**Marketing to Teens - Advertising Strategies**

**Advertisers have many methods to try and get you to buy their products. Lots of times, what they are selling is a lifestyle, or an image, rather than the product. Here are some tricks of the trade.**

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| **Ideal Kids (or families)** - always seem perfect. The kids are really hip looking, with the hottest fashions, haircuts and toys. Ideal families are all attractive and pleasant looking -- and everyone seems to get along! Ideal kids and families represent the types of people that kids watching the ad would like themselves or their families to be.  **Family Fun** - a product is shown as something that brings families together, or helps them have fun together; all it takes is for Mum or Dad to bring home the "right" food, and a ho-hum dinner turns into a family party.  **Excitement** - who could ever have imagined that food could be so much fun? One bite of a snack food and you're surfing in California, or soaring on your skateboard!  **Star Power** - your favorite sports star or celebrity is telling you that their product is the best! Kids listen, not realizing that the star is being paid to promote the product.  **Bandwagon** - join the crowd! Don't be left out! Everyone is buying the latest snack food: aren't you?  **Scale** - is when advertisers make a product look bigger or smaller than it actually is.  **Put Downs** - when you put down your competition's product to make your own product seem better.  **Facts and Figures** - when you use facts and statistics to enhance your product's credibility.  **Repetition** - advertisers hope that if you see a product, or hear its name over and over again, you will be more likely to buy it.Sometimes the same commercial will be repeated over and over again. | **Heart Strings** - ads that draw you into a story and make you feel good, like the McDonalds commercial where the dad and his son are shoveling their driveway and the son treats his poor old dad to lunch at McDonalds when they are done.  **Sounds Good** - music and other sound effects add to the excitement of commercials, especially commercials aimed at kids. Those little jingles, that you just can't get out of your head, are another type of music used to make you think of a product. Have you ever noticed that the volume of commercials is higher than the sound for the program that follows?  **Cartoon Characters** - Tony the Tiger sells cereal and the Nestlés Quick Bunny sells chocolate milk. Cartoons like these make kids identify with products.  **Weasel Words** - by law, advertisers have to tell the truth, but sometimes, they use words that can mislead viewers. Look for words in commercials like: "Part of..." "The taste of real....." "Natural...." "New, better tasting....." "Because we care..." There are hundreds of these deceptive phrases -- how many more can you think of?  **Omission** - where advertisers don't give you the full story about their product. For example, when a Pop Tart claims to be "part" of a healthy breakfast, it doesn't mention that the breakfast might still be healthy whether this product is there or not.  **Are You Cool Enough? -** this is when advertisers try to convince you that if you don't use their products, you are a nerd. Usually advertisers do this by showing people who look uncool trying a product and then suddently become hip looking and do cool things. |

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| **Special Issues for Tweens and Teens**  **The "Tween Market"**    One of the most important recent developments in advertising to kids has been the defining of a "tween" market (ages 8 to 12). No longer little children, and not yet teens, tweens are starting to develop their sense of identity and are anxious to cultivate a sophisticated self-image. And marketers are discovering there's lots of money to be made by treating tweens like teenagers.  The marketing industry is forcing tweens to grow up quickly. Industry research reveals that children 11 and older don't consider themselves children anymore. The Toy Manufacturers of America have changed their target market from birth to 14, to birth to ten years of age.  A 2000 report from the Federal Trade Commission in the U.S. revealed how Hollywood routinely recruits tweens (some as young as nine) to evaluate its story concepts, commercials, theatrical trailers and rough cuts for R-rated movies.  By treating pre-adolescents as independent, mature consumers, marketers have been very successful in removing the gatekeepers (parents) from the picture—leaving tweens vulnerable to potentially unhealthy messages about body image, sexuality, relationships and violence.  **Marketing "cool" to teens**   |  | | --- | | "The entertainment companies ... look at the teen market as part of this massive empire they're colonizing.  (Robert McChesney, *The Merchants of Cool*, 2000) |   Corporations capitalize on the age-old insecurities and self-doubts of teens by making them believe that to be truly cool, you need their product.  According to *No Logo* author Naomi Klein, in the 1990s corporations discovered that the youth market was able and willing to pay top dollar in order to be "cool." The corporations have been chasing the elusive cool factor ever since.  Some companies hire "cool hunters" or "cultural spies" to infiltrate the world of teens and bring back the latest trends. Trying to stay ahead of the next trend can be a tricky business however, as cultural critic Douglas Rushkoff explains. "The minute a cool trend is discovered, repackaged, and sold to kids at the mall—it's no longer cool. So the kids turn to something else, and the whole process starts all over again."  Teen anger, activism and attitude have become commodities that marketers co-opt, package and then sell back to teens. It's getting harder to tell what came first: youth culture, or the marketed version of youth culture. Does the media reflect today's teens, or are today's teens influenced by media portrayals of young people? It's important that parents discuss these issues with their teens, and challenge the materialistic values promoted in the media.  **Body image and advertising**    It's difficult for teens to develop healthy attitudes towards sexuality and body image when much of the advertising aimed at them is filled with images of impossibly thin, fit, beautiful and highly sexualized young people. The underlying marketing message is that there is a link between physical beauty and sex appeal—and popularity success, and happiness.  Fashion marketers such as Calvin Klein, Abercrombie & Fitch and Guess use provocative marketing campaigns featuring young models. These ads are selling more than clothing to teens—they're also selling adult sexuality.  Studies show that while teens received most of their information about sex from the media: magazines, TV, the Web, radio and movies, the majority say their parents shape their sexual decisions most, so it's important that parents talk to their kids about healthy sexuality, and about exploitive media images.  Media images can contribute to feelings of body-hatred and self-loathing that can fuel eating problems. While body image has long been considered a female issue, an increasing number of boys now also suffer from eating disorders. A 1998 Health Canada survey on the health of Canadian youth noted that by grade ten, over three-quarters of the girls and one half of the boys surveyed said there they weren't happy with their bodies.  Studies have also found that boys, like girls, may turn to smoking to help them lose weight.  **Tobacco and alcohol**   |  | | --- | | "Advertising has always sold anxiety, and it certainly sells anxiety to the young. It's always telling them they're losers unless they're cool."  (Mark Crispin Miller, *The Merchants of Cool*, 2000) |   Tobacco and alcohol companies have long targeted young people, hoping to develop brand loyalties that will last a lifetime.  It's crucial for the tobacco industry to continually cultivate new and younger smokers to replace the thousands who quit each year—and those who die of tobacco-related diseases.  The tobacco industry targets youth by:   * linking smoking in ads with being "cool" and independent and with taking risks (particularly physical risks) * placing ads in magazines with high adolescent readerships, such as *Rolling Stone*, *Maxim* or *People* * having movie stars, who are popular with young people, smoke in films * sponsoring rock concerts and sporting events * placing advertising near high schools: on billboards, in bus shelters and in variety stores.   The alcohol and beer industries were quick to recognize the value of the Internet as an effective tool for reaching young people. The Web offers marketers a medium that is a huge part of youth culture—with the added bonus that it's unregulated, with very little parental supervision.  In 1999, the U.S. Center for Media Education found that 62 per cent of beer and alcohol Web sites displayed what they call "youth-oriented features"—that is, activities that appeal to the adolescent and pre-adolescent set.  The alcohol and beer industries also target youth by:   * running ads during TV shows with a high number of young views, such as *The Simpsons*, *South Park* or sporting events * placing ads in magazines with high adolescent readerships, such as *Rolling Stone*, *Maxim* or *People* * sponsoring rock concerts and sporting events * creating and extensively marketing "alcopops"—sweetened, lightly carbonated drinks that don't taste like alcohol (think Mike's Hard Lemonade)   **Packaging Girlhood and Boyhood**  As they make the transition from childhood to the teenage years, tweens (ages 8-12) are continually bombarded with limiting media stereotypes on what it is to be a girl or a boy in today’s world. This “packaged childhood” is sold to them through ads and products; and across all media, from television, music, movies and magazines to video games and the Internet.  If you believe the media messages aimed at kids: tween girls are mini-*fashionistas* who are pretty and sexy and who are obsessed with boys, friends, shopping, pop stars and celebrities; tween boys are independent and strong, and preoccupied with sports, video games, adventure, cars, music, and hanging out with friends.  Young girls in particular are targeted by marketers, and the focus of these ads – beauty, sexuality, relationships, and consumerism – is worrisome for parents. According to Sharon Lamb and Lyn Mikel Brown, authors of *Packaging Girlhood*, images of girls as “sexy, diva, boy-crazy shoppers” can be quite harmful to their self development. At an age when girls “could be developing skills, talents, and interests that will serve them well their whole life, they are being enticed into a dream of specialness through pop stardom and sexual objectivity.”  Media stereotypes of boys are no less harmful: they are nearly always presented as "tough guys" and, as with girls, there is a consistent emphasis on their physical appearance. Ads and movies communicate a masculine ideal that is athletic and muscular. In fact, over the last twenty years action figures for properties such as *Star Wars* and *G.I. Joe* have gained more muscles than even the most dedicated body builders. Rap and hip hop videos reinforce this narrow vision of masculinity: particularly popular with youth, this musical culture – whose origins are broad and diverse – has narrowed to present a single, stereotypical image of masculinity and relations between the sexes. | |
| **Advertising: It's Everywhere**    No, it's not your imagination. The amount of advertising and marketing North Americans are exposed to daily has exploded over the past decade; studies show, that on average we see 3,000 ads per day. At the gas pumps, in the movie theatre, in a washroom stall, during sporting events—advertising is impossible to avoid.  Even outer space isn't safe from commercialization: the Russian space program launched a rocket bearing a 30-foot Pizza Hut logo, and some companies have investigated placing ads in space that will be visible from earth.  The challenge of the future may be finding public and private spaces that are free of advertising.  Marketers are pressed to find even more innovative and aggressive ways to cut through the "ad clutter" or "ad fatigue" of modern life. Here's an overview of some of the ways marketers are targeting us:   * **Ambient advertising** Ambient advertising refers to intrusive ads in public places. With the cost of traditional media advertising skyrocketing and a glut of ads fighting for consumers' attention, marketers are aggressively seeking out new advertising vehicles. Cars, bicycles, taxis and buses have become moving commercials. Ambient ads appear on store floors, at gas pumps, in washrooms stalls, on elevator walls, park benches, telephones, fruit and even pressed into the sand on beaches.  Even some members of the industry itself are critical of this trend to slap ads on everything. Bob Garfield, columnist for the ad industry magazine *Advertising Age*, calls this plethora of commercial messages "environment pollutants." Others worry that this deluge of advertising will create a backlash with consumers. * **Stealth- endorsers** Marketers are moving away from the traditional use of celebrities as product hucksters, since a cynical public no longer believes that celebrities actually use the products they endorse in commercials. The trend now is to brand celebrities with specific merchandise by having them use or wear products in public appearances or promote them in media interviews—without making it clear that the celebrities are paid spokespeople. * **Naming rights** Corporations are turning public spaces into commodities by purchasing naming rights to arenas, theatres, parks, schools, museums and even subway systems. Cash-strapped municipalities see naming rights as a way to raise much-needed revenues without raising taxes. * **Targeted advertising** Targeted ads are a form of Internet marketing. Using sophisticated data collecting technologies, Web sites can combine a user's personal information with surfing preferences to create ads that are specifically tailored for that user. * **Cross-merchandizing** A wave of media mergers over the past decade has produced a handful of powerful conglomerates that now own all the major film studios, TV networks, radio and television stations, cable channels, Internet, book and magazine publishing and music companies. These giant conglomerates use their various media holdings to promote products and artists through massive cross-promotional campaigns.  For example, when the world's largest entertainment conglomerate AOL Time Warner was preparing the release of the film *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, it enlisted all its various media divisions—cable systems, speciality channels, TV networks, magazines and Internet companies—to help mass-market the movie and the spin-off merchandise.  Commenting on the phenomenally successful cross-promotional approach used to market the film (Harry Potter smashed all previous opening records, grossing $90 million in its first weekend) AOL Time Warner executive Richard Parsons explained: "This drove synergy both ways. Not only did we use our promotional and advertising platforms to help create awareness, we used the film to drive traffic to those vehicles." * **Product placement** The future of product placement as a successful advertising tool was assured when the 1982 film *ET* featured Reese's Pieces in a pivotal scene—causing sales of the candy to jump 65 per cent. Since that time, product placement in movies, on TV, and increasingly in video games, has become a commonplace marketing technique.  The marketing company FeatureThis extols the virtues of product placement for potential clients, on its Web site: "Break through the cluttered media entertainment environment inexpensively," it claims "product placement in feature films and television reaches millions of consumers, over and over again."  With the advent of technologies such as TiVo, which allow consumers to edit out TV commercials, product placement is taking on an even greater importance. TV producers are looking for new ways to integrate advertising and content. Basing an entire show around a product is one technique; and giving viewers the capability of immediately purchasing products featured on the program is another.  Following a segment of the NBC TV show *Will and Grace*, in which a character wore a pink Polo shirt, the network ran a 10-second clip telling viewers to go to the Polo Web site (which is 50 per cent owned by NBC) to purchase one. The site sold $3,000 worth of shirts over the next five days. In the near future, Interactive TV will allow users to order a pair of pants that your favourite TV star is wearing, merely by clicking on them. * **Digital or "virtual" advertising** Digital advertising goes one step further than product placement by using computer technology to add products to scenes that were never there to begin with. This practice is common in sporting events coverage, where ads are digitally inserted onto the billboards, sideboards and playing surfaces in arenas and stadiums. * While digital ads are mainly used in sports coverage, virtual advertising is starting to break into the entertainment world as producers digitally insert products into TV scenes after the scenes are shot. The technology also allows product names to be altered in scenes, creating the potential for new advertising revenues when series are sold into syndication. |