Media Smarts

CANADA'S CENTRE FOR DIGITAL AND MEDIA LITERACY

Co-Co's AdverSmarts

An Interactive Unit on Food Marketing on the Web

Teacher's Guide

Co-Co's AdverSmarts was created by

MediaSmarts is a Canadian, not-for-profit centre for digital and media literacy. MediaSmarts' vision is that young people have the critical thinking skills to engage with media as active and informed digital citizens.

MediaSmarts :

- offers hundreds of free media literacy resources including classroom ready lesson plans, online educational games for kids and background information on media literacy, all of which are available on the MediaSmarts website http://www.mediasmarts.ca.

- provides professional development (PD) resources and training. MediaSmarts' PD resources are available through a licensing arrangement to provincial/territorial departments, school districts and boards, libraries, post-secondary institutions and individual schools.

- conducts research. Since 2000, *Young Canadians in a Wired World* (*YCWW*) — the most comprehensive and wide-ranging research of its kind in Canada — has examined the Internet activities and attitudes of more than 11,000 students in Grades 4 to 11.

- hosts *Media Literacy Week* in partnership with the Canadian Teachers' Federation. The purpose of the week is to promote media literacy as a key component in the education of young people and to encourage the integration and the practice of media education in Canadian homes, schools and communities. Visit the *Media Literacy Week* website at http://www.medialiteracyweek.ca for more information on this event.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Co-Co's AdverSmarts: An Interactive Unit on Food Marketing on the Web is an educational game for young children. The purpose of the game is to teach five- to eight-year-olds how to recognize commercial websites that target kids through highly engaging and interactive Web environments.

This teacher's guide contains background information, learning expectations and points of discussion on the strategies and techniques companies use to promote their products and foster brand loyalty online. The guide also includes activities, exercises and handouts for use in the classroom or at home.

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The Goal of *Co-Co's AdverSmarts*

Co-Co's AdverSmarts helps children between the ages of five and eight recognize the marketing tactics used in online immersive commercial environments. On these types of websites, kids interact with brands and products through activities, games and videos. By understanding the rationale behind the elements that make up these online environments, children will recognize the advertising strategies they may encounter while playing on these sites.

The game stresses the importance of being able to recognize the commercial elements in these environments so kids will recognize virtual playgrounds for what they are – prolonged and interactive commercials.

Overview

In the game, students meet Co-Co Crunch, a talking cereal box who needs help designing his new website. Co-Co explains to players that advertising companies use gimmicks on websites to promote products and brands to kids and invites them to pick five gimmicks for his new website.

After each choice, Co-Co explains how marketers use that particular gimmick to attract users to the site and to build brand loyalty.

Theme

Students start the game by selecting one of three possible themes for the Co-Co Crunch website: "Magic Land" (an outdoor experience), "My Fun Zone" (a playground) or "Castle Quest" (a fantasy environment). The game feedback points out how advertisers use these images and words to make children feel as if they are in a special place, not a commercial.

Weasel Words

> Weasel words are used to create slogans that sound catchy, but really don't mean anything – slogans such as "The taste of real" or "I can" or "Just do it" are examples of this.

Next, players are asked to select a catch-phrase or slogan to include on the site. This lets kids see how meaningless or misleading some of the language used in food advertising is. Slogans include "New and improved super crunch" (to highlight the empty use of "new"); "The taste of real chocolate" (which is used to distract consumers from the fact that there **isn't** real chocolate in the cereal); and "One great tasty crunch" (which is an example of how much advertising language is simply meaningless, i.e. 'crunch' cannot have a taste).

Spokescharacters

Once students have decided on the website's theme and slogan, they need to come up with a mascot. Students choose between a Tiki statue, penguin or dragon as the cartoon spokescharacter who will help kids to identify and bond with Co-Co Crunch products and brands. Feedback for their choice helps students understand how companies develop such characters to create a feeling of exotic situations (like the Tiki statue), to associate the product with cute cartoon characters (such as the penguin) or to give a sense of adventure (as is done with the dragon). Spokescharacters are especially effective when children recognize them across various marketing platforms such as television ads or shows, toys and packaging.

Activities

One way that advertisers keep kids coming back to their sites is through engaging activities. These may be creative activities (such as the "Design your own Co-Co Crunch Cereal Box") or games, videos or downloadable content such as wallpaper or cell phone ringtones. All of these are used to promote the brand and associate it with enjoyable experiences like games or creative play.
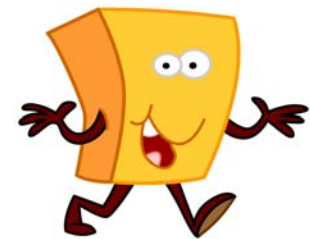
Many of these activities are presented as contests or surveys. As well, children are often required to register (usually in the form of joining a "club") to access extra content. These tactics are designed to get "return customers" and to collect users' personal information. This benefits the advertisers (who get valuable consumer data for free) and encourages kids to give out information that should be kept private. The choices in this section emphasize that there's always a cost for "free stuff."

Curricular Fits

Co-Co's AdverSmarts is an interdisciplinary educational game that can be used to enhance:

- critical thinking and problem solving
- personal development
- aesthetic expression
- technological competence and Web literacy

Co-Co's AdverSmarts was designed to be used as an educational resource for the following subject areas:

- English Language Arts
- Health Education
- Information and Communication Technology

Learning Outcomes and Expectations

In the course of this game, students will:

- begin to develop an understanding of the commercial objectives of immersive online environments, specifically those characteristic of food products' websites

- identify the purpose and the intended audience of these types of websites and describe how audiences might respond

- recognize and identify the advertising and marketing elements and characteristics associated with commercial websites

- identify overt and implied messages of websites that market to children their age

- identify the characteristics and techniques used in the creation of online immersive environments

- utilize their information to simulate the creation of a media text

- begin to develop an awareness of the strategies marketers use to engage children online

- begin to develop an understanding of the commercial nature of the Internet

Suggestions for Playing the Game

Reading Competencies

Co-Co's AdverSmarts includes audio with all of the game's text to accommodate different reading abilities. Younger children may, however, benefit from having a helper to navigate through the game. Here are some suggestions before you start:

- enlist a student from a higher grade to sit with two or three children as they play the game and help them out if they are having trouble. Children who need a lot of help on their first attempt should be given the opportunity to play again

- have a parent volunteer sit with a student while he or she goes through the game

- team up capable readers with less able readers to play the game together

- have pairs of students play the game and compare designs they create. Give them the chance to play again and create different playgrounds

- use a projector or whiteboard and navigate through the game with the whole class

Pre-Game Discussion and Activities

Buy Me That!

Advertisers love to get kids to do their work for them by using "pester power" to talk their parents into buying things.

Ask students:

- What's on their wish lists for birthdays or Christmas? (Write their choices on the blackboard or on a large sheet of paper.)
- Talk about the lists: How did they hear about the items they want?
- How many of them saw the items advertised on TV?
- What is advertising?

Talk About Advertising

Ask students:

How do marketers try to convince children that a certain toy, game or cereal is really the best? What strategies do they use? Explain some of the strategies that marketers use to make viewers want to buy a particular product, such as:

Advertising is a message that tries to sell you something.

- featuring kids a few years older than the target age group, to make the product seem really "cool"
- using sound effects, heightened colour, dramatic camera angles and music to make the products in the ads look exciting
- showing everyone having a great time in the ads because they know people want to buy products that make them feel good

Here are some more advertising strategies. Ask students to find examples for each of these "tricks of the trade."

Grades K-1

Introduce and talk about the following advertising strategies with younger children:

Cartoon Characters

- Can you think of any products that have cartoon characters associated with them? (Branded cereal characters are a good example of these).
- Do you have a favourite cartoon character? What do you like best about this character?
- Does this character make you want to buy the product?

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!

- Have you seen any commercials where kids are doing really fun things with toys or food?

- What kinds of things are they doing?

- Do you do this when you are playing with your toys or eating your food?

Repetition

- Why might a company show a commercial over and over again? (Advertisers believe that if you see a product or hear its name over and over again, then you'll be more likely to remember it and buy it.)

Grades 2-3

Review cartoon characters, excitement and repetition, and add:

Family Fun

- Have you ever noticed how much fun families in commercials have? What kinds of fun things do they do?

- Does your family act like that?

Free Stuff

- Have you ever asked your mom or dad to buy you something because you get free stuff when you buy it? (Such as giveaways in cereal boxes, mail-in coupons, etc.)

- What kinds of free stuff did you get?

Being Special or Cool

- Have you ever seen a commercial where the kids seem really cool, where you wish you could be like them? What kinds of kids are they? Are they the same age as you or are they older? What are they doing or saying that makes them seem cool?

Once students begin to understand that advertisements are messages that are designed to make them want to buy things and can identify and talk about different types of ads they see on TV, teachers can then move on to advertising on the Internet.

Online Marketing

Ask students:

- Have they seen advertising on the Internet?
- What kind of ads have they seen?
- Which products were being advertised?
- How do the advertisers make people want to buy a certain product?

Have any of them ever joined a club on a commercial website for kids?

- Did they get anything special for joining?
- What information was required to join the club?
- Did they ask an adult to help them?
- Did they find their experience rewarding?

For older students, distribute the handout *Remember Your Cybersmarts*. For younger students, use this as a discussion guide.
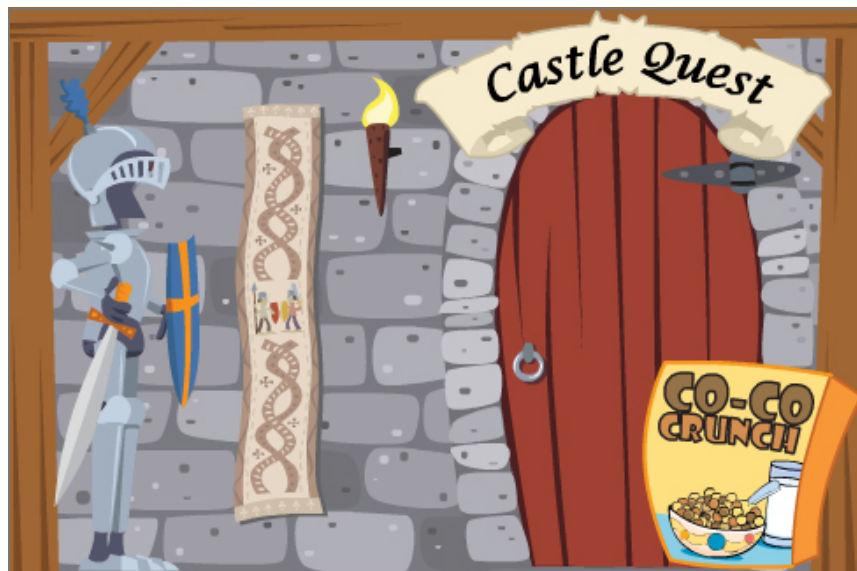
Post-Game Discussion

This section offers discussion notes on each stage of the game. Teachers may wish to lead a discussion after students play the game or have students play the game a second time, stopping at each stage for discussion. Select the notes and questions that are best suited for the age group of the students.

Each of the following discussion notes covers the elements in commercialized immersive environments. Each element presents opportunities for marketers to target kids with brand-related messages and position their product in a positive way. Marketers seek to develop relationships with young people at the earliest possible age and use the following elements to their fullest potential for that end.

Theme

Often companies will choose not to include the brand or product name in the title or domain name, thus blurring the connection to their company or brand, which in turn blurs the boundary between content and advertising.

Examples of strategies used by marketers:

- *Locations*: Words like *world*, *village*, *town*, *clubhouse*, *land* and *planet* give the impression that the location of the website is set in a far away special place. Companies want children to feel that it's a special world and that they can have access to visit, play and explore.

- *Personal:* Words like *my* give the impression that the website is their own personal space. To reinforce this idea, these websites will also include activities in which kids can customize their experience. Some ask children to submit their names before entering a site in order to provide them with personalized greetings when they return.

- *Adventure*: Words like *quest, challenge* and *journey* give the impression that the user is about to begin a great adventure and give the sense that it is an active, rather than two dimensional, place. Sometimes these words are matched with a location, such as *Adventure Land.*

Ask students:

- If an advertiser wanted to attract people to a website what kind of names would they use?

- What types of images come to mind when they hear a name for a website that includes the words *world, my* and *quest* in the title? What types of activities would they expect to be on such a website?

- Have they ever been on a website that has a name similar to *Magic Land, My Fun Zone* or *Castle Quest*?

- Why would a company not just name the site after the product?

Weasel Words

Explain to students that by law advertisers must tell the truth, but sometimes they use words that can mislead viewers. We refer to these as "weasel words" because they sound like they mean more than what they actually say such as "the fruity smell of this nutritious breakfast."

Ask students:

- How are the following phrases from the game misleading?

    - *New and improved super crunch*

    - *The taste of real chocolate*

    - *One great tasty crunch*

- Can you think of other examples of weasel words? (Make a list on the board. Examples may include words or phrases such as: Raisin Bran's "Two scoops of raisins in every bowl" (how big are the scoops?); Lucky Charms' "Magically delicious" (so what does it really taste like?); Trix yogurt's "Two fruity colours" (how can colours be fruity?); and Lego's "It's a new toy every day." (actually, it's the same toy.)

Spokescharacters

Spokescharacters are effective when children recognize them from other media such as television, games, movies, toys and packaging; but they are even more appealing when kids can play and interact with them in online activities and games.

And advertisers hope that brand recognition at a young age will evolve into life-long brand loyalty!

Young people need to remember that although they appear friendly, these characters are really not their friends. They are created for commercial reasons and, in a way, can be seen as salespeople who are trying to sell a product.

Ask students:

- Why might companies create spokescharacters like *Cap'n Crunch* or *Toucan Sam*?

- What are some other examples of spokescharacters? What do you like about them?

- Have you ever wanted to try a product because you liked the spokescharacter?

- Have you ever been on a website where you could do things with a product or its spokescharacter? What types of games and activities could you do?

Advergames

In *Co-Co's AdverSmarts*, players have the ability to add activities to the Co-Co Crunch website. One of the most effective ways for marketers to promote products online is through advergames, which is a term used to describe the seamless integration of product promotion in online activities.

Ask students:

- Based on the word "advergame" how would you define or describe what it is?

- Who do you think is the audience of advergames? How do you know this?

- Have you seen or played any advergames? If so, what products were promoted?

- How do advergames compare with other kinds of advertising? Brainstorm a list of types of advertisement and the typical length of how long you think people interact with it.

"Create-your-own" Activities

Marketers try to increase user participation on branded websites by allowing users to customize their experience.

Kids may be able to create their own characters or products, their own spaces in an online community or even design accessories for the product. Create-your-own activities encourage extended interaction with a brand, create a sense of ownership and control and allow children the opportunity to play with the product in new and creative ways.

90% of players who receive a challenge from a friend play the game

By engaging kids in a personal way, their experience will likely be more memorable and they are more likely to foster a positive brand relationship. It also adds an incentive for kids to share their creations with others, increasing the chances of positive word-of-mouth promotion.

Ask students:

- Have you ever been on a site that let you make your own space, like decorating your own house or room? If so, what type of site was it? What did you get to do?

- If you were making a website for kids, what kinds of things would you let them do to make their own special places?

- What other kinds of "do-it-yourself" activities can you do, i.e. "dress or get extra things for your avatar." Do you have to do anything extra to do this?

Online Videos

For marketers, the popularity of online videos on sites like YouTube has given extra life to television commercials. Not only can visitors view these commercials on a product's website, but users are often given incentives for doing so such as points or access to other activities.

Sometimes companies will ask for direct feedback from their visitors after watching their commercials. Websites use empowering language, encouraging people to "have your say" or "tell us what you think" as part of the interaction. Unlike airing commercials on television where the communication is one-way, on the Internet companies can get direct feedback from their audience and insight into how people react to their commercials and what they like about them. Since commercials on these websites are integrated into the overall content, some people are concerned that young people may have difficulty recognizing them as ads.

Ask students:

- Have you been on a website that showed online videos? What type of website was it?
- Did any of these videos show products like toys or food?
- Have you been on a website for a toy or candy or cereal that had commercials that you can watch?
- How is watching commercials online different than watching commercials on television?
- Why do you think companies like to include commercials on their websites?

E-cards and Extended Advertising

While many of the activities on branded websites can spark positive word-of-mouth and viral marketing, some activities are solely designed for that purpose. One example is e-cards. Many commercially branded sites offer free e-cards or messages that visitors can send to their friends.

The e-card also represents the brand or product in a positive way. As kids share with their friends, they do the work of the marketers for them.

Ask students:

- What are e-cards? Have you ever received or sent an e-card? How are e-cards on branded websites different than the e-cards offered on other websites?
- Has a friend ever sent you a message or invitation using an e-card? What did you do when you received the message?
- Why might companies want kids to send their friends e-cards from their websites?

Memberships and Clubs

For online marketers, one of the challenges is to find ways of getting Web visitors to come back as often as possible. Offering memberships and clubs for kids to join are one way marketers get kids to spend time on their website and encourage them to come back in the future.

Often, memberships on these sites offer additional incentives including access to games or points. Once they are part of the club children are informed of new promotions, products and exclusive offers.

Sometimes companies use clubs to conduct market research. Using polls, quizzes and surveys, marketers ask kids for feedback and opinions on products, collect demographic and product-use information and interact with users in a more direct manner than traditional forms of marketing.

Remind students before providing any personal information online that they should first ask a parent, caregiver or teacher.

Ask students:

- Have you been on a website where you can join a club? Have you ever done this? What type of information did they ask you for? What did you get for being a member? Was there anything you didn't like about being a member?
- Do you think it's ok for a company to collect information about you so they can sell you things?

Contests and Sweepstakes

Another way marketers get attention about their product is by offering contests and sweepstakes. This is an easy way to get people excited, since who wouldn't want to win a fabulous prize. However, it is important to remind students that contests are a form of advertising and to be cautious about the information they provide to enter.

Ask students:

- Have you seen any contests while surfing on the Internet? If so, do you remember the website or the type of website that offered the contest? What was the prize? Have you ever entered an online contest?
- What do you think are the chances of winning the prize in online contests? Do you know anyone who has won a prize through an online contest?
- Why do you think contests are popular? Why do you think marketers like to use contests?
- Remind students that if they ever want to enter an online contest or survey, they should get an adult to help them to make sure they don't give away too much information.

Note to teachers:

The handout *Remember Your Cybersmarts* provides an overview of *Co-Co*'s main teaching points. Review this handout with students.

Assure them that there is nothing wrong with playing on commercial sites, but explain that it's important to recognize the sites for what they are: online commercials. Remind students that they must be careful to protect their personal information and to avoid falling for gimmicks that are used to collect information.

Extension Activities

From the suggestions below, select follow-up activities that suit the ages and abilities of your students.

Healthy Food Web

Over the past 25 years, rates of childhood obesity have increased substantially. According to the Canadian Community Health Survey the numbers have tripled among adolescents. Health officials, educators and parents have raised questions on the impact of food marketing to children and the ways food advertising can affect their healthy food choices.

Activity One: Eating Under the Rainbow (Grades 1-3 Lesson Plan)

This lesson plan can be used as an introduction to the activity. It will help students understand the lure of snack food advertisements and where snacks can fit into a healthy diet. The lesson is available for free on the MediaSmarts website: http://mediasmarts.ca/lessonplan/eating-under-rainbow-lesson

Activity Two: Class Discussion

Start a class discussion on junk food advertising and healthy food options. Ask students:

- What is meant by a "healthy" diet?
- What are the food groups that make up Canada's Food Guide? (Available at: http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php)
- Where do snack foods fit into our diet?
- What type of food commercials have you seen? Where would these types of foods fit in Canada's Food Guide?
- What are the top four most common ingredients listed in snack foods that are advertised?
- Do you see commercials for all of the foods in Canada's Food Guide? What types of foods are not advertised?
- Is there a problem with too much snack food advertising?
- Can we eat snacks and still be healthy?

Activity Three: Design a Healthy Food Website

Once students have thought about where snack food fits into their lives and healthy alternatives, ask them to design elements that can be included as part of a healthy food website. Use the *Co-Co's AdverSmarts* game as a guide, but unlike the Co-Co Crunch website which uses gimmicks that may mislead or foster brand recognition, the motivation behind the design for the healthy food website is to educate and inform about the benefits of healthy food choices.

For their designs:

- Have students think of their favourite healthy food and select it as a product to promote on a website. Have students design a logo for the food type.

- Ask them to create, name and draw their own food spokescharacter. Let them draw or paint a picture of their new character with their favourite food. Have students consider how the design of the character can help depict the food type as healthy.

- Ask students:

   - what kind of activities they would include on their website

   - how these activities would inform people of the healthy nature of their food type

   - how the videos, games and activities on the healthy food site would be different from those found on other websites

   - if they would include other things like a nutrition information area

- Have students create a name for the website

Once students have finished brainstorming ideas for their website have them draw or paint a design for their homepage. Post the images on the wall as a healthy food website.

Remind students that it is important to think critically of media we encounter. While surfing the Internet we should ask questions such as "Who made this website? What is the purpose of the website? Is it to sell things to us? Is it to give us information or just for fun?" Remind students that when a website is to trying to sell something we need to be aware of the ways we are being marketed to.

It's In the Box

This activity makes students more aware of how packaging and branding may influence their food choices.

For this activity, each student brings to class an empty box from their favourite cereal. The teacher will need to provide large sheets of paper and glue as well as two pairs of full cereal boxes, with each pair including a brand name cereal and its generic equivalent – four boxes in total. Have the cereals poured into bowls before beginning this activity (and be sure to remember which bowl is the brand name, and which is the generic brand).

1. Sitting in a circle, have each student present his/her favourite cereal to the group, and explain why he/she particularly likes it.

2. Once everyone has spoken, ask them: "Why do you buy cereal? What do you do with it?" (This is to establish that the ultimate goal of buying cereal is to eat it.)

3. Instruct students to look at their cereal boxes and, using their scissors, cut out everything on the box that is not a picture of something that is edible (such as a picture of the cereal itself, fruit, milk, etc.). *Younger students may need guidance here. Encourage them to systematically cut out things such as the name of the cereal, branded characters, promotions for games or toys, nutritional information, etc.* They should be left with a remnant of their box that contains nothing but a picture of the cereal itself.

4. When everyone has finished, ask: "Have you cut out any animals or cartoon characters? Show them to me!" Then, "Is this something you can eat?" (To illustrate this, select one of the nearby cutout animals and pretend to take a bite at the cardboard, then "spit it out" in disgust). The children are then invited to glue all their animals on the big sheet of paper.

5. Do the same for the various other components such as promotions, nutritional information, the brand name, etc., placing them on the second large piece of paper. Review the various things that are on the two pieces of paper and ask: "Why do you think cereal companies put all of this stuff on the cereal boxes?" (With the exception of nutritional information, answers should relate to making the cereal look fun and exciting, making kids want to buy it, etc..)

6. Once this is done, have students display on the floor or a table what is left of the cardboard boxes after everything that is not directly related to the cereal has been removed.

7. Ask them: "Do these cereals still have the same nice taste even after we've taken out the pictures on the box? Do the pictures on the boxes change the taste of the cereal?" (Give students time to answer this.) "Well, to decide, we have to taste them! But in order not to be influenced by all the glitzy things that were on the box, I'm not going to tell you which one is the more expensive and glitzy brand name cereal and which one is the cheaper, less glitzy store brand version."

8. Have each student taste both cereals in each pair and put a checkmark beside the one he/she likes best. When all the students have done this, see which cereals are the winners. Regardless of which cereals "win" congratulate students on letting their taste-buds decide, and for not being influenced by fancy wrapping and gimmicks.

End the activity by taking the students through the following action rhyme:

Rhyme	Action
A box is only cardboard,	*Mime being a square box*
It's what's inside that counts!	*Raise your hands to open the box*
Mascots don't taste yummy,	*Pretend to eat something and make a "yucky" face*
And prizes won't fill my tummy,	*Hold your tummy*
So when I eat my breakfast,	*Mime eating cereal from a bowl*
I think I'll trust my mouth!	*BIG SMILE!*

Weasel Word Blast

(Grade 3)

Activity One: Media Log

Watching for weasel words can be fun for students while at the same time they will be developing an awareness of language. Have students create a weasel word media log of advertisements on television, Internet or magazines.

In their media log students can record:

- weasel words
- when and where they encountered the ad
- type of media
- product promoted
- how the words may be considered misleading

Activity Two: Weasel Words in Action

Ask students to design and draw a new product and then write a number of weasel words or phrases to promote the product to other children in their age group.

Co-Co's AdverSmarts Home Assignment

Have students share the game with their parent(s) or guardian(s). Background information on the topic of commercial branded and immersive Web environments is included in the *Handout for Parents*. A package can be put together for students to take home, including activity sheets found towards the end of the guide. Have students play the game with their parents and describe each of the different gimmicks. As a variation, students can show their parents an example of a commercially branded website and explain the advertising techniques behind the site.

Activity Sheets

Select the activity sheets appropriate for your students. The activity sheets can also be included as part of the *Co-Co's AdverSmarts Home Assignment*. Activity sheets include:

- Co-Co's Colour the Gimmick
- Co-Co's AdverMatch
- Co-Co's Spot the Differences
- Co-Co Crunch Mystery Message
- Co-Co Crunch Fill In the Blanks
- Co-Co Crunch Word Search
- C-Co Crunch Crossword

Additional Resources

To access additional information about online advertising and marketing to children visit the following resources available on the MediaSmarts website:

- *Kids for Sale: Online Privacy and Marketing*
  Kids for Sale is a professional development workshop with a companion guide. The workshop includes background information about online marketing and data collection on commercial sites for kids and teens and provides teachers with resources to help kids understand the "business" side of the Net and to safeguard their personal information on commercial sites.
  http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/licensed-resources/web-awareness-workshop-series/detailed-descriptions

  Kids for Sale is part of the *Web Awareness Workshop Series,* which is available through a licensing arrangement. A list of current licensees is available on the MediaSmarts website at: http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/licensed-resources/find-out-what-youre-licensed. If you are not covered by a current licence agreement and would like more information on the workshops or to preview the workshops, contact: licensing@mediasmarts.ca.
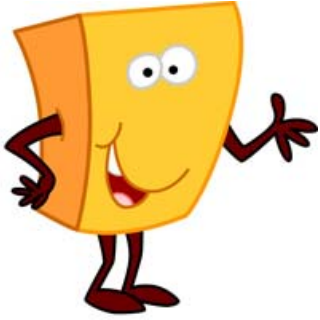
- *Lesson Library: Advertising and Marketing*
The MediaSmarts lesson library features hundreds of free, copyright-cleared, primary to Grade 12 teaching lessons and activities. A user-friendly interface allows educators to search by grade, topic and curriculum outcome.
http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/find-lesson

- *Privacy Pirates: An Interactive Unit on Online Privacy.* In this online game, students ages 7-9 are introduced to the concept of online privacy and taught to distinguish between information that is appropriate to give out and information better kept private.
http://mediasmarts.ca/game/privacy-pirates-interactive-unit-online-privacy-ages-7-9

- *Privacy Playground: The First Adventure of the Three CyberPigs* In this online game, students ages 8-10 learn about online marketing and protecting their privacy as they surf the Internet.
http://mediasmarts.ca/game/privacy-playground-first-adventure-three-cyberpigs

Handouts

REMEMBER YOUR CYBERSMARTS

Companies often use cool characters to attract you to their products. But remember: it's still just advertising. A pretend character isn't really your friend, especially when he or she is trying to sell you something.

Games on some websites for kids let you play with cartoon spokescharacters, brands and products. These games are designed so that you will play them again and again. Companies think that the more you play with their products the more you will like it and want to buy it. Games can be fun, but recognize advergames for what they are – commercials.

Companies often ask kids to join clubs or complete surveys on the Internet. They may offer you a prize for answering questions about your name, age, favourite foods or what your parents do for a living. Don't give companies any of this personal information. Next thing you know they'll be trying to sell you something.

Downloadable screensavers featuring products and brands or email "postcards" that can be sent to your friends are advertisements. These are two ways in which marketers can advertise even when you or your friends are not on the site. Don't do the work of the marketers for them.

You came on to the Internet to play, not to pay. Sometimes companies create cyber-playgrounds to trick kids into buying things. Don't be fooled.

Co-Co's AdverSmarts: Handout for Parents

Why Marketers Target Kids

Kids represent an important demographic to marketers because they have their own purchasing power; they influence their parents' buying decisions and they are the adult consumers of the future.

Today's kids have more autonomy and decision-making power within the family than in previous generations so it follows that kids are vocal about what they want their parents to buy. "Pester power" refers to children's ability to nag their parents into purchasing items they might not otherwise buy. Marketing to children is all about creating pester power because advertisers know what a powerful force it can be.

To effectively market to children, advertisers need to know what makes kids tick. With the help of well-paid researchers and psychologists, advertisers have access to in-depth knowledge about children's developmental, emotional and social needs at different ages. Using research that analyzes children's behaviour, fantasy lives, art work, even their dreams, companies are able to craft sophisticated marketing strategies to reach young people.

Building brand name loyalty

Marketers plant the seeds of brand recognition in very young children, in the hopes that the seeds will grow into lifetime relationships. According to the Center for a New American Dream, babies as young as six months of age can form mental images of corporate logos and mascots. Brand loyalties can be established as early as age two, and by the time children head off to school most can recognize hundreds of brand logos.

Online marketing

The Internet is an extremely desirable medium for marketers wanting to target children:

- It's part of youth culture. This generation of young people is growing up with the Internet as a daily and routine part of their lives
- Parents generally do not understand the extent to which kids are being marketed to online
- Kids are often online alone, without parental supervision
- Food advertisers prefer the Internet to broadcast media, which have codes regarding advertising to kids, because the Internet is less regulated
- Sophisticated technologies make it easy to collect information from young people for marketing research and to target individual children with personalized advertising
- By creating engaging, interactive environments based on products and brand names companies can build brand loyalties from an early age

Online marketers are creating online playgrounds where content and advertising are seamlessly integrated into graphics, games and activities. Often the immersive environment is an "advergame" centred on brand, product or product-related character.

Marketers create these immersive environments to build relationships with young children.

Special Issues for Young Children

According to *Consumer Reports* magazine, "young children have difficulty distinguishing between advertising and reality in ads, and ads can distort their view of the world."

Excessive materialism can have an impact on the development of a child's self image and values. In his 2004 book *Psychology and Consumer Culture: The Struggle for a Good Life in a Materialistic World*, Dr. Allen Kanner states "It's the meta-message that you can solve all of life's problems by purchasing the right products that's having the most profound effect."

A child's identity shouldn't be defined by their consumer habits; yet that is the main way they see themselves reflected in the media – as consumers.

With the significant increase in levels of obesity among young children, questions are being raised about the impact of aggressive food marketing on the Internet for products such as fast food, soft drinks and candy.

Tips for Dealing with Online Marketing

To help kids avoid the many traps and pitfalls set up by online marketers, parents themselves need to become more informed about online marketing techniques and privacy issues – and then pass the information on to their kids. In particular, parents should teach their kids to:

Think critically about commercial websites

Kids need to be educated about online marketing and need to recognize when they're being sold to and how. The contests, quizzes and surveys are there for a reason: to collect personal information from kids like yours and to use it to create marketing strategies to reach other kids.

Until the age of six or seven, children have difficulty distinguishing advertising from reality and may not understand that ads are there to sell something. Talk to your children about advertising from an early age and encourage them to become active – not passive – consumers of commercial messages. It is important for kids to understand that while commercial sites may be fun to visit, they exist for two reasons: to build brand name loyalty and recognition for their brand and to collect data from kids for marketing purposes.

Protect their personal information

Your kids should always check with you before submitting any personal information online. If they absolutely must give out an email address to participate in a commercial website, you can set up a "dummy" email account for them. (This is an email account that is only used when providing an email address to websites.)

Read online privacy policies

While most kids' websites have privacy policies, it's important to learn to read the fine print. A good privacy policy will come right out and tell users what information is being collected from kids and how it will be used. It should also allow parents to view the information collected on their child and edit or delete it if they wish.

The privacy policy is usually linked to at the bottom of each page. Here's what to look for:

- What information is being collected or tracked? How will this information be used? (It is especially important to understand whether it will be sold or transferred to a third party.)

- Do parents have the ability to change or delete any data that has been collected about their children?

- What steps are being taken to safeguard children's privacy when they participate in chat rooms, message boards and email activities on the site?

Know the difference between branded and non-branded sites

Branded commercial sites for kids are easy to spot. They're associated with a specific company or brand and feature products and characters produced and trademarked by the company. Their purpose is to build brand loyalty, to sell products and to use the information they get from visitors to develop their marketing strategies.

Non-branded commercial sites aren't as obvious since they don't appear to be affiliated with a specific company or brand. They may feature the products of a number of different companies or no product at all. Their chief purpose is to conduct surveys and research for the purpose of gathering personal information about the children who visit their site – either for the sole benefit of their site partners or to sell to other interested third parties.

Recognize online marketing gimmicks

- Explain to your kids that advertisers use words and images that can make a website feel as if it is a real place kids can join in.

- Explain how the activities on commercial sites, such as colouring pages and games, are designed to keep kids interacting with the site for long periods of time. Marketers call this "sticky traffic."

- Teach your kids that the online contests, quizzes and surveys on commercial sites are there for a reason: to collect personal information from kids and to use it to create marketing strategies to reach other kids.

- Explain to your kids that banner ads often link to other commercial websites or product information and sometimes this information is not suitable for children.

- Teach kids how marketers play on human insecurities by creating ads that imply their products will improve our lives and bring us happiness and how they use friendly cartoon "spokescharacters" to attract kids and create a lasting impression of products and companies.

- Many companies attempt to combine real world products with virtual world environments, so young people can play with their toys in new and creative ways.

Recognize responsible children's sites

A responsible kids' site will:

- Identify its partners

- Make sure the difference is clear between its content and any advertisements

- Have a privacy policy that is written in language that is easy to understand and can be reached both from the home page and from any other pages where kids are asked to submit information

- State clearly in its privacy policy that any information collected from children will **not** be sold to a third party

- Ensure that parents are aware of the unprotected nature of its chat rooms, bulletin boards and email activities and take steps to safeguard the children who participate in them

- Provide monitored chat environments

- Require parental consent be obtained before any child under 13 releases personal information. This consent should be verifiable, not just a simple exhortation such as "Hey, kids, be sure to get your parents' permission before you give out information online!"

Activity Sheets

Co-Co's Colour the Gimmick

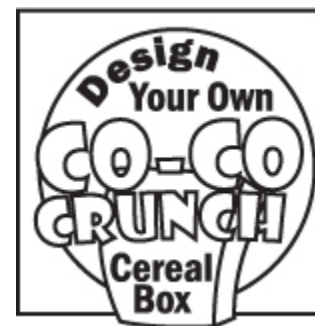Which of the following are online gimmicks? Colour your answers.

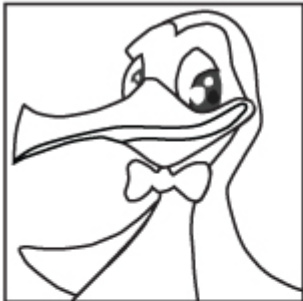**Spokescharacters**

E-cards

Advergames
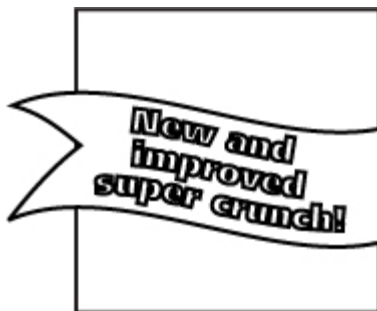
Weasel Words

Create-your-own Activities
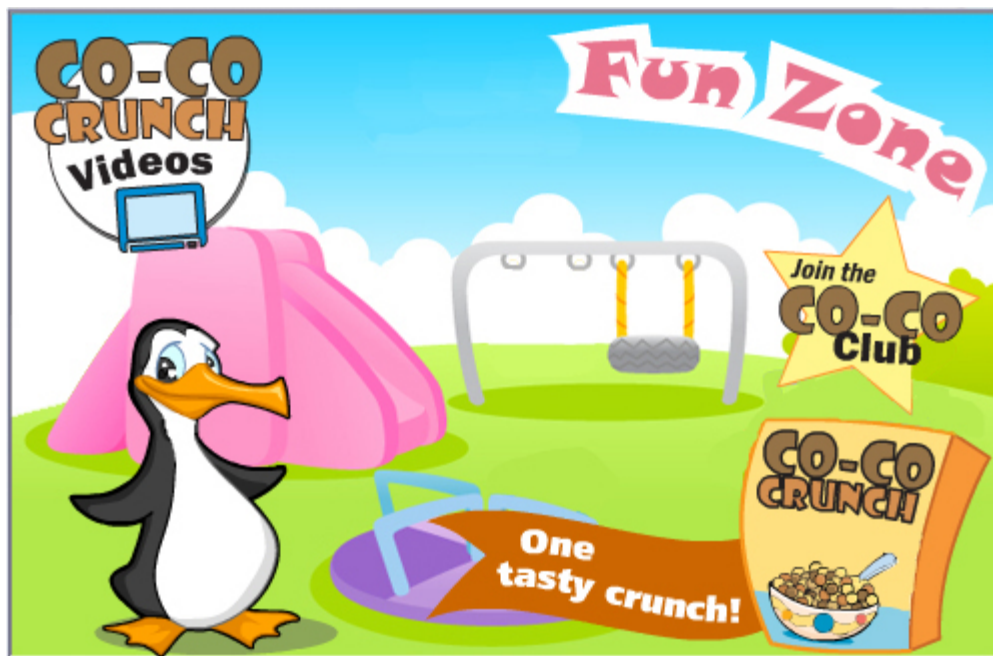
Co-Co's AdverMatch

Match the image of an online marketing gimmick with the word that best describes it.

E-Cards

Advergames

Contests

Create-your-own

Commercials

Clubs

Spokescharacters

Weasel Words
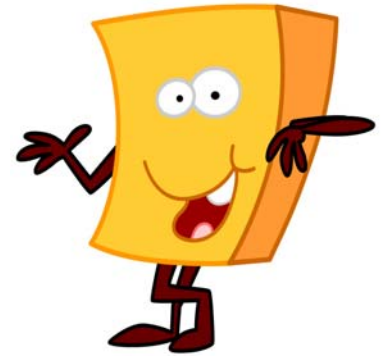
Co-Co's Spot the Differences

Circle 8 differences between these pictures of *My Fun Zone*.

Co-Co Crunch Mystery Message

Using the alphabet code below, decode the mystery message.

```
___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
18   5   3  15   7  14   9  26   5
```

```
___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___   ___ ___ ___   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
 2  18   1  14   4   5   4    23   5   2    19   9  20   5  19
```

```
___ ___ ___   ___ ___ ___ ___   ___ ___ ___ ___   ___ ___ ___
 6  15  18    23   8   1  20    20   8   5  25     1  18   5
```

```
–  ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ .
    3  15  13  13   5  18   3   9   1  12  19
```

Alphabet Code

1 = A	5 = E	9 = I	13 = M	17 = Q	21 = U	25 = Y
2 = B	6 = F	10 = J	14 = N	18 = R	22 = V	26 = Z
3 = C	7 = G	11 = K	15 = O	19 = S	23 = W	
4 = D	8 = H	12 = L	16 = P	20 = T	24 = X	

Co-Co Crunch Fill In the Blanks

Fill in the blanks in the sentences below, choosing the words that fit from this list.

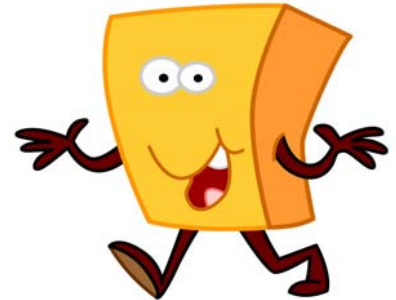**advergames**   **clubs**   **contests**   **play**

gimmicks   **promote**   **visit**   **website**

weasel words

1. Co-Co Crunch needs help designing his new _____.

2. Co-Co Crunch wants five _____ to make his website look fun and cool.

3. Marketers create fun websites to _____ their products to kids.

4. These websites are often set in magical and adventurous places, where kids will want to _____.

5. Companies often use _____ such as "new and improved" or "the taste of real…" to describe their products.

6. Many of these websites include activities and games where kids can _____ with products.

7. These games are called _____ because they are really advertisements disguised as games.

8. Websites invite kids to become members and join _____ so they will come back often.

9. Sweepstakes and _____ build excitement around products.
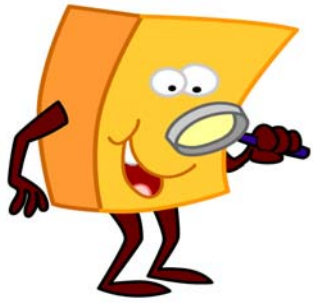
Co-Co Crunch Word Search

Look for these words hidden in the word search. The words can run up, down, diagonally or backwards.

O	G	I	M	M	I	C	K	A	C
E	P	E	C	A	R	D	S	H	O
M	A	R	K	E	T	R	A	I	M
A	L	D	O	E	E	R	F	B	M
G	O	T	S	D	A	M	U	R	E
R	G	T	W	C	U	Y	N	A	R
E	O	E	T	L	P	C	E	N	C
V	N	E	W	U	O	L	T	D	I
D	R	W	E	B	F	O	A	S	A
A	T	S	E	T	N	O	C	Y	L

ads	cool	gimmick	play
advergame	commercial	logo	products
brand	contest	market	Web
buy	ecards	my	
character	free	Net	
club	fun	new	

Co-Co Crunch Crossword

Use the clues on the other side to put the right words in each of the Across and Down spaces below!

Co-Co Crossword

Use the clues below to put the right words in each of the Across and Down spaces on the other side!

ACROSS

1. Advergames are one way companies get kids to play with their _____ or brand (7 letters).

4. Companies offer this type of electronic postcard, so users will help them advertise by sending it to their friends (6 letters).

6. To pay for the promotion of a product or service is to _____ (9 letters).

8. A "cartoon _____" helps foster brand recognition for companies. One example is Tony the Tiger (15 letters).

11. Companies use magical, personal or adventurous _____ for their website (5 letters).

12. Designed to stand out and get attention (7 letters).

14. Online _____ on junk food websites are usually commercials for products (6 letters).

15. Marketers create online games so users can play with their product and _____ (5 letters).

16. Marketers advertise to kids in hopes of fostering a life time of brand _____ (7 letters).

17. Describes a computer-generated environment (7 letters).

DOWN

2. Web users who remain engaged with a website or online game for extended periods is called " sticky _____" (7 letters).

3. Ads disguised as games (10 letters).

5. Companies offer _____ and other memberships in hopes that users spend lots of time on the site and come back often (5 letters).

7. Companies create fun and exciting websites to _____ their product to kids (6 letters).

9. An "immersive _____" is an interactive, computer-created website representing places or worlds in which users can engross themselves (11 letters).

10. Offering sweepstakes and _____ is a way companies create excitement around their product or brand (8 letters).

13. "The taste of real chocolate is an example of a "_____ word," which are slogans that sound catchy but really don't mean anything (6 letters).

Co-Co Crunch Crossword:
Answer Key

	¹P	R	O	D	U	C	²T		³A						
							R		D						
⁴E	⁵C	A	R	D	S		⁶A	D	V	E	R	T	I	S	E
	L						F		E						
	U						F		R					⁷T	
	B						I		G					A	
	⁸S	P	O	K	E	S	C	H	A	R	A	¹⁰C	T	E	R
				⁹E					M			O		G	
				N					E		¹¹N	A	M	E	S
	¹²G	I	M	M	I	C	K		S			T		T	
				R				¹³W			E			
				O		¹⁴V	I	D	E	O	S			
		¹⁵B	R	A	N	D			A		T			
				M				S		S			
				E				E					
				N				¹⁶L	O	Y	A	L	T	Y
	¹⁷V	I	R	T	U	A	L							