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Tony Schwartz in his sound studios on West 56th Street last week. He advertises both politicians and products.

Packaging Voters for Candidates, TV-Style

By CHRISTOPHER LYDON

The picture on the television screen shows Senator Abraham A. Ribicoff, the Connecticut Democrat, with his wife behind a shopping cart in a supermarket aisle. A slow succession of still photographs focuses the viewer's attention on 30 seconds of studio-recorded words:

SENATOR RIBICOFF: When I shop with Lois. . . .

MRS. RIBICOFF: I'm delighted that Abe has a moment to come. . . .

SENATOR RIBICOFF: . . . in the Hartford area where I've spent most of my life. . . .

MRS. RIBICOFF: I think Abe is absolutely astonished. . . .

SENATOR RIBICOFF: I see people putting food back on the shelf after they've looked at the price. . . .

MRS. RIBICOFF: I think he's very distressed. . . .

SENATOR RIBICOFF: . . . and that really hurts. They want the item. They would like it. They know they just can't afford it.

MRS. RIBICOFF: I think he comes away with great and deep feelings.

SENATOR RIBICOFF: It's a

lonely fight when you try to keep food prices down.

MRS. RIBICOFF: Abe has always been for price control.

SENATOR RIBICOFF: It's really shocking.

That elliptical, barely political sounding dialogue was inspired, recorded and edited by Tony Schwartz, a New York advertising man who is one of the busiest men in American politics this fall.

'Best in the Business'

Joseph Napolitan, the campaign consultant, calls Mr. Schwartz "the best in the business" of political sounds and pictures; David Garth, who has managed Representative Hugh L. Carey's media campaign in the New York race for Governor, calls him "the master" of the tape recorder.

Mr. Schwartz, who operates out of a studio-home in what used to be called the "Hell's Kitchen" neighborhood of Manhattan's West Side, earns his living turning out Macy's radio commercials and Coca-Cola's "It's the real thing" spots.

Ten years ago, he conceived one of the more famous political advertise-

ments of the electronic era: The films of a girl counting petals on a daisy, which cut to the sound of a military countdown and the picture of an atomic mushroom cloud as the voice of President Johnson declared: "These are the stakes. . . ."

This year, Mr. Schwartz is producing radio and television commercials for 13 Democratic candidates, from Marvin Mandel of Maryland to Senator Mike Gravel of Alaska.

Low-Budget Spots

The low-budget Ribicoff spot is representative of a lot of political advertising in the 1974 campaign. Money is tight. Congress and many states have legislated limits on media spending, and in some important campaigns (the California and Massachusetts Governorship races, for example) candidates have agreed on still-lower voluntary radio and television ceilings.

Media men, in general, have lost their reputation for black magic since Joe McGinnis wrote "The Selling of the President" about the Nixon campaign of 1968.

The most celebrated TV campaigns for the Senate in 1970—including Charles Guggenheim's Cinema Verité commercials for Senator Howard Metzenbaum in Ohio, and Mr. Garth's fact-packed spots for Richard Ottinger in New York—ended in the candidates' defeat.

Dark horses have become formidable candidates this year—like David Boren, the Democratic nominee for Governor in Oklahoma, and Ramsey Clark, the Democratic challenger against Senator Jacob K. Javits of New York—with scant benefit of paid television. The Watergate scandal, meanwhile, has tended to upstage the media men as the manipulative villains of American politics.

Political Merchandising

Yet the Ribicoff supermarket spot is illustrative of much political merchandising this year and, in particular, of Mr. Schwartz's influential ideas. Most of these are elaborated in his book, "The Responsive Chord," published by Anchor Press-Doubleday last year.

Among the Schwartz theorems in his chapter on political advertising are the following:

Q To the average voter, expressing-a-position-talk is what Government officials do when they want to cover up something. A voter wants the candidate to talk to him, not at him; to use the medium not as a large public address system but rather as a private undress system.

Q "The best political commercials are similar to Rorschach patterns. They do not tell the viewer anything. They surface his feeling and provide a context for him to express those feelings."

Q "The task of a media specialist is not to reveal a can-

didate's stand on issues so much as to help communicate those personal qualities of a candidate that are likely to win votes."

For Senator Gravel, too Mr. Schwartz has produced a supermarket spot, in which the Senator's voice begins, "Every so often Rita and I shop together," and ends, "It's shocking." The point, as in the Ribicoff commercial, is not to suggest any mastery of the inflation issue.

Quite the opposite, Mr. Schwartz explained in his studio here. "Who knows the answer to inflation?" he asked "You don't. He doesn't. And if someone told you the answer, you wouldn't know he was right. But people will come away from this feeling: This man knows what I'm going through. I'll feel comfortable with him. He knows what I'm going through."

That is not manipulation, Mr. Schwartz says, but rather "participation" because it invites the listener-watcher to participate — indeed to provide meaning for the ad out of his own experience and emotion. "The audience becomes work force," Mr. Schwartz explains, quoting his friend Marshall McLuhan, the most famous of modern media analysts.

The charge that ad men "package" candidates misses the point of his own work, Mr. Schwartz argues.

"My study is how to surround the voter with auditory and visual stimuli that evoke reactions and feelings that move him to pull our candidate's lever in the voting booth," he says. "We really package the voter and deliver him to the candidate."

Mr. Schwartz insists that he does not "sell candidates like soap" either. "You see," he says, "I don't sell soap like soap."

In the Schwartz view, the mistake in most product advertising, from soap to gasoline, is that "It's trying to make you feel the product is unique when you know it's not. I want to make the product commonplace. Does it have a meaningful relation to my life? That's what sells."

In that sense, he says, "products have a lot to learn from politicians. Politicians don't try to take a unique position just to be different. They try to take the correct position, deeper."