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# William H. Danforth

## Ralston Purina, Danforth Foundation

By M. Karen Hubbard

### LESSON DESCRIPTION

In this lesson, students will discover different ways entrepreneurs promote their product trying to get people to purchase it as they explore the contributions of entrepreneur William H. Danforth. Students will read the story of Mr. Danforth and discuss the many ways he tried to promote his product. Students will try to invent their own idea to promote a product.

### ECONOMIC CONCEPTS

- entrepreneur
- target market

### RELATED CONCEPTS

- reading comprehension
- language arts

### MATERIALS

- One copy of “William H. Danforth” reading for each student
- One copy of Activity 1 – “Product Production” for each student
- One copy of “Dog Food Bag Marketing Activity” on overhead transparency.
- Art supplies for decorating bags (for example: markers/crayons, glue, colored paper, yarn, foam shapes, etc.)
- Brown bags (one per student)

### TIME

This lesson is divided up into three 30-45 minute classes or, if not enough time, teacher may read over lesson and pick activity that would fit time limit.

### PROCEDURE

Class One:

1. If you have not discussed “entrepreneur” with your students already, explain that an “entrepreneur” is someone who thinks of a good or service

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that someone would like to buy and produces it. An entrepreneur takes a risk that people will not like the good or service, and that all of the time, effort, and money he or she has spent to make the product will have been for nothing.

2. Distribute the story of William H. Danforth and explain that the students are going to read about an entrepreneur who developed a product that was used year round and how he promoted his product.
3. When the reading is completed, help students define any words with which they are unfamiliar. Ask the following questions:
  - Where is Charleston, Missouri, located on a Missouri map?
  - Why was Mr. Danforth not happy in the brick business? (seasonal: can only conduct business certain times of the year so do not make a yearly income.)
  - Who influenced his thinking? (his father) How? (Father said to get into a business that people need year around – good times and bad times in order to make a yearly income.)
  - What business did he get into? (Animal feed)
  - What was Danforth’s target market, that is, the consumer group likely to buy his good? (farmers and ranchers)
  - Why was this a good choice? (Animals have to eat year round and their feed was cheaper than oats and safer than corn.)
  - Why was 1894 both a good and difficult year? (Good year because he got married to Adda Bush and difficult year because a tornado wiped out the company’s factory.)
  - How did he handle the destruction of his factory? (He went to the bank and borrowed \$25,000 to rebuild the factory.)
  - What did Mr. Danforth do in 1898? (Mr. Danforth decided that his company would make and sell whole wheat breakfast.)
  - When and why did the company change its name to Ralston Purina? (He met a man named Dr. Ralston, a health teacher, who said that he would tell people that the breakfast was good for their health if his name was put on it. The name changed to Ralston Purina in 1902.)
  - Why did Danforth want Dr. Ralston to endorse his product? (He figured that many of the 800,000 people who listened to Dr. Ralston would buy the product.)
  - Why did Danforth put the word “Chow” on all animal feed that his company produced? (While fighting in the First World War in France, Mr. Danforth noticed that food was called “chow” and this chow brought great happiness to the soldiers. After the war he felt that putting the word “chow” on his feed would attract former soldiers to buying his animal feed.)

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- Why did Mr. Danforth put his animal feed in red and white checkerboard sacks? (Danforth felt it would attract people to buying his product.) Where did he get the idea? (He had remembered from his childhood the Brown family who wore clothes made from the same bolt of checkerboard cloth and you could not miss them.)
  - In his personal life, what did Mr. Danforth believe was the ingredients for life? (A person's mind, body, personality and character must grow in balance with each other.)
  - What did he and some friends organize in 1924? (The American Youth Foundation) Why? (Train young men and women in Christian ideals and help them prepare for a life of responsibility and leadership.)
  - What did Donald Danforth persuade his father to do? (In 1926, He opened the Purina Pet Care Center 45 miles southwest of St. Louis.)
  - What did Mr. and Mrs. Danforth do in 1927? (They established the Danforth Foundation to give scholarships to many college students and teachers.)
  - What is the main goal of the Danforth Foundation now? (To help revitalize St. Louis region and make it one of the top metropolitan areas in America.)
  - About how old was Mr. Danforth when he died? (About 77 years old)
4. Ask the students to view the three bags on the "Dog Food Bag Marketing Activity" transparency on the overhead and tell which one draws their attention to the product and why. Explain that the checkerboard square became a trademark by which consumers knew the Purina products.
  5. Explain that "intermediate goods" are things made by people and used up in the production of another good/service. They are different from capital resources because capital resources are NOT used up in the production but can be used over and over again, like a hammer, computer, building, etc.
  6. Ask the students what resources, including intermediate goods, they think the producer used to decorate the bag. (natural – ground for building; human – people who made the bag; capital – scissors, markers/crayons; intermediate goods - bags)
  7. Tell the students to think of a product that could be sold in bags. Show the students the art supplies you have put on the table. Tell the students that they are to use the art supplies to decorate the bag in order to attract consumers. They are also to keep a list of everything they use to decorate the bag. (Student may need to finish at home.)

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Class Two:

When they have finished decorating their bag, instruct students to write a paragraph using adjectives in complete sentences to describe their bag using words that might refer to the color, size, shape, etc.

Class Three:

Put the decorated bags around the classroom and number them. Have the students take a sheet of paper and number it according to the amount of bags. Explain that students will play a game trying to pick out a particular bag using the students' written descriptions that you will read. (To speed up the game, teacher can type the paragraphs, number them, and make copies for all students. Students then read the paragraphs and match them to the bags.) Check answers together.

Remember:

Teacher needs to keep track of the description to the corresponding bag. The student with the most correct answers wins.

## CLOSURE

Remind students that entrepreneurs may have a good product but they have to find ways to attract a target market that will encourage the consumers to buy it. William H. Danforth thought of ways to persuade people to buy his product.

## EXTENSION

- Distribute the “Product Promotion” Activity Sheet to each student and have them answer the questions using complete sentences. Discuss answers with the students.
- Teacher can invite an entrepreneur from the community to discuss the risks and benefits of starting a business.

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## ACTIVITY 1 – PRODUCT PROMOTION

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Instructions: There were 3 ways mentioned in the reading about how Mr. Danforth promoted his products. Answer the questions below in sentence form.

1. Why is it important for an entrepreneur to promote his/her product?
2. Why did the endorsement of Dr. Ralston help to sell the new wheat cereal?
3. Why do you think putting the word “Chow” on all the animal feed helped promote the feed?
4. Why do you think putting the feed in checker board patterned sacks helped to sell the feed?
5. Think of some other ways that entrepreneurs inform consumers of their product today and list them below.

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## ACTIVITY 1 – PRODUCT PROMOTION – ANSWER SHEET

1. It is important for entrepreneurs to promote their product because they want to sell it so they have to find ways to inform the target market about it.
2. Dr. Ralston was a health teacher with 800,000 followers. Mr. Danforth hoped Dr. Ralston’s followers would buy the new cereal if Dr. Ralston endorsed it.
3. Mr. Danforth was hoping that the word “chow”, which brought great happiness to the soldiers on the battlefield because it meant food, would attract the attention of the soldiers who were farmers when they came home from the war.
4. Mr. Danforth was hoping that the checker board pattern would attract the consumers to his feed sack as the pattern attracted attention to the Brown family.
5. Some ways that entrepreneurs attract consumers to their products today are: radio, television, newspaper, magazine, sports’ stadiums, computer advertisements, billboards, mass transit (busses, Metrolink, etc.).

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**DOG FOOD BAG MARKETING ACTIVITY**

**A.**



**B.**



**C.**



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# **William H. Danforth Ralston Purina, Danforth Foundation**

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William H. Danforth was born in 1870 in a swamp area in southeast Missouri. He helped his father in their store in Charleston, Missouri. He was a sickly farm boy but was dared by his school teacher to become “the healthiest boy in the class”. His life was built upon the idea that to live is to dare.

Mr. Danforth graduated from Washington University in St. Louis (across from Forest Park) in 1892 and found a job in the brick business. He was not satisfied because this was seasonal work. He always remembered what his father had said, “Get into business that fills a need for lots of people—something they need all year round and in both good and bad times”. Two men persuaded Danforth to join them in producing horse and mule feed. At that time there were 2 feeds for horses and mules besides hay: corn, which every year thousands of horses died from colic caused by bad corn, and oats which was expensive. In 1894, the Robinson-Danforth Commission Company was formed. Their slogan was “Cheaper than oats and safer than corn”. Danforth began as the bookkeeper and became a good salesperson.

1894 was a good year because Mr. Danforth married Miss Adda Bush. They had two children, Dorothy and Donald. It was a difficult year because a tornado hit St. Louis and wiped out the company’s factory. He did not let this get him down; he went to the bank and borrowed \$25,000 to rebuild.

Danforth was interested in human nutrition, too. He believed that a hot whole wheat cereal would be a healthy breakfast food. In 1898, Danforth began selling the cereal to St. Louis grocers under the Purina label. The cereal was later renamed Ralston Wheat Cereal to gain the endorsement of a famous health teacher, Dr. Ralston, who had 800,000 followers. By 1902, the company changed its name to Ralston Purina.

Mr. Danforth fought in the First World War in France. Rations (food) were labeled “chow” and he observed that the word “chow” brought soldiers in the battlefield great enthusiasm. After the war, he returned to his business and put the word “chow” to all livestock and poultry feeds that his company produced. Throughout the United States and Canada, farmers knew the name “Purina Chows”.

Another of Mr. Danforth’s sales promotion ideas was to have a distinctive trademark. At that time, companies did not have standard packaging. Mr.



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Danforth bagged his animal Chow in sacks marked with uniform red and white checker board pattern. He had remembered from his childhood the Brown family who wore clothes made from the material from the same bolt of checkerboard cloth. He said, "You couldn't miss a Brown kid".

In his personal life, he did not let business crowd out a happy balance of life. He believed that a person's ingredients for life are a body, a mind, a personality and character must grow in balance with each other. He wrote a number of books on this subject.

In 1924, Mr. Danforth and some friends organized the American Youth Foundation to train young men and women in Christian ideals and help them prepare for a life of responsibility and leadership. He helped start Camp Miniwanca, a 300-acre campsite near Shelby, Michigan. For 30 years, up to the time of his death, he went to this camp and counseled thousands of young people.

Donald Danforth, son of William Danforth, persuaded his father in 1926 to open Purina Pet Care Center which conducted feeding trials and nutritional studies. It covers 337 acres and is located 45 miles southwest of St. Louis. It is now known as "Purina Farms," an animal educational facility. It is the oldest and largest facility in the world.

In 1927, Mr. and Mrs. Danforth established the Danforth Foundation as a national educational philanthropy. It extended scholarships to many college students and teachers. Presently, its main goal is to help revitalize St. Louis region and make it one of the top metropolitan areas in America.

He wrote an inspirational "Monday Morning Message" each week for his associates and employees for nearly 40 years. In 1955, in his 84th year, he wrote, "Some folks are continually making changes. I flatter myself that I like new ventures and new experiences. But when it comes to fundamentals I believe in finding the right foundations and building on them. I'm a poor changer. For instance, here are some of the fundamentals I have never changed: I have been a church member for over 60 years; married to one wife for over 60 years; a lodge member for over 60 years; a Purina man for over 60 years."

Mr. Danforth was his company's active Board Chairman, tireless traveler, and leader of youth until his death on Christmas Eve 1955.

In 2001, the Ralston Purina Company merged with the Nestle Company to become the Nestle Purina Petcare Company. It is now the world's largest producer of dry dog food, dry and moist cat foods, and leading producer of cat box filler in the United States and Canada.