

while others focused on building brand identity. CME discovered sites using a soft-sell approach to their products by disguising them in commercial playgrounds, while other companies went straight for the hard sell using virtual stores. CME even found that some of the children's areas in commercial online services contains unlabeled advertising.



Do You Know...?

...Computer technology makes it possible for companies to track every move your children make while they are using commercial online computer services or the World Wide Web.

...Companies target their online advertising to children as young as 4 in an attempt to develop "brand loyalty" as early as possible.

...Many companies design sites to bypass adult authority while preying upon the vulnerabilities of children, who—unlike adults—move effortlessly through the colorful, interactive world of cyberspace.

...Advertisers hire psychologists and anthropologists to probe children's minds to find out what attracts them to cyberspace, and then marketers exploit these "hidden motivators" to develop intimate, consumer-driven relationships with children.

And this is just a harbinger of even more advanced marketing mechanisms that will emerge as the interactive media environment continues to develop without proper safeguards. Currently, advertisers in cyberspace are free from regulation. Unlike television, which has basic guidelines to protect children from unfair advertising techniques, the latest electronic medium has no such safeguards.

Fortunately, there is another option. Parents, policy makers, children's advocates, and industry leaders can work together to establish guidelines for advertising to children, while work-

ing to promote the exciting educational and cultural opportunities on the digital frontier.

The Center for Media Education has called upon the Federal Trade Commission, the agency responsible for policing false or deceptive advertising claims, to conduct a comprehensive investigation of online advertising and to establish policies to protect children. Joining CME in a call for regulatory safeguards are the National PTA, Center for Science in the Public Interest, Consumer Federation of America, the Electronic Privacy Information Center, and the Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.

As a parent, take time to visit online areas aimed at children. You may be outraged by what you see. Let's work together to safeguard our children from deceptive and exploitative online advertisers.

Take Action!

- Teach your children that they should not give out any personal information in cyberspace, just as they should not talk to strangers in their neighborhood.
- Talk with other parents you know and make them aware of the dangers of online advertising.
- Educate your local PTA, school board, and other children's advocacy groups about the issue.
- Write a letter or organize a letter-writing campaign to the Federal Trade Commission; contact CME for a sample letter.
- Spend more time with your children while they are online.
- Make sure your children's school has policies that restrict the use of commercially-oriented areas.
- Complain to companies that use deceptive practices to target your children online. Your voice is important.



About the Center for Media Education

The Center for Media Education is a non-profit, public interest organization founded in 1991 to improve the quality of electronic media for children, families, non-profit organizations, and the general public. This Fact Sheet is part of CME's Action for Children in Cyberspace project, a research, organizing, and public education initiative dedicated to ensuring that the information superhighway is a positive force in children's lives. You can support this program by sending a tax-deductible contribution to the Center for Media Education. To learn more about our work or to order a copy of the report, "Web of Deception: Threats to Children from Online Marketing," contact us or visit our Web site: Center for Media Education, 1511 K Street, NW, Suite 518, Washington, DC 20005; Tel: 202-628-2620; Fax: 202-628-2554; E-mail: cme@cme.org; Web site: www.cme.org/cme