

# MARKETING TO CHILDREN OVERVIEW



## Marketing contributes to many problems facing children today

- Marketing directly to children is a factor in the childhood obesity epidemic.<sup>1</sup>
- Marketing also encourages eating disorders, precocious sexuality, youth violence and family stress and contributes to children's diminished capability to play creatively.<sup>2, 3</sup>
- As young children are developing their gender identities, they are flooded with ads for products promoting sexualized stereotypes. There are 40,000 Disney Princess items on the market today.<sup>4</sup> Violent movies, like *Spiderman* and *Transformers*, market toys that promote violence to boys.<sup>5</sup>



Photo by Nat Ward

## Marketing to children is a huge business

- Companies spend about \$17 billion annually marketing to children,<sup>6</sup> a staggering increase from the \$100 million spent in 1983.<sup>7</sup>
- Children under 14 spend about \$40 billion annually.<sup>8</sup> Compare this to the \$6.1 billion 4-12 year olds spent in 1989.<sup>9</sup> Teens spend about \$159 billion.<sup>10</sup>
- Children under 12 influence \$500 billion in purchases per year.<sup>11</sup>
- This generation of children is the most brand conscious ever.<sup>12</sup> Teens between 13 and 17 have 145 conversations about brands per week, about twice as many as adults.<sup>13</sup>



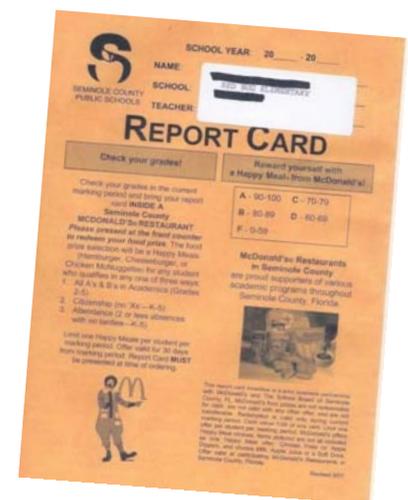
Photo by Nat Ward

## Children are bombarded with marketing every waking moment

- Children ages 2-11 see more than 25,000 advertisements a year on TV alone,<sup>14</sup> a figure that does not include product placement. They are also targeted with advertising on the Internet, cell phones, mp3 players, video games, school buses, and in school.
- Almost every major media program for children has a line of licensed merchandise including food, toys, clothing, and accessories. Brand licensed toys accounted for \$22.3 billion in 2006.<sup>15</sup>
- In their effort to establish cradle-to-grave brand loyalty and promote nagging, marketers even target babies through licensed toys and accessories featuring media characters.<sup>16</sup>
- Viral marketing techniques take advantage of children's friendships by encouraging them to promote products to their peers.<sup>17</sup>

## Marketing exploits children's developmental vulnerabilities

- Until the age of about 8 children do not understand advertising's persuasive intent.<sup>18</sup>



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- Very young children can't distinguish between commercials and program content; even older children sometimes fail to recognize product placement as advertising.<sup>19</sup>
- Marketers often denigrate adults and exploit older children's desires to fit in with their peers and rebel against authority figures as a selling point for their products.<sup>20</sup>



## There is a growing movement to protect children from marketing

- In recent years, organizations and coalitions – including the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood – have formed to stop the commercial exploitation of children.
- National and international public health organizations, including the American Psychological Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, World Health Organization, and the Institutes for Medicine have called for restrictions on marketing to children.<sup>21</sup>
- A 2007 *Wall Street Journal* poll showed that 64% of people surveyed believe that popular characters from television and movies should not be used to sell products to children. About half believe that marketing should be prohibited to children under 12.<sup>22</sup>
- On the national level, legislation has been introduced to restore the Federal Trade Commission's authority to regulate marketing to children. Several states have passed legislation to restrict junk food marketing in schools.

<sup>1</sup> *Food Marketing to Children and Youth* (2006). Institute of Medicine. Washington: The National Academies Press, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Linn, S. (2005). *Consuming Kids: The hostile takeover of childhood*. New York: New Press.

<sup>3</sup> Schor, J. (2004). *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture*. New York: Scribner.

<sup>4</sup> Linn, S. (2008). *The Case for Make Believe: Saving Play in a Commercialized World*. New York: New Press, p. 175.

<sup>5</sup> Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood. (June 28, 2007). *Letter to the FTC*. Retrieved March 4, 2008, from <http://commercialfreechildhood.org/pressreleases/transformersftcletter.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> James McNeil quoted in Horowitz, B. (2006, November 22). Six Strategies Marketers use to Make Kids Want Things Bad. *USA Today*, p. 1B. Retrieved March 2, 2008, from [http://www.usatoday.com/money/advertising/2006-11-21-toy-strategies-usat\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/money/advertising/2006-11-21-toy-strategies-usat_x.htm).

<sup>7</sup> Schor, J. (2004). *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture*. New York: Scribner, p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> James McNeal quoted in BuyBabies. (2006, December 9). *The Economist*.

<sup>9</sup> Schor, J. (2004). *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture*. New York: Scribner.

<sup>10</sup> Tru. (2005, December 15). Tru projects teens will spend \$159 Billion in 2005.

<sup>11</sup> Campbell, K. & Davis-Packard, K. (2000, September 18). How ads get kids to say I want it! *Christian Science Monitor*.

<sup>12</sup> Bachmann Achenreiner, G. & Roedder John, D. (2003). The meaning of brand names to children: A developmental investigation. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 13(3), p. 205–219.

<sup>13</sup> Corcoran, M. (2007, September 25). These days, some teens covet expensive brand names in purses, accessories. *Los Angeles Times*.

<sup>14</sup> Federal Trade Commission Bureau of Economics Staff Report. (2007, June 1). *Children's Exposure to TV Advertising in 1977 and 2004*. Holt, D.J., Ippolito, P.M., Desrochers, D.M. & Kelley, C.R. p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Hayes, D. (2007, February, 19). Invasion of the Techie Tots. *Variety*. p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Gregory Thomas, S. (2007). *Buy Buy Baby*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

<sup>17</sup> Horowitz, B. (2005, October 19). P&G 'buzz marketing' unit hit with complaint. *USA Today*.

<sup>18</sup> Kunkel. (2001). Children and television advertising. In: D.G. Singer & J. L. Singer (Eds.) *The handbook of children and media*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. p. 375-393.

<sup>19</sup> Atkin, C. K. (1982). Television advertising and socialization to consumer roles. In: D. Pearl (Ed.), *Television and behavior: Ten years of scientific progress and implications for the eighties*. Rockland, MD: National Institute of Mental Health, p. 191-200.

<sup>19</sup> Buzzback Market Research (2003, August). *Buzzback's Tweens Exploratory*.

<sup>20</sup> Linn, S. (2005). *Consuming Kids: The hostile takeover of childhood*. New York: New Press, pp. 110-113 and pp. 188-190.

<sup>21</sup> WHO Forum. (2006, May 5). *Marketing of Food and Non-alcoholic beverages to children, Report of a WHO forum and technical meeting*. Oslo, Norway.

<sup>22</sup> Bright, B. (2007, August 20). Poll Shows Growing Concern about Role of Advertising in Child Obesity. *Wall Street Journal Online*. Retrieved March 3, 2008, from <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB118730629508900233.html> (accessed August 24, 2007).