



Lesson 5

The Pressures of Advertising

Main Ideas

\$ *TV, Internet, movie and radio advertising constantly urges children to buy, buy, buy!*

\$ *Products are designed to attract children to purchase them.*

\$ *Advertisers use techniques to encourage brand loyalty. Even infants and toddlers introduced to logos and product images can develop brand loyalty later in life.*

\$ *The advertising industry sees young people as an excellent market. Instead of being victims of advertising pressure, children can learn to use advertising as a source of useful information.*



Key Words

\$ **Advertising** - A way manufacturers try to sell their products, by calling consumers' attention to them. Advertising is designed to make products seem necessary or desirable.

\$ **Commercial** - An advertising message presented on radio, television or other broadcast media.

\$ **Consumers** - People who buy and use products and services.

\$ **Infomercial** - Program-length commercials that promote a specific product or service using a typical program format, such as a talk show, product demonstration, cartoon adventure, etc.

\$ **Media** - The many forms of mass communication, both electronic and print, including TV, Internet, podcasts, movies, radio, billboards, newspapers, magazines, etc.

\$ **Media Literacy** - Skills for analyzing or evaluating messages, many of which make use of language, moving images, music, sound effects, special visual effects and other techniques that affect our emotional responses.

Children and Advertising

According to the Federal Trade Commission, in 2004 children ages 2 to 11 saw 25,600 total TV ads and 2 1/4 hours of ad-supported TV a day.¹ But that's only on the television screen. Those numbers don't include the Internet, print media or product placement in movies. Many of the things that children request are things they want because of high-pressure advertising on TV, the Internet, radio and billboards and in movies, newspapers and magazines. Children who haven't learned to read yet can recite TV commercials.

Exposed to the highly developed sales techniques used in most media, our children are constantly pressured to buy. Advertisers specifically tailor their work based on research. Companies start early creating brand-loyal customers. Groups of 3- to 5-year-olds were able to identify logos for fast food, retail stores and TV icons when shown "flash cards."² Celebrities and program icons encourage youth to identify happiness with possessions and endlessly urge the buying of expensive clothes and branded foods. Young consumers have nearly \$84

billion a year in spending power, according to Yankelovich,³ a consulting firm. Youth are deluged with advertising. Advertisers spend an estimated \$12 to \$20 billion a year to reach them.⁴

Also, with an estimated spending power of \$153 billion in 2006, teenagers present a vast marketing opportunity that is multifaceted and touches on many products and services.⁵

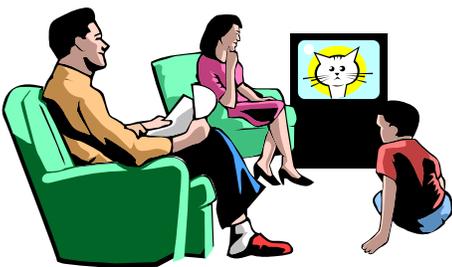


Children aren't safe from advertising in school either. Channel One News broadcasts are delivered daily to more than 7 million teens in middle schools and high schools across the country, reaching approximately 30 percent of teenagers in the United States. The 12-minute in-classroom broadcast has 2 minutes of commercials.³ Businesses are more than willing to provide "educational" information and products for the classroom, realizing how readily youth learn to recognize logos and brands.

As a parent or caregiver, you can help your children understand the role of advertising in our marketplace.

"But First This Important Message . . ."

Are those words familiar to you? They should be. The website for the Children's Advertising Review Unit of the Better Business Bureau includes this comment: "It is estimated that children in this nation watch an average of 3.5 hours of television every day, the equivalent on an annual basis of a **50-day marathon** of TV viewing." Forty percent of infants are regular TV and DVD viewers, and that number jumps to 90 percent for 2-year-olds.⁵



What Is Advertising?

An advertisement is a message that tries to sell a product or service. Advertising has two

functions—to *inform* and to *persuade*. By being alert to these two functions, we can use advertisements to our advantage. The factual content of an ad can often help us make sound purchasing decisions.

Advertising does have several good effects. It pays for commercial TV, websites and radio, often gives information you can use in comparison-shopping and introduces new products. But an advertisement is always trying to *sell* something. An ad may give you information, but only the information that the advertiser thinks will persuade you to buy.

The role of advertising has been complicated by the advent of the infomercials. For adults, these commercials air like documentaries or talk shows, often with famous personalities endorsing the product or service. In children's programming, toys are sold based on television characters. Although the television program is not a commercial per se, many times the product is created first, then the television show is written about and based on the product. Children have difficulty separating the show from commercials featuring the same characters.

More importantly, after watching the 30-minute cartoon feature, children ask for the products — everything from diapers to macaroni and cheese dinners, soups, toothbrushes, clothes, shoes and even toilet seats—tied to their favorite characters. You can teach your children to *use advertisements, not let advertisers use them*.

Help children distinguish the commercial from the program. Explain to children that they don't have to believe everything an ad

seems to say. Federal law forbids advertisers from making false statements. In other words, they are not allowed to tell lies. But an advertisement may combine true statements with scenes and images that may *imply* something that may not be true at all. For example, a cell phone ad might show a group of young people congregating at a business, covering each other with silly string, as a result of shared text messages. This has nothing to do with the phone and nothing at all is *stated* - nobody has told a lie. But the *implication* is that kids who have these phones will have fun and lots of friends - and if you want to have experiences like that, you should have the same phone.



How Does Advertising Work?

Advertising's main purpose is to get you to buy. One very effective way is to appeal to your emotions. **Let's look at a few examples:**

The desire to be like others. For example, an ad may imply that all teens wear a certain brand and style of jeans, and if you don't, you won't be popular.

Fear. Such ads imply that if you don't use a certain product, you will lose your boyfriend or girlfriend, be seen as an outsider, or won't be able to compete for jobs or grades.

Snob appeal. These ads imply that buying a certain item makes you a leader or a success.

Comfort and enjoyment. Such ads suggest physical pleasure, such as good flavor, soft texture, health,

or freedom from pain.

Sex appeal. These ads want you to think a product will automatically make you popular with the opposite sex.

Desire for a bargain. Prices and free gifts are stressed.

Instant happiness. These ads imply that you will be assured of happiness as soon as you buy and use the product.

If you know what an advertisement is trying to do, it's easier to decide whether you really want to buy the product. Toddlers and preschoolers are especially vulnerable to commercial messages. They are more inclined to use the right side of their brain - where color, images, and emotion are triggered - than the left-brain skills of thinking and analysis, which are undeveloped at that age.

¹ Holt, D., P. Ippolito, D. Desrochers and C. Kelley. (June 1, 2007) Children's exposure to TV advertising in 1977 and 2004. Federal Trade Commission: Bureau of Economics Staff Report.

² DeRusha, J. (May 14, 2007) How many brands do young children recognize? WCCO TV, Minneapolis, Minnesota

^{3,4} Bess, Allyce. (June 20, 2004) Ads aimed at kids leave many to ask: too much? Some groups want to limit marketing. St. Louis Post-Dispatch, in Center for a New American Dream.

⁵ Spending Power of the Teen Consumer - US - (September 2006) Published by: Mintel International Group Ltd. Report in Global Information Inc.: the-infoshop.com

⁶ Zimmerman, F. and D. Chistakis. (May 2007) *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* in UW News.

Things To Do—Family

- \$ At your regular family meeting, talk about ads that family members have seen or heard. How much did the ads really tell about the products? Were there unmeasurable statements like "tough" or "luxurious?" What information was generic and could have been used to describe other products? What purpose did the scenery, characters and conversation play in the ad? What emotions did the ads trigger?

These are some things to look for in an ad:

Information

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| \$ Style | \$ Features |
| \$ Color | \$ Who makes it |
| \$ Size | \$ What is it for |
| \$ Weight | \$ Regular price |
| \$ Shape | \$ Former price |
| \$ Quantity | \$ Current price |
| \$ Where available | |

Persuasion

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| \$ Vague claim of economy | \$ "Your last chance to buy" |
| • "\$30, worth \$40" | \$ Impressive illustration |
| • "Should sell for . . ." | \$ Vague reference of quality |
| • "Now only . . ." | i.e. "These last for years to come" |
| • "Below cost!" | \$ Play on fears - pain, social failure, accident, etc. |
| • "Selling elsewhere for . . ." | \$ Play on hopes - health, glamour, "a new you," romance, enjoyment |
| • "Certified value" | |
| • "Made to sell for . . ." | |
| • "Savings up to . . ." | |

Analyze an ad

- \$ What is written down, shown on TV, the Internet, at the movies, or heard on the radio?
- ◇ What does the ad really tell you?
 - ◇ What do the advertisers want you to think?
 - ◇ What do you think?
 - ◇ How can the ad help you?

Make up a new product

- \$ Let all household members who are old enough make up ads for the product. Show and talk about the ads at a family meeting. How did each ad try to "sell" the product?

Make a collage

- \$ Find newspaper and magazine ads that appeal to emotions. Make a collage using the ads. Discuss the ads. Hang on family bulletin board for a while to encourage wise use of advertising among family members.

Preschoolers

- \$ As you watch TV together, talk about the commercials. Explain the difference between ads and programs. Help your child understand that commercials are partly “make-believe.”
- \$ Introduce your preschooler to children’s programs on public TV channels, where there are no commercials. If you have cable or satellite television, there are also some ad-free children’s programs available. Help them to understand that products printed with the likeness of these characters are not “better” because Dora, Elmo, Big Bird, Sponge Bob Square Pants, etc. decorate the item.



- \$ Give children other things to do besides watching TV - playing with friends or family members, helping around the home, “reading” picture books and magazines, drawing or coloring, learning to play a simple musical instrument, making up stories, planting a garden, swimming or other sports and so on.

6- to 12-Year-Olds

- \$ Children of this age are old enough to understand how advertising works. Talk about ads they see and hear.

\$ Explain that advertisers are not allowed to tell lies, but they can *imply* things that are not true.



- \$ Discuss how commercials affect your family and its choices.
- \$ Study magazine or other print ads, paying special attention to frequently used “selling” words and claims that could or could not be proven.
- \$ Let children write and then videotape, draw or act out ads they create.
- \$ Encourage children to make a poster of different ads and tell other family members about the ads they selected. Highlight the various emotions the ads are using to sell products.
- \$ Talk about how ads are made to appeal to different markets—young children, teens, senior citizens, etc.

Teenagers

- \$ Continue with activities from other age groups, but expand.
- \$ Help teenagers understand the positive aspects of advertising, such as learning more about products and needed or available features.
- \$ Explore career opportunities in advertising with teenagers.

Remember, we need advertising to make our free market system work, but we don’t have to let advertising control us. We can use advertising to help us get the best buys for the money we spend.

Developing a Good Brain

Professionals in the fields of pediatric medicine, psychology, education and media literacy continue to caution parents about the quantity and quality of screen time for infants, toddlers, youth, ‘tweens and teens. Research shows a link between attention disorders such as ADD and the frequency and kind of programs youth watch.*

Ideas to help counter TV and other screen activities:

- \$ Children under 12 need much more time doing than viewing.
- \$ Provide mental challenges on an ongoing basis, such as word and number puzzles like sudoku and crossword.
- \$ Don’t fill every minute of children’s time. Let them learn to entertain themselves with books and their own imaginations.
- \$ Instead of TV, plug children into stories or CDs in leisure time.
- \$ Choose TV programs and DVDs that have a slower pace and mimic real-world rhythms more closely.

*Jeffery Johnson (May 2007) Extensive television viewing and the development of attention and learning difficulties during adolescence, in *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*.

Coming—In our next and final lesson we will look at some common questions that parents and care givers might have concerning children and money.

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