

Children encouraged to advertise to themselves

When advertisers defend marketing to children, they often claim that children can tell the difference between advertising and entertainment. Children are able, so the argument goes, to apply a critical eye and judge the advertising messages for their persuasive intent. Their critical judgement is triggered by recognising the advertising as separate from the television programmes, story books and everyday objects that make up their childhood world.

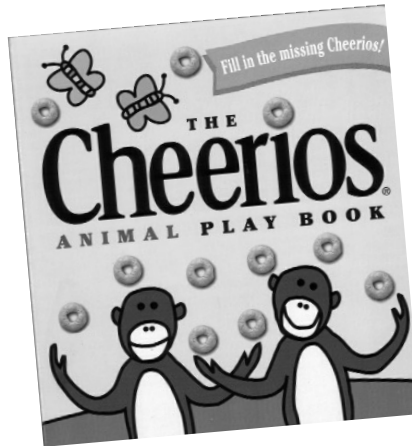
So what should children make of some of the latest product promotions targeted at them? How should they distinguish between marketing and entertainment when these are woven into one and the same thing?

An example of blurred boundaries in food advertising is the Frosties branded kitchen towels shown below. What better way to ensure that a child is repeatedly exposed to Tony the Tiger imagery than to print him again and again on kitchen roll? In this way, the Frosties brand can become an accepted part of a child's everyday landscape.

Meanwhile, a new promotion for Nestlé Milkybar encourages parents to collect tokens for a 'personalised story book', in which a child's name is printed into a book involving the Milkybar Kid and his friends. As the child reads the book they advertise to themselves and are likely build up positive – even lifelong – associations with the Milkybar brand.

The story book tokens appear on products aimed at very young children, such as Milkybar bars and Milkybar Buttons, branded as 'a delicious source of milk goodness'.

Nestlé says that Milkybar is 'trusted by Mums



and benefits from its association with goodness, purity and security'. However, milk powder is only the second ingredient (26%) after sugar. The confectionery is 57% sugar and 20% saturated fat.

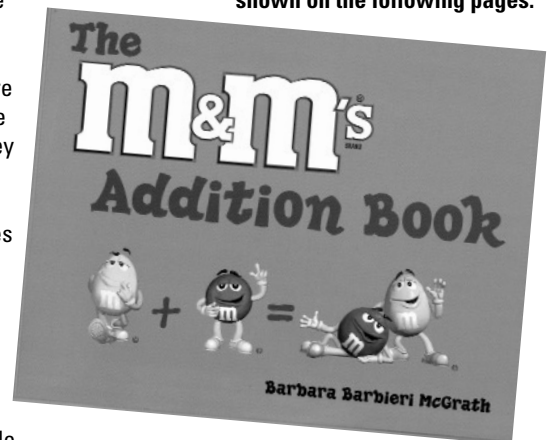
Meanwhile, branded food products are creeping into the hands and minds of the very youngest children - even before they learn to read. The Food Commission has examples of books for toddlers integrating real food products into stories and games, such as M&Ms and Lovehearts sweets and Cheerios cereal. In one example, shown here, toddlers are encouraged to put real Cheerios cereal pieces into specially cut holes on the page. An M&Ms addition book encourages older children to learn simple mathematical calculations by counting M&Ms confectionery.

Through these promotions, the child interacts in play with the objects and brands,

in an open and engaged mood which makes them at their most receptive to learning and suggestion. It's an advertiser's dream.

This spring, the government said that it hoped food advertisers would take a more responsible attitude to food promotions to children, with a vague threat that regulation might be considered if advertisers had not shaped up by 2007. However, the Food Commission remains concerned that the government may focus its attention only on TV advertising, and fail to address the ways in which food marketing is 'slipping sideways' into other forms that invade children's lives.

■ More examples of how brands are crossing the boundaries between advertising, entertainment and learning experiences are shown on the following pages.



Your child's name can be printed as a hero in a Milkybar story book. Nestlé uses this as a sneaky way of encouraging your child to do their marketing work for them.



Companies merge entertainment



Companies are becoming increasingly interested in reaching children at home – and one highly effective way of doing this is to use websites. Not only do they have a global reach, they are also likely to be used by children without direct parental supervision, because adults are usually not around to help children recognise or interpret the marketing messages. Indeed, many adults might have difficulty distinguishing the marketing messages from the entertainment, since they are often one and the same thing. Examples that the Food Commission has spotted in recent months are shown on these pages.

This summer Disney, the giant media company, will launch a new website called Virtual Magic Kingdom, where children will be able to: 'chat, play and trade with friends', 'decorate your own (virtual) room and mix music', and 'compete with other players in our Pirates and Fireworks games'.

What the early version of the website does not mention is that Disney plans the site to be an opportunity for 'advergaming' – interactive internet games carrying commercial messages. The first version is due to be launched in May as part of an 18-month global initiative, targeting children aged 8 to 12 years old.

Disney has not yet announced what sort of advertising the new site will carry, but the focus is likely to be on promoting Disney theme parks. Kids will also earn online points within the Virtual Magic Kingdom that can be redeemed for products at a 'real' Disney Magic Kingdom. As the president of Walt Disney Parks Jay Rasulo explains, 'We hope it becomes a real hangout for preteens and teens.'

Advergaming is a growing phenomenon on websites aimed at children, and in computer games. The website Neopets.com, for instance, offers children virtual cartoon pets (134 million have already been claimed) which they navigate through games and adventures to earn points. Marketing messages and paid-for advertisements are integrated throughout the website. Responding to a technique known in the marketing trade as 'Immersive Advertising', children are encouraged to build up a 'wish list' of products from the Neopets catalogue – toys and souvenirs relating to the Neopets characters from the online game – for their parents to pay for later.

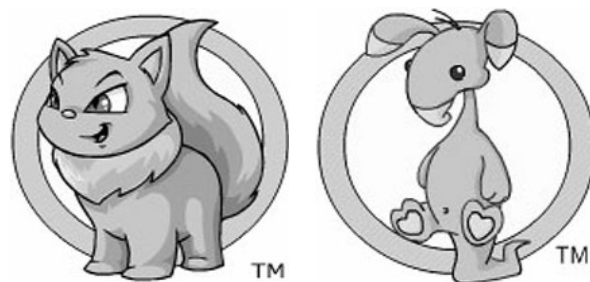
Big food brands are also investing in online advergaming. A current Frosties cereal promotion features an online sports game in which cartoon characters compete in a virtual stadium adorned with Frosties advertising hoardings. Characters have to 'consume' packets of Frosties to have enough power to take part in the races.

A related Frosties site offers children the chance to 'Earn their stripes' through playing online computer games introduced by the ubiquitous Tony the Tiger.

Other food brands using such techniques include the sugared milk drink Nesquik from Nestlé. Nesquik websites offer children a



Gr-r-r-reat prizes are on offer in Tony the Tiger's online Tigercathlon, where children can earn points by taking part in races in a virtual stadium, but only if their cartoon character picks up packets of Frosties to give them enough 'power'



Meet Wocky, Blumaroo, Grundo, Kiko, Tuskaninny, Uni and Usul

entertainment and marketing



Disney is investing heavily in its first venture into 'advergaming' – the use of website games that attract children but have inbuilt marketing messages. The advergaming site, due to launch this summer, will be Disney's 'Virtual Magic Kingdom'

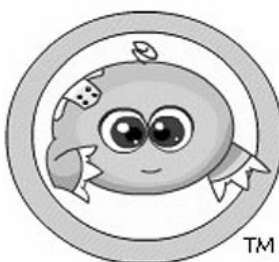
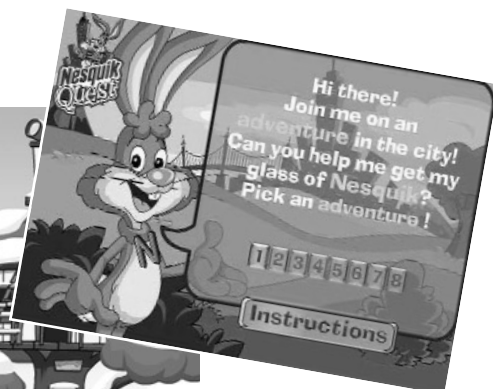


range of games and downloads, from virtual sticker-collecting and trading games that incorporate branded imagery, to downloadable colouring sheets that encourage children to colour in the Nesquik rabbit holding his favourite sugary drink.

In all of these online advergaming, each image and interaction is meant to reinforce a sales message in the child's mind, linking the brands to excitement, involvement and fun, and flying under the radar of parental control.

- http://disneyland.disney.go.com/disneyland/en_US/special/vmk/index?VMKSplashPage
- <http://www.frosties.co.uk>
- <http://www.kelloggs.co.uk/frosties/games/tigercathlon/>
- <http://www.neopets.com>
- <http://www.nesquik.com>
- <http://www.nesquik.co.uk>

Two Nestlé websites promote the sugary drink Nesquik to young children. The online games use children's favourite activities such as sticker collecting and trading – complete with Nesquik branding.



– just some of the virtual 'Neopets' aiming to hook children into a long-term relationship with a website that interweaves games and marketing messages

That's McEntertainment!

Toys have long been used to promote food to children, with collectable toys routinely offered with children's fast food meals and sugared cereals. Over the years, the Food Commission has also been sent toys that promote branded food products.

However, with increasingly negative media attention focused on TV advertising, we have noticed an increase in the use of different techniques to encourage children to interact with brands, and to advertise to themselves while they play.

Once again, in the case of food-branded toys, we ask the question: how can a child distinguish between a marketing message and entertainment when they have been interwoven to become one and the same thing?

In surveys of children's food advertising conducted over recent years, both in the UK and around the world, McDonald's has often been identified as 'the most prolific advertiser to children'. In his judgement on the famous McLibel trial in 1997, Justice Bell said that, *'McDonald's advertising is in large part directed at children, with a view to them pressuring or pestering*

their parents to take them to McDonald's.'

Here we show just some of the examples of McDonald's branded toys. The food company is not the only one to use this technique, but it's brand is one of the most far-reaching and influential in children's lives.



As far as we're aware the McDonald's Barbie pictured above is only available in the US (where we've also spotted her moonlighting in a Pizza Hut restaurant playset), but there are a wide range of McDonald's toys available in the UK, such as the McFlurry Maker and the Play Food Set pictured left.

Badvertisement

Seriously un-fruity!

The pictures and descriptions on the front of these Fox's Glacier Cranberry Fusion sweets might make you think that they are jam-packed with fruit. Fox's emphasise that they are 'made with concentrated fruit juice', resulting in 'seriously juicy fruit flavours'.

So how much juice is in these sweets? The ingredients list declares 0.2% cranberry, 0.06% blackcurrant, 0.05% raspberry and a pitiful 0.04% apple – just over a third of one per cent concentrated fruit juice in total (0.35%). To give you some idea of how much that is, we've reproduced the packet at 0.35% size inside the circle underneath the full size image. The company is at pains to point out how healthy the



product is, advising that eating six sweets provides 40% of the recommended daily allowance of Vitamin C, and that 'a serving of this product will provide, on average, 5.2% of the recommended daily calorie intake for men and 6.5% for women'.

But Fox's is selective with the information they choose to provide. Funnily enough, one of the few pieces of information missing from the packet is the sugar

content – which we estimate to be around 90%. On this estimate, a single serving of six sweets would provide around 25g of sugar – nearly half of the recommended daily maximum for an adult woman. It's a shame that Fox's uses healthy descriptions to hype up what are, after all, just sweets.



McDonald's Cash Registers for McToddlers to play with, and McBackpacks filled with toy burgers and plastic chicken nuggets

photos by Hugh Warwick