engaged in studying some of its telephone and communications problems. The answer to one of them is the recently installed Federal Government Inter-Agency Dial Switching System, which he helped develop over a period of ten years and which he discusses in this issue.

Among his present responsibilities is a project of current interest to the Bell Sys-

tem operating companies. This is the U. S. Treasury's "consolidated telephone contract" program, covering some 40 major city areas, where substantially all telephone service to Governmental activities may be procured under a series of master contracts between the Bureau of Federal Supply and the various companies. Mr. DesJardins, working with the companies' tariffs and engineers, sets up schedules of rates applicable to each area, which schedules are used in operating under the contracts. The resulting simplified operation is mutually advantageous.

ALTHOUGH FREDERICK A. WISEMAN's article in this issue appears as a sequel to "The Biggest Offer Ever," which he contributed to the MAGAZINE for Winter 1947-48, it describes an operation which preceded the 1947 convertible debenture offer and greatly simplified the handling of it. Mr. Wiseman's Bell System career is recounted briefly in the earlier issue.

THE AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS on pages 24 and 51 were obtained from Fairchild Aerial Surveys Inc.