

Advertising to Children

In this lesson, you will read about sneaky methods that marketers use to advertise to children. You will consider the effects of consumerism on kids and debate whether or not parents or advertisers are to blame.

Pre-Reading

A. Warm-Up Questions

1. What types of companies advertise to children?
2. What methods and platforms do advertisers use to target young people?
3. Why are parents and doctors concerned about "kidvertising"?



"In general, my children refused to eat anything that hadn't danced on TV."

—Erma Bombeck, newspaper columnist

B. Vocabulary Preview

Match the words on the left with the correct meanings on the right.

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| _____ 1. consumer | a) morally acceptable |
| _____ 2. vulnerable | b) to convince someone to behave or speak in a certain way |
| _____ 3. distinguish | c) a person who buys something |
| _____ 4. purchasing power | d) to find the differences between things |
| _____ 5. influence | e) to market one product while advertising a related product |
| _____ 6. pester | f) at risk for physical or emotional harm due to age or inexperience |
| _____ 7. sneaky | g) to bother someone with repetitive behavior |
| _____ 8. cross-promote | h) the authority to make buying decisions |
| _____ 9. ethical | i) to gain money or status at the expense of a vulnerable person |
| _____ 10. regulation | j) the lack of skill and understanding in an area or field |
| _____ 11. exploit | k) sly or secretive |
| _____ 12. inexperience | l) a rule or law |

Reading

ADVERTISING TO CHILDREN

Vulnerable Consumers

1. Do you skip ads or get up to do an errand when a commercial comes on? The average child under five does not. Young children cannot **distinguish** between advertising and entertainment. Older children and teens recognize the difference, but they don't consider the negative effects of ads. It's no wonder that children and teens are the prime targets for so many marketing campaigns.
2. Young kids may not have much of their own spending money, but they do have a lot of **purchasing power**. Kids greatly **influence** their parents' purchasing decisions about groceries, restaurants, vacations, and toys. Most parents don't realize that their kids are **pestering** them to buy certain products or services due to ads that have directly targeted their kids.
3. Large corporations find **sneaky** ways to market to young audiences. Hiring child psychologists is one way. These specialists have taught marketers that three- to seven-year-olds love to play make-believe and seven- to twelve-year-olds like to collect things. Businesses also work together to **cross-promote** their products. For example, movie characters help sell cereal and running shoes, and merchandise helps sell movie tickets. *Ka-ching!**
4. Parents aren't the only victims of "kidvertising." Many health experts blame marketers for the rising costs of childhood obesity. Food marketing accounts for approximately half of the advertisements North American kids are exposed to each day. These ads feature everything from candy bars and soda pops to sugar cereals and fast-food restaurants.
5. Is advertising to children **ethical**? In some countries, there are strict **regulations** on marketing to kids. In Sweden and Norway, advertising to children on TV is illegal. In Quebec, Canada, advertising to kids in any way is against the law. The Advertising Standards Authority in the UK can ban an ad if it **exploits** a child's **inexperience** or encourages children to pester parents to make a purchase. In addition, product placement is not allowed in children's programming. Other countries rely on self-regulation.
6. While regulations are tightening in many countries and industries, wise marketers know how to bend the rules. For example, it's no secret that kids see plenty of ads on programs that are not intended for child audiences (e.g., reality shows). There are also few regulations in digital advertising. In fact, using sponsored Internet ads that match kids' search terms may be the sneakiest and most profitable way to market to kids. Why would Johnny skip or close an ad if it's the most entertaining part of his online experience?

***Onomatopoeia**

This is a fancy term for *words that make sound*. The word *ka-ching* makes the sound of an old-fashioned cash register. This word is used to describe something that makes or costs a lot of money.

Listen for onomatopoeia in advertising (*zoom, fizz, snap, crackle, pop...*). The use of onomatopoeia is a sure sign that an ad is targeting kids.

Comprehension

Discuss these questions in pairs, and write the answers in your notebook.

1. Discuss the subtitle.
Why are kids vulnerable consumers?
2. Why does the reading mention groceries?
3. Why would a cereal company hire a child psychologist?
4. What example of cross-promotion is used in the reading?
5. What can be inferred from the last line of the reading?
6. Give at least five examples of onomatopoeia.

Vocabulary Review

A. Complete the Sentences

Complete the sentences using a vocabulary word from page 1.

1. That's _____ ! They're using a cartoon character to market their airline.
2. Is it _____ to market to kids before they are old enough to distinguish between a show and a commercial?
3. After watching a commercial for Disneyland, children will probably _____ their parents about going there.
4. Businesses don't take self-_____ seriously enough.
Fast-food companies should be fined for exploiting children.
5. Preschool children have more _____ than you might think.
They influence many purchases, including vacations.

B. Synonyms

Circle the two synonyms in each group of words.

- | | | | |
|--|--|--|---|
| 1. a) sneaky
b) mischievous
c) influence | 3. a) innocence
b) inexperience
c) influence | 5. a) regulation
b) rule
c) exploitation | 7. a) target
b) differentiate
c) distinguish |
| 2. a) promotional
b) ethical
c) moral | 4. a) annoy
b) power
c) pester | 6. a) market
b) promote
c) purchase | 8. a) pretend
b) play make-believe
c) collect |

Discuss

Work with a partner or in small groups.

Discuss the following questions.

1. What ads do you remember most from your childhood?
2. What types of products or services did you pester your parents to purchase when you were a child?
3. In your opinion, whose job is it to regulate advertising: the federal government, local government, industry, parent, or other?
4. Many people agree that marketing to children is wrong. What about using children *in* advertising? Should kids be used to sell car insurance?
5. Children see thousands of ads every year. Are there any ways that marketing has a positive effect on kids?

Critical Thinking

FROM CRADLE TO GRAVE

The goal of many big businesses is to gain customer loyalty from an early age. The expression *cradle to grave* is used to describe this marketing method.

Teens can be the most difficult, but most profitable, demographic for marketers. Sometimes marketers *nail it* and other times, it is an *epic fail*.

Which companies or brands do you see marketing from cradle to grave? How do they do it, and how successful are they?

Teen Slang

nail (it): to do something perfectly

epic fail: a complete disaster

Debate

Below are two topics to debate in small groups or pairs. Your teacher will tell you if you will be debating for or against the idea. You will have ten minutes to prepare your arguments.

TOPIC #1

Businesses have the right to market to consumers. It's up to parents to make wise and healthy consumer decisions.

TOPIC #2

Food and beverage marketers are to blame for the childhood obesity epidemic.

Writing

Choose one of the questions below.

Write a paragraph in your notebook stating your own opinion.

1. Why are teens trickier to market to than kids?
2. Why are teens such an important target market for advertisers?
3. What special vulnerabilities do teens have? What do marketers do to exploit inexperienced teens?

Useful Expressions and Transitions for Debating

Agreeing and Disagreeing

- That doesn't take away from the fact that...
- That's beside the point.
- With all due respect...
- I agree with you there.
- I agree with ---- (name).
- I see your point, but...
- That may be true, but...
- We're going to have to agree to disagree.
- I get/see where you're coming from, but...
- I'm afraid I disagree entirely.
- I'm afraid I'd have to disagree.
- I agree to some extent, but...
- I disagree with you there.
- Pardon me for disagreeing, but...

Interrupting / Asking to Contribute

- I hate to interrupt, but...
- If I may come in here...
- I'd like to add something.
- Would you like to contribute something?
- I'd like to raise a point.
- If I could speak for a moment...
- I'd like to cut in here.
- You haven't answered my question.

Persuading

- Can you see where I'm coming from?
- I challenge you to give this a try/chance.
- I want you to see it my way.
- Put yourself in my shoes.
- Am I getting through to you?

Expressing an Opinion

- In my honest opinion...
- It is my belief that...
- From my experience...
- From where I look at it...
- From my point of view...

Clarifying / Rephrasing

- Let's be clear here...
- I think you misunderstood what I said.
- What I said was... (repeat a point that was misunderstood or confused)
- What I meant to say was... (rephrase something in a way that is clearer)
- In other words...
- What I was trying to say before I was interrupted is that...

Summarizing / Concluding

- So let me get this straight. You think...
- To conclude...
- I'd just like to summarize by saying...
- Finally, I'd like to reiterate that...
- It's time to take stock of what we've heard today.
- Both sides have some valid points.
- The stronger argument/team today is...