



Interactive Advertising: Implications for Children's Health and Nutrition

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Television as we know it is changing. As television transitions from analog to digital, children will soon be able to view television and access the Internet from the same platform with a simple click of the mouse. Young viewers will be able to link to the Internet during a television show to access information about the program, surf a Web site or even purchase merchandise.

As television goes digital, questions arise as to how children will be marketed to in an interactive world and how these emerging advertising practices will affect young viewers, especially since the majority of ads targeted to them are for candy, cereal, soda and fast food.¹ Imagine this scenario: Little Joey is watching Scooby Doo and he is able to click on Scooby's head and is immediately transported to the show's website where he can purchase the Scooby Doo cookies and sugar cereal.

Children Now and the Children's Media Policy Coalition² are increasingly concerned about how children will be marketed to in a digital world, given their inherent vulnerability to commercial persuasion. Consider how interactive media, specifically the Internet, is already being used to entice child customers. Many companies are using a type of marketing, known as "advergaming" which encourages children to play Internet games. For example, Kraft Foods' *TooMunchFun.com* features the "Kool-Aid Mad Scientists' Mix It Up!" game where visitors must create a clean path for Kool-Aid powder to flow safely through tubes to a beaker. On *NabiscoWorld.Com*, children can be guests at the "Chips Ahoy! Cookie Guys' Housewarming Party" where visitors are led into different rooms featuring the home of chocolate chip cookie characters.

Other companies are also beginning to investigate the potential of interactive advertising on television. For example, Capri-Sun, with a target market of 7 to 11 year-olds already has an advergame featured on its Web site and is now looking to create interactive ads for television.³

¹ Dale Kunkel, "Children and Television Advertising," *Handbook of Children and the Media*, ed. Dorothy G. Singer and Jerome L. Singer (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001): 375-393.

² Children Now leads the Children's Media Policy Coalition which includes the following groups: the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Psychological Association, National PTA, American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatrists, National Institute on Media and the Family, Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ, the Benton Foundation and Action Coalition for Media Education.

³ Jolley, Richard. Get Them While They're Young -- Interactive TV Allows Companies to Involve Children In a Two-Way Communication with their Brands, *Revolution*, Mar. 13, 2002.

Digital advertisers believe the transition from the Web to television should be smooth given children's familiarity with computers. As one digital advertising executive remarked, "Children will have already been communicating with the brand through the web, which should make it easier to build a dialogue through interactive television."⁴ Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) also is experimenting with interactive television as a way to reach young viewers; during a television program targeted to 4 to 11 year-olds, KFC encourages young viewers to enter designated areas by clicking on a remote control when prompted by presenters on the show. KFC has a specially branded section that features the company's logo, offers games and provides information about the menu and restaurant locations.⁵

Finally, Children Now is increasingly concerned that interactive advertising will be used to track the viewing habits and interests of viewers without their knowledge or consent. Interactive television will allow advertisers to target individual viewers with personalized ads, which may increase the likelihood of impulse purchases.⁶ Eventually, advertisers will be able to target children according to their gender, age, household income and/or race by tracking the history of their individual television viewing habits.⁷

As we enter this brave new world of interactive advertising, it is essential that children are protected, especially when considering the role that the advertising of unhealthy food products their in their short and long-term food preferences and consumption habits. While the FCC has tentatively concluded that there should be no interactive links in children's television programming, Children Now is urging them to move forward and prohibit such links to protect the health and well-being of our nation's children.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Center for Digital Democracy, "TV That Watches You: the Prying Eyes of Interactive Television," <http://www.democraticmedia.org/privacyreport/.pdf>, generated 9/29/03.

⁷ *Ibid.*