Dear Doctor...

We can probably all agree receiving a postcard in the mail from an exotic faraway place is one of the more exciting things that might happen in a day... but did you know that some decades ago, a pharmaceutical company used this precise notion to come up with one of the most unique marketing schemes of all time? Read on - it's a good story!

Between the years 1954 and 1968, Abbott Laboratories of Illinois sent out 240,000 postcards every couple of weeks to doctors, nurses, and health facilities all over the world. They manufactured, stamped, and postmarked over 170 unique postcards from 165 different towns in 85 countries. The postcards' authenticity of origin intrigued the recipients, increasing their overall effectiveness.

The pictures on the cards displayed local scenes portraying the place, culture, or people of the particular country it was mailed from. The entertaining message on the back was written in a friendly tone, and never forgot to plug their prized product—an intravenous anesthetic by the name of Pentothal. This drug, by the way, is still used today not only for its anaesthetic effects, but also in some places for its truth serum properties!
It is a bit of a mystery how this novel idea originated. In an article by Daniel Friedman, one Abbott employee, Dean Carson, was quoted saying, “I just came up with this idea and they said it was fine.” Others speculate it was either the Abbott advertising executive, Tom Bird or Charless Hahn, the Chicago Sun Times stamp editor, who had previously collaborated on a magazine together advertising Abbott products to doctors in Latin America.

Whoever actually invented this genius marketing method back then probably didn’t fully realize the extent of popularity these postcards possess among present-day collectors. In September 2012, a bunch of Dear Doctor postcards were sold on eBay raking in hundreds of dollars for each card—the record price was $298!

Impressive, isn’t it?

By the way, the photos that illustrate this post come from the collection of Tom Fortunato, who graciously allowed us to use them. Tom runs deardoctorpostcards.com, a website for Dear Doctor postcard collectors - check it out!
here is another one of mine from Greenland ...

http://9teen87spostcards.blogspot.com/2012/03/qivitoq-movie-from-greenland.html

Posted by 9teen87 on 25 Jan, 2013

Thank you for an amazing story. I am a professor of pharmacology and I will put this nice story to my lecture. I hope that the students will learn quickly all material conected with interesting things

Posted by ingali on 25 Jan, 2013

This is such a wonderful bit of postcard history. Thank you!

Posted by PostMuse on 25 Jan, 2013

WOW!

Posted by linku on 25 Jan, 2013

the power of a postcard... very interesting story indeed!

Posted by LuziaAlestle on 26 Jan, 2013

Fascinating and an original form of Ad cards

Posted by Mundos on 26 Jan, 2013

thank you for this interesting article :)

Posted by nedam_nori on 26 Jan, 2013

What a wonderful story and a clever marketing campaign, and I hope I can run across one of these some day. It would be wonderful!

Posted by MsCookie on 26 Jan, 2013

So interesting! Thanks!

Posted by Mama-Bear on 27 Jan, 2013

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