

A BUYER'S DREAM COME TRUE

That's the Australian Buying Advisory Service, a Melbourne-based organization that "shops" for its members to find them the lowest price on any item over \$50 in value.

By Mardi Kerr.

Did you hear the one about the man who ran around in circles trying to get a great quantity of timber and was quoted what appeared to be mad prices? Well, he joined ABAS and they got him his timber at a saving of 58% on the lowest price he had previously been quoted. Honestly.

As Norman Gunston would say, truly and reely it's the best thing to happen to the Australian consumer society. ABAS stands for the Australian Buying Advisory Service which is actually self-explanatory. Managing Director Richard Farrington says ABAS saves its members tens of thousands of dollars each year by doing their shopping for them. This doesn't mean very small things but if an item is over \$50 in value then the Service sets out with a relentless determination to find a supplier prepared to sell to the member for as close to cost price as possible.

"There are," he says, "many pitfalls for the unwary. How can a consumer be absolutely certain that he is buying a genuine 'bargain' and not a superseded model advertised as a special? It's our job to find out and to protect our members.

"A few months ago a member rang and brought our attention to a newspaper advertisement for a large city store. It offered a particular lounge and style of lounge suite at a special price for this week only. We shopped around and we found the identical suite, not on special, at another store and negotiated a price for our member which was more than \$200 below the advertised price of the 'one week only' lot."

ABAS is based in Melbourne but it has members all over Australia . . . there are even some in Papua New Guinea. Membership can be arranged by telephone or by mail: simply write to Australian Buying Advisory Service Pty Ltd., V.A.C.C. House, 464 St. Kilda Road, Melbourne, 3004. The telephone number is 267-1888. Fees are

extremely moderate, considering the service offered. One year's subscription is \$45, two years \$75, three years \$105.

For interstate members, anything will be bought and sent to the member provided the item is of low volume and low weight . . . clearly it is impractical to try to send 800 dozen cricket balls or 785 dishwashers from Melbourne to Sydney. Or, for that matter, anywhere else. By the time high volume, high weight articles are transported, the member will be paying as much as he would have anywhere else.

Nothing carries a blanket guarantee these days but whatever the member wants — repeat *whatever* — the Society will attempt to find it. If it can be gotten, they will get it. If it can be bought, they'll buy it. They could probably even get you an elephant.

The most important objective of ABAS is the enormous saving of time. This is even more important than saving money. Among the members are about 100 solicitors, 70 priests, 12 Federal politicians and 150 accountants, doctors and other professional people. If they were to spend a lot of (valuable) time trotting about comparing prices and comparison shopping they would soon be in quite a bind. So ABAS saves them all that running, *and* a load of money.

The other important aspect of their existence, according to Richard Farrington, is their position of trust.

"Everyone needs someone to lean on, to ask for advice and to trust," he says. "So in the consumer marketplace, who better than us? If someone has found a so-called bargain, who does he ask, other than us, to prove that it really is or is not the bargain it's presented as? We can tell him pretty easily because of our considerable contacts but even when we tell him we can arrange the same whatever-it-is for a smaller price, he's not bound to



Richard Farrington, managing director of the Australian Buying Advisory Service: "There are many pitfalls for the unwary consumer."

take it. He can still go back and get the first one if he wants to but we have done our job. And done it honestly, because we don't have a vested interest."

One man who had a happy surprise was a member who wanted to buy a Ford station wagon. ABAS found him one at a saving of \$564 on the first quote but by the time he took delivery there had been a cut in sales tax so he saved a further \$200.

There are other jolly little stories too: \$305 saved on a caravan, \$200 on a Yamaha agricultural bike; \$132 on a pair of garage doors; \$120 on a verandah.

There was a most disconsolate gentleman who had mistakenly signed an unfair contract for a collection of encyclopaedias, decided he had been ripped off and wanted to renege. He was shown by the financial adviser of ABAS how to do this.

One mildly hysteric lady called up one day and wailed that her (expletive deleted) cat had actually been sick on the new carpet, for God's sake, and what would she do now? Someone in the furnishing department handled the situation with huge calm and explained to the frantic member how to take instant remedial action (for the carpet, not the cat).

The Church smiles benignly on ABAS, too. Wanted were 100 bundles of votive candles and not only did ABAS find a saving of \$10 per bundle *but* the candles were an extra 1/2 inch longer than the ones originally quoted on.

People do order some interesting things — one person needed 50 pairs of roller skates and a slab of concrete measuring 40' x 70'. He was saved \$170 on the skates and a splendid contractor was found for the concrete. Need a steam roller? There's one happy chap who saved \$680 on his purchase.

ABAS members phone a special number and leave details

of the article needed with information of the style, model, finish etc. and the best price that has been offered. Within 48 hours one of the ABAS staff phones back and directs the caller to the store where the best possible price has been negotiated. In the vast majority of cases this is an astonishing amount below the member's best available price. The joyful caller then presents his membership card and completes the purchase.

ABAS has also arranged for its members to shop at a wholesale warehouse for all items valued at less than \$50. This applies to crockery, linen, cutlery, lamps and lots of other homemaking things. Think of the savings on Christmas presents!

There are also special concessions arranged permanently on all dry cleaning, photographic printing and developing, chemists supplies, car rentals, some restaurants and theatres, wines and spirits. Special advisory services have been set up to ensure that ABAS gets the very best possible value for its money. These are in finance, travel, insurance and so on. It's a matter of record that most people have not the faintest idea that one tour could have a different cost of as much as \$200 between several tour advisers or companies. This is because of an extra loading.

As ABAS has no vested interest, its advice is completely objective and a loading is non-existent. Financially, almost everybody needs someone trustworthy to look at contracts and advise them accordingly. Members are also steered to non-profit organisations and co-operatives, and lured away from expensive hire-purchase contracts.

Actually, the Australian Buying Advisory Service is a sort of huge father figure symbolism . . . protective, firm but kindly, educative, highly respected and quite dignified. Furthermore, they can get it for you wholesale. ■ (Advertisement)