

Children's Television

■ ensuring that codes, the design of advertisements and interest groups' concerns over misleading advertising to young children are especially stressed in our education programmes;

■ funding of a research project on the effect of advertising on children's dietary behaviour and knowledge which will be available in the next few months;

■ examining the feasibility of monitoring AIM Data to keep the industry abreast of child viewing patterns; ensuring that cues which may be confusing for children are removed or moderated as part of the creative process of developing advertising copy. We are awaiting further advice from experts, for example, on the need to remove conflicting oral and visual messages, in order to conduct joint initiatives for people in the advertising industry.

Conclusion

Importantly, we need to understand and be more accepting of children's approach to media and advertising. This view has been echoed by Ellen Sieter in her book, *Sold Separately Parents & Children in Consumer Culture*. Sieter argues that children's interest in consumer culture is, 'profoundly social,

even utopian, in the sense that it permits them to communicate with a larger group. As a mass culture, toys and television give children access to others through a language of trade that changes with use and is inflected by children with surprising originality in everyday life.' Perhaps we need to assess that approach to originality. ☐

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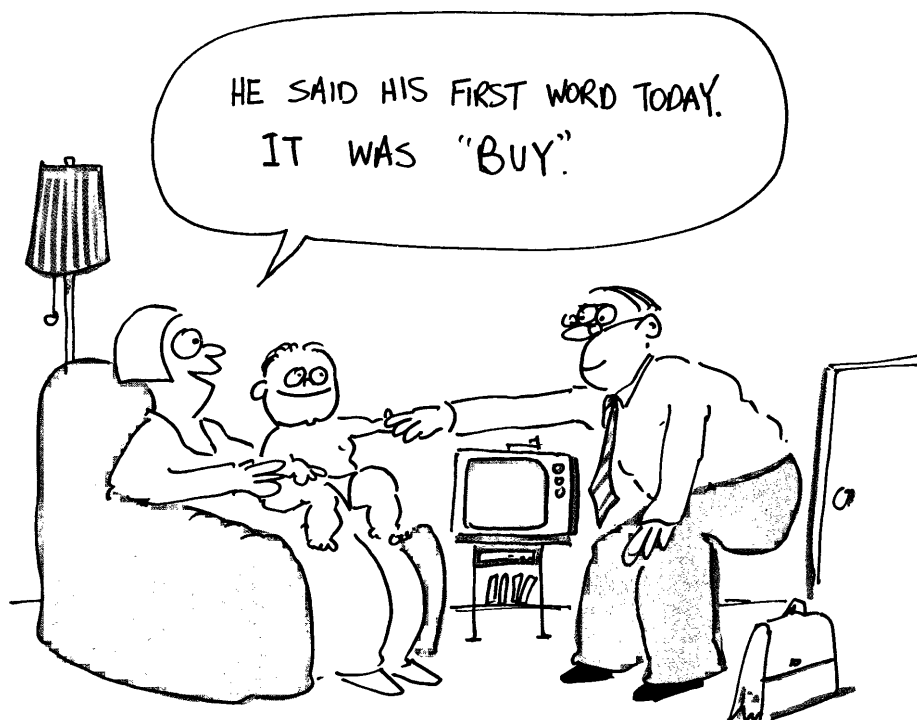
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Children are being sold a multitude of 'things' via their sports heroes, their magazines, through competitions, in supermarkets, in schools, through radio programs, and last, but not least, through television, via paid advertisements, 'host selling', and their cartoon programs.

Community concern about the impact of these campaigns on a vulnerable child audience was well captured in the Federal Bureau of Consumer Affairs discussion paper on children and advertising issued early in 1994. The debate was carried further in the July 1994 *Children and Advertising: A Fair Game* conference, jointly organised by the Institute for Values Research and Young Media Australia, and held at the New College, University of New South Wales. That conference aimed for a 'round table' to air the growing dissatisfaction in the community about seeing children treated as a '\$3 billion market'.

Dale Kunkel, (UCLA, Santa Barbara, USA) speaking at the conference summarised the research evidence about children's developmental abilities to cope with advertising. In essence, children under the age of five, do not distinguish between advertisements and the programs they are in, and children under eight do not understand the selling or persuasive intent of commercials. Hence, most advertising was misleading or deceiving to those under eight [contravening, I believe, the ABA's Children's Television Standard (CTS) 17 'no advertisement may mislead or deceive a child']. The remedy was not easy. Society had to choose what it valued most - the protection of children or of the market place.

Andre Caron (University of Montreal, Canada) described the French Canadian solution implemented some 10 years back. This was to ban advertisements for children's products in children's programs. Such advertisements





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Australian children are the targets of highly sophisticated, extensive, expensive, intensive, multi-media selling campaigns, says **Barbara Biggins** President, Australian Council for Children's Films and Television and Hon. Director, Young Media Australia.

advertising: a fair game?

were allowed to be shown in grown-ups' programs. The Quebec measures had survived challenges to the Supreme Court by the advertising industry.

A number of regulatory issues raised at the conference have still to be resolved. These include the advertising of fast, fatty, sugary and salty foods to children. The present CTS 19 for food advertisements requires that 'advertisements for food products may not contain any misleading or incorrect information about the nutritional value of the product'. A more effective standard might read 'an advertisement for a food product should correctly disclose its nutritional value'.

The anomaly that allows 'host selling' and the promotion of prizes for competitions in early morning children's cartoon shows, but not in programs that are classified C (specifically made for children) must go. Recent monitoring carried out by the SA Council for Children's Films and Television indicates that this practice adds as much as 3-4 minutes per hour to the allowable 15 minutes of paid advertising. Despite general agreement by conference participants that this anomaly be removed, little action by the industry is evident.

Other issues raised at the conference still seem to be 'on the back-burner'. Additional research was to have been carried out to determine just what sort of techniques in advertising are most misleading to the under-eight year olds. Funding was to be found to support the development of an education kit to help parents of the under-eights develop

'building blocks' for advertising awareness. Assessment procedures for child directed advertisements by the Commercial Acceptance Division of Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations were to be reviewed. These steps need to be taken if community concerns are to be addressed.

A further issue is coming to the boil!

Since the early 1980s, toy manufacturers in the United States have been commissioning and subsidising the production of children's cartoon series which feature their toy (or team of toys). The series are designed to 'bring to life' the toys in a way that will make them very attractive to children. They are, in effect and intent, 30 minute commercials for the products.

Australia has seen many of these series. They include such early series as 'He man and the Masters of the Universe', 'Voltron' and 'GI Joe'. More recently, 'Transformers', 'My Little Pony', 'Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles' and 'Mighty Morphin Power Rangers'. To date, they have not been recognised as advertising content, despite Australian Council for Children's Films and Television action in that regard in 1990.

These series are not just of concern for the fact that they add to the already commercial laden content of children's lives. They are of concern because, as a subsidised product, they may well end up squeezing other product, made with other motives, out of the market. Children's programs, which have been made by people who know and care about children, and who want to make programs that simply tell them a good story - not sell them a good line - may not survive.

The social impact of this growing toy 'advertising' practice on children's play and story world, and possible regulatory remedies, will be explored in depth at a further joint Institute for Values Research and Young Media Australia

conference in Sydney at New College on 9 March 1995. Stephen Kline (Canada) and Angela Campbell (US), both of whom will be in Australia for the World Summit on Television and Children, are to be the principal speakers.

Young Media Australia and Institute for Values Research will continue to monitor developments in advertising directed to children and will continue to program seminars on related issues to raise awareness of children's needs. □



Barbara Biggins

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