



LESSON PLAN

Level: Grades 6 to 9
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Online Marketing to Kids: Strategies and Techniques

Overview

This lesson introduces students to the online marketing techniques used by marketers to target children on the Internet. It begins with a guided discussion about the similarities and differences between traditional marketing methods and online advertising and why the Internet is such a desirable medium for advertisers to reach young people. Student activities include a survey of the marketing techniques used on several commercial websites for children; the creation of a commercial website for kids that incorporates common marketing strategies; and an analysis of case studies about online marketing to young people.

Learning Outcomes

Students demonstrate:

- an awareness of the format and structure of online advertisements.
- an awareness of the differences between television advertising and Internet marketing.
- an understanding of their own reactions, as consumers, to these ads.

Preparation and Materials

Photocopy student handouts:

- *Kids for Sale: Television vs. the Internet*
- *Advertising Strategies*
- *Online Marketing Strategies*
- *Online Marketing Worksheet*

Obtain teacher's copy of *CME's Most Popular Children's Websites*

For Activity 3, photocopy the case studies: *Hanging out with the Band* and *Wonder World* to give to students. For yourself, download the analyses of these case studies *Between the Lines: Analyzing Pat's Online Experience* and *Between the Lines: Analyzing Jessica's Online Experience*.

For Activity 4, have on hand art supplies such as bulletin boards, scissors, magazines, paint, glue sticks and magic markers.



The Lesson

Day One

Begin by asking your students to share product jingles, slogans or ad campaigns they enjoy. Ask them:

- What are the sources of these ads? (ie., magazines, television, radio)
- Which, if any, of these advertisements do they think they will remember years from now? (Teachers might like to share some jingles or ads from their childhoods, as examples of how ads can be ingrained into our consciousness.)
- What elements make these ads so powerful?

Distribute and discuss the student handout *Advertising Strategies*. Discuss these traditional marketing methods and encourage students to think of examples. Other advertising strategies such as the use of prizes, contests and give-aways might also be discussed.

All of us have experienced advertising -- on television, in films, on billboards, on the radio and in magazines. But in the past few years, a whole new medium has emerged that is unlike any other in its ability to target and engage consumers.

Distribute and discuss the student handout *Kids for Sale: Television vs. the Internet*. Ask students:

- Do they use the Internet?
- Have they noticed any of the differences that have just been discussed?
- What kinds of advertisements have they noticed online? (Ask them to record these points for later reference.)
- Discuss the concept of "flow-state," that mental state we enter when we become totally absorbed in an activity such as surfing the Net or playing a video game. Researchers have found that when we enter this state of mind, we become extremely receptive to the messages and images that we encounter.
 - What advantages does this phenomenon offer marketers? (ie., they can sell us their products without our being aware that we are being sold to.)
 - What challenges does this flow state pose to marketers? (ie., they have to create ads that capitalize on, but don't interrupt, the user's flow-state.)

Ask students to review *Kids for Sale: Television vs. the Internet* for next class. For homework, ask them to list other factors that make the Internet an attractive medium for marketers trying to target kids.

Day Two

Take up answers to the question "what other factors make the Internet an attractive medium for marketers who are trying to target kids?" Answers may include:

- going online is becoming a popular kids' activity.
- often kids go online without adult supervision
- kids today have tremendous spending power.
- kids tend to accept much of the information that they see on the Internet at face value. They lack the experience or knowledge to question the information and activities they find online



Distribute and discuss the *Online Marketing Strategies* handout. Ask students if any of them have encountered these strategies online. How does online marketing utilize and enhance the traditional marketing strategies that you discussed previously? Ask students to reflect on this and make a journal entry about their observations.

Activities for this lesson include a selection of online, computer and non-computer exercises.

Activity 1: Online Survey of Commercial Sites for Kids

Internet access required

- Distribute the *Online Marketing Worksheet* to students.
- Divide the class into groups.
- Assign each group five website addresses from the *Most Popular Children's Websites* (or sites suggested by students that have been vetted and approved by the teacher).
- Using the checklists, have each group record the marketing methods that are used on these sites and report their findings to the class.
- Ask each group to rank their sites from most to least commercial.

Activity 2: Sample Kids' Site

Computer required

- Divide class into groups.
- Each group assumes the role of a company that wants to build a commercial website aimed at children.
- Using html skills or a Web page design program such as "Netscape Composer," students will create a mock Web page with "kid appeal" for their company or product. This page will incorporate the online advertising methods students have studied in class. (Students may want to look at some children's websites from the *Most Popular Children's Websites* for ideas.)
- This assignment includes the production of a mock Web page and a written "Site Plan" outlining:
 - the target audience of the site
 - the advertising methods selected to appeal to the target audience
 - why these particular methods have been selected
- Each group will present its "site" to the class, and submit its "Site Plan" to the teacher.

Activity 3: Marketing Analysis

No computer needed

- Let students choose one of the case studies *Hanging out with the Band* or *Wonder World*.
- Students are to read their chosen case study and write a two-page analysis of the marketing methods used to appeal to a particular target market, in these cases: boys ages 11 to 15 and children ages 5 to 9. In their analysis, students should also note any issues that emerge from these case studies.
- Once student analyses have been submitted, review *Between the Lines: Analyzing Pat's Online Experience* and *Between the Lines: Analyzing Jessica's Online Experience*.



Activity 4: Sample Kids' Site

No computer needed

- Divide class into groups.
- Each group assumes the role of a company that wants to build a commercial website for children.
- Using the online advertising methods they have studied, students will create a mock-up of a Web page with "kid appeal" for their company or product. The mock-up should be presented on bulletin boards in order to visually illustrate how the site would appear on the Internet.
- This assignment includes production of a mock Web page and a written "Site Plan" outlining:
 - the target audience of the site
 - the advertising methods selected to appeal to the target audience
 - why these particular methods have been selected
 - Each group will present its "site" to the class, and submit its site and "Site Plan" to the teacher.

Regarding the spending power of kids, teachers might like to offer these statistics to students as food for thought:

- According to the 2000 YTV Kid and Tween Report, Canadian "tweens" (ages 9 - 14) have \$1.8 billion in total discretionary income and influence 10 times that amount in family spending.
- Spending by North America's wired youth (that's 41 million kids & teens!) is expected to reach \$21.2-billion (U.S.) in 2006. (*Forrester Research 2001*)

Of that estimated \$21.2-billion, online spending by young Canadians will be \$1.8-billion. (Compared to \$500 million online spending in 2000.) (*Forrester Research 2001*)



Kids for Sale: Television versus the Internet

How is the Net different from television?

Consider these points:

- The Canadian television industry has standards for advertising to children. Advertisers may not pressure or mislead children; they are not allowed to exaggerate product characteristics; they can't directly urge children to buy a product or service, or ask their parents to buy it for them; and advertising alcohol and tobacco products to minors is forbidden.
- Internet advertising is largely unregulated, and knows no national boundaries. In other words, almost anything goes!
- Television advertising engages children only as passive consumers who just watch and listen.
- The Internet engages children interactively, allowing them to react to the content provided by the marketer and participate in online environments.
- TV advertisers purchase time slots between TV shows, which they select because they hope their product or service will appeal to the same audience the programs attract.
- On the Internet, corporations create their own programming. They build entire online environments to create associations with their own products, to establish brand loyalty, and to collect information about their present and future customers.
- Advertising on television has a certain "look and feel," which children quickly learn to recognize. The sound level even goes up when a commercial comes on.
- Internet marketing is so blended into the content of a website that the lines are blurred between advertising, entertainment and information.
- Traditional marketing tools such as Nielsen surveys may give advertisers a general idea of their audience profile, in terms of age and maybe gender. But individual children are anonymous.
- Internet marketers are able to collect data about specific users, through the use of online registration forms, quizzes and surveys - or through computer "cookies," electronic tattletales that track where kids surf, how long they stay there, and what they download.



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.

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 favourite 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 shovelling 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 Nestlé's 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 suddenly become hip looking and do cool things.



Online Marketing Strategies

Online advertisers use many methods to try and get kids to buy their products. Often, they blend advertising with activities and games on the Internet so that kids don't even recognize that they're being sold to. Next time you're on a commercial kids' site, see if you can spot any of these techniques.

Some marketing techniques, like Banner Ads, are pretty obvious:

Banner Ads are the most easily recognized types of advertising on the Net. Some are very flashy, and some are very sneaky. All of them want you to click on them in order to obtain information about the product they're advertising. 

Others are more subtle.



Imagine a giant commercial that kids can enter, where they can talk and play with products and product spokescharacters. Imagine a commercial that gives marketers access to information about specific kids, including their inner-most dreams and desires. This is what the Internet offers advertisers through commercial websites.

Here are some of the methods used by advertisers to involve kids with their products:

The creation of virtual environments that make kids feel as if they are entering an actual place.



Look for words like *world*, *village*, *town*, *clubhouse*, and *planet*. Companies want children to feel that this is not a commercial - it's a special world that's been created just for them. Some websites ask children to submit their names before entering a site, in order to provide them with personalized greetings when they return.



Friendly, cartoon "spokescharacters" that encourage kids to identify with products and companies. Advertisers are hoping that brand recognition at a young age will evolve into life-long brand loyalty.



Interactive games and activities like colouring pages, crossword puzzles and word searches featuring brand-name products and their spokescharacters.

Traditional advertisements don't work on the Internet, so advertisers seamlessly blend advertising content with games and activities.



Downloadable screensavers featuring products and spokescharacters, or email "postcards" that can be sent to other kids via the commercial website (The company that owns the website can now add these additional addresses to its database). Clubs that kids can join and contests they can enter to win prizes. (Many of the prizes that are offered feature product logos, slogans or characters.)

Often, kids are asked to give out personal information like their names, email and home addresses, phone numbers and preferences before they can join clubs, enter contests or play games. This gives marketers the ability to solicit kids through email, build user profiles of kids who visit the site, sell information about kids to third parties and make the advertising on their website even more effective!



The bottom line? Recognize when you're being sold to. Commercial sites are lots of fun, but they exist to make money. When you visit commercial kids' sites, see how many online marketing methods you can spot.



Online Marketing Worksheet

Print five website addresses in these spaces:

Descriptors					
Words and images that make a website feel as if it is a real place that kids can enter and belong to.					
Friendly, cartoon "spokescharacters" that encourage kids to identify with products and companies.					
Interactive games and activities like colouring pages, crossword puzzles and word searches featuring brand-name products and their spokescharacters.					
Downloadable screensavers featuring products and spokescharacters or email "postcards" that can be sent to other kids via the commercial website.					
Clubs that kids can join and contests they can enter in to win prizes. (Note the sorts of prizes kids can win.)					
Banner ads linking to other commercial websites or product information.					
Requests for kids to send in the email addresses of friends, so that they can win a prize too.					
Indicators of a responsible commercial website.					
Advertisements are clearly identified.					
Parents and children are informed of the commercial nature of the website.					
Partners and sponsors are prominently listed.					
The site contains a clearly-stated Privacy Policy.					
The site adheres to self-regulatory guidelines of the Children's Advertising Review Unit or the Canadian Association of Internet Providers.					

Compare the sites you have visited and discuss which you consider to be the more desirable Internet environments for kids.

Our thanks to Gloria Antifaiff for creating this worksheet from our **Online Marketing Checklist**



Top 15 Most Popular Kids' Websites

According to eBizMBA, a service that ranks websites based on how much traffic they receive, here are the top 15 kids' websites in August of 2012:



1. **Nick**
(<http://www.nick.com>)



2. **PBSKids**
(<http://pbskids.org/>)



3. **Nick Jr.**
(<http://www.nickjr.com/>)



4. **Club Penguin**
(<http://www.clubpenguin.com/>)



5. **Cartoon Network**
(<http://www.cartoonnetwork.com>)



6. **Yahoo! Kids**
(<http://www.kids.yahoo.com>)



7. **PopTropica**
(<http://www.poptropica.com/>)



8. **MoshiMonsters**
(<http://www.moshimonsters.com>)





9. **Webkinz**
(<http://www.webkinz.com>)



10. **Stardoll**
(<http://www.stardoll.com>)



10. **Funbrain**
(<http://www.funbrain.com>)



12. **Cool Math Games**
(<http://www.coolmath-games.com>)



13. **Neopets**
(<http://www.neopets.com/>)



14. **Primary Games**
(<http://www.primarygames.com/>)



15. **Fantage**
(<http://www.fantage.com/>)



Pat' Story: Hanging Out with the Band

Pat, a 13 year old, is in his room searching the Net for information about his favourite rock group, *Rave*. His search pays off with hundreds of hits. He clicks on the first item and is transported to a striking page with bold colours and flashing animation featuring the sponsor's products - beer mugs, tee-shirts and caps. He immediately identifies with the invitation:



... Come join fellow Rave fans and rock 'till you drop at the coolest event of the year! Sign up here for a chance to win free tickets to the Rave concert, sponsored by Malbot Breweries, makers of Rage Ale. Watch Rave in concert in New York. Listen to recent hits. Send a Rave photo to a friend. Hang out at the "Open Mike" chat room and rap with other cool fans.

Pat fills out the questionnaire to enter the contest. He sends *Rave* e-cards to 5 friends, then checks out the "Open Mike".

He is asked to enter a username and password and check a box indicating his age. Pat lies about his age, since you have to be 19 years of age to enter. Shortly afterwards he is welcomed into the chat room by a chat room host who tells him he can talk with members of the band and meet other cool *Rave* fans in the site's chat rooms.

Pat enters a chat room and lurks for a bit, checking out the messages about the Rave lifestyle, anti-dress codes and party ideas. He notices that Radical, Rave's lead guitarist is there, giving advice. Pat joins in the discussion to find out what Radical does after his concerts. He can't wait to tell his friends that he got to hang out with Radical! Pat says "later" to the people in the chat room and goes off to explore some "Virtually Cool Rave Sites".

Another gold mine! Links to dozens of *Rave* sites. He scrolls down the page a bit and clicks on "Smokin' Ravers". He waits while the page and images slowly download. There's a photo of the band sitting around backstage after a concert smoking and having a couple of *Rage* beers, just like Radical said. They look so cool! Under the picture are more links:



- Cool Smokin Celebs
- Smokey's Bar
- alt.smoking
- Smoking Products and Shops

He checks out "Cool, Smokin' Celebs". Neat! He had no idea that so many cool people smoked! He checks out some of their sites and bookmarks them for later.

Pat sees his friends the next day. They greet each other, and talk excitedly about the *Rave* website and the postcards they received. After school, they all go back to Pat's. He boots up his computer, connects to the Net, and checks his email. There's a couple of messages. The first is from Malbot Breweries. They've invited him back to the site to keep up with the latest on Malbot's "*Rave Rage*" concert series. He'll do that later, but right now he wants to show his friends his "Other Cool Smokin' Celebs" bookmark ...



Now, let's take a closer look at the marketing strategies targeted at kids like Pat:

Between the Lines: Analyzing Pat's Online Experience

Jessica's Story: Wonder World

Eight-year-old Jessica can't wait to see the new Fantasy Land movie, *It's a Dog's World*. Mother sits with her as they search the Net using "Fantasy Land" and "It's a Dog's World" as their keywords. Jackpot! Jessica reads the first link -- "Big Burger Meets Dog's World" -- and clicks on it.

Jessica is mesmerized by the virtual playground filled with stars from Fantasy Land movies and all the people at Big Burger, even the Big Burger Bird! She's seen them all on TV. They invite her to color pictures, play games, and tour their "Kidz Town" to visit the people and shops.

Mom, who considers herself a savvy surfer, checks out the site's privacy policy before letting Jessica continue:

Big Burger follows the FTC guidelines for compliance with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act and Rule. Verifiable parental permission is required prior to the collection of any personal information. Big Burger Restaurants, Inc. collects personal information on a voluntary basis only.

Personal information posted to the Big Burger site becomes our property. It is used for internal purposes only, such as marketing and research, and will not be sold to third parties. Big Burger offers an "opt-out" feature that allows you to remove your and/or your kids' email address from our files at any time.

Big Burger also uses "cookie" technology to obtain non-personal information. This technology helps us track visitors to our site in aggregate form. We do not use this technology to extract specific information on an individual or to contact you, and we do not generally sell this information to third parties. Cookies allow us to update and improve the site for our visitors.



Satisfied, she completes the parental permission form and then leaves Jessica to it.

Jessica colours a beautiful picture of Woofs -- star of *It's a Dog's World* -- playing in a field with the Big Burger Bird. She's so proud of the results that she prints it out to hang on the fridge.

Then she tries one of the games. It is an exciting sort of hide-and-seek in which the Big Burger Bird (Triple B, for short) has to find and pack all the ingredients for an imaginary Bird Burger Meal. Jessica begins with the Kidz Burger, dripping with that special sauce, then she adds the large soft drink and fries. And last but not least -- the ice cream sundae topped with all her favourite sprinkles. Mmmm, Jessica's getting hungry. But there's still a couple of hours before dinner, so she decides to visit Kidz Town.

WOW! What a treat for the eyes! This, thinks Jessica, is just like a real town with streets, cars and trucks, people and pets, all kinds of buildings, blue sky and bright yellow sun, even lush green grass, colourful flowers and butterflies. And hey, there's the Big Burger Bird! He asks Jessica to fill in a form with her name, email address, favourite games and movies, and favourite Big Burger characters and meals before boarding the bus for the Kidz Town Tour. She happily types in her name and email address and clicks the boxes beside her answers to the other questions. She boards the bus and clicks on characters, who then talk to her. She visits shops specializing in all sorts of Fantasy Land and Big Burger dolls, clothes, games, and other neat stuff. She'd really like to have that Woofus doll. Maybe Mom will buy it for her. Where is Mom, anyway? She disconnects and goes to find her.





Jessica asks Mom to hang the picture on the fridge. Mom agrees and praises her for her wonderful coloring job. Then Jessica asks if they can go to Big Burger after the movie, and could she please get the Woofus doll too? Mom, always trying to live within a tight budget, figures out the cost. Whew, \$55! Mom tells Jessica that she can't afford everything, but seeing the disappointment on Jessica's face, she relents, saying she'll see what she can do.

Mom manages to take Jessica to the movie, but waits a few weeks before treating her to a trip to Big Burger. Jessica is thrilled to order the new special, a Bird Burger Meal. It's just like the one in the game she played on the Internet!

A few days later, Jessica makes a thrilling discovery. Big Burger Bird has written an email to her! He says her new friends in Kidz Town miss her and would love to see her again soon. He says there's a lot of new stuff to see and do...

Now, let's take a closer look at the marketing strategies targeted at kids like Jessica:

Between the Lines: Analyzing Jessica's Online Experience



Between the Lines: Analyzing Pat's Online Experience

Pat's online experience is not unusual.

The Internet provides teens with easy access to adult material. Sometimes kids access this material from teen environments containing adult-oriented links and activities; in other instances, adult-oriented sites actively target teens and send them on to blatantly adult, pornographic sites. As we saw from Pat's experience, warnings like "you must be 19 or older to enter" are easy to bypass.

While it is difficult to say whether the site visited by Pat is a teen- or adult-oriented site, one thing is sure: the rock band *Rave* and the strategies used to promote their concert tour could certainly appeal to young teens as well as young adults.

In addition to cross-marketing with other corporate interests (in this case, a beer company), the *Rave* site incorporates a number of online marketing strategies designed to appeal to young people. They include:

- **Glorification of youth culture:** hip language, humour and goodies such as downloadable audio clips, profiles of young celebrities, and hyped-up information about company-sponsored music and sports events.
- **"Bells and whistles":** bold graphics and animation; interactive games; contests; and branded merchandise, such as promotional screen savers, tee-shirts, and email postcards to send to friends. (Email postcards are a particularly useful means for companies to attract new potential customers to add to their email databases.)
- **Collection of personal information:** Through questionnaires and surveys, companies gather and use personal information to create individualized messages, develop site content, and facilitate site promotion through return email. This information is sometimes sold to third parties.
- **Chat rooms and message boards:** These are used to create in-your-face, hip, virtual communities. Some companies even have programmed personalities (i.e., *Rave's* lead guitarist, *Radical*) that enliven the talk or engage visitors in personal discussion. They sometimes even weave product talk into the chat room discussion.



Between the Lines: Analyzing Jessica's Online Experience

The online environment Jessica visits is fairly typical of the virtual playgrounds designed for kids. The following are common online strategies used on sites for young children:

- **Cross-marketing:** Companies team up to create huge merchandising bonanzas. In this case, we saw an entertainment company (Fantasy Land) and a restaurant chain (Big Burger) join forces.
- **Bells and whistles:** Site designers attract kids with bold graphics and animation; interactive games; contests; and branded merchandise, such as online colouring books, promotional screen savers, tee-shirts, and email postcards. Jessica encountered many of these marketing strategies.
- **Brand characters:** The promotion of brand characters, animated spokescharacters or animals is an effective marketing tool that helps build strong brand awareness and attachment to a product. Remember, Jessica recognized the characters on the Big Burger website from TV.



Jessica's mother did the right thing to read the privacy statement beforehand. But let's take another look at some key points in this statement:

We adhere to the FTC guidelines for compliance with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act and Rule.

Read: According to this legislation, websites must disclose their information gathering practices from children under the age of thirteen. But this legislation doesn't regulate marketing practices, so we can market our products to your child as aggressively as we wish.

Personal information posted to the Big Burger site becomes our property. It is used for internal purposes only, such as *marketing and research and will not be sold to third parties.*

Read: It's our property and we'll use this information to sell Big Burger products. Don't be surprised if your child receives promotional email from us.

Big Burger offers an "opt-out" feature that allows you to remove your and/or your kids' email address from our files at any time.

Read: It's up to you to withdraw your child's name from the Big Burger mailing list.

Big Burger also uses "cookie" technology to obtain non-personal information. This technology helps us track visitors to our site and analyze it in aggregate form ...'Cookies' allow us to update and improve our site for our visitors.

Read: Thank you for visiting our site and providing us with information we obtained from a file on your hard drive -- specifically the places on our site you visited and how long you stayed. This information enables us to target our market much more effectively.

In the end, Jessica is one of hundreds of children to receive an email message promoting Big Burger's new meal deal, new shops, and their exciting new game.

