



# Consumer Kids

***Consumer Kids, IIR Conferences, 2-3 September 1993, Sydney.***

**The average Australian child watches 22,000 television commercials a year.**

It's not surprising then that Australian children are now seen as a multi-billion dollar market, and that recently in Sydney the subject of children as consumers occupied a whole conference to itself.

The conference coincided with the release of the Stephen Spielberg movie *Jurassic Park*, and the massive marketing promotion for related merchandise which accompanied the release provided a topical illustration of the conference's theme.

David Green, national media director of Mojo, was careful to remind participants from the conference chair to consider the moral and social aspects of marketing to kids. But his statement that 'minority audiences are making their growing discontent with advertising felt: alcohol, cigarettes - fast food is now in the gun [and] regulators are listening' left some wondering what he considered a 'minority' audience.

Green said that by the year 2000, there would be four million people under 15 in Australia. He estimated that children have a 'networked' influence on consumer decisions up to a value of \$15 billion across 62 categories of product - and not just kids' products but major items like computers and stereos.

Green cited research showing that children are heavy television users: a strong children's program will rate 30, with an average rating being around 27. The attention span of children under 12 is 137 seconds, compared with 260 for adults. Children hate the frequency of ads on television and repetition exhausts their patience.

Children 6-12 spend up to 17 hours a week listening to radio, but advertising on radio is 'a problem' with children, Green said, because its one dimensionality is out of synch with

their perceptions of the world. (See accompanying story on radio for children).

Dina Browne, director of children's television for the Seven Network, said that consumption for kids is 'as legitimate an activity as it is unavoidable. Consumer socialisation is as inevitable as it is necessary, but it is important not to allow this inevitability to be taken as an excuse for advertising excesses'. Browne said that the industry needed to remind itself constantly that children are a special audience with special needs and abilities, and 'The message is plain - in order for advertisers to maximise the opportunities offered by television advertising, they must practice, and be seen to practice, restraint'.

## Roundup of Research

Browne said that children's competence to process information differs substantially from that of adults. In an overview of recent research she noted such findings as:

- children under seven are unable to attribute persuasive intent to advertising;
- they have trouble distinguishing commercials from program matter;
- the amount of television viewed has no significant effect on the child's ability to understand commercials; and
- both desires and requests for products increase as children get older.

Browne said that exposure to television advertising, as well as influencing children's product preferences and purchases, also affected their social learning of modelled behaviours.

She provided a summary of the regulatory response in various countries, including the EC, Germany and Canada, where in Quebec advertising to children under 12 is expressly banned. The Canadian Broadcast Code for Advertising to children emphasises

that the child lives in a world which is part imaginary and part real, and advertising should not abuse the power of the child's imagination.

She concluded by noting community disquiet about program-length commercials (like Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles) and sounded a note of warning about interactive TV. 'With a populace already crippled by credit misuse and a generation of children suspected of being at risk morally and physically, the impact of this new form of TV coercion is mind boggling' Browne said.

She hastened to add that she was not biting the hand that feeds her, and that children's TV needs advertising dollars because without them there will be 'less and less quality children's TV'.

## Sophisticated Techniques

A paper on practical solutions to researching kids using 'sensory evaluation' by Karen Vanderblom, accounts manager for Colmar Brunton Research, showed just how sophisticated research with children has become.

The paper's starting point was that children are having more influence on parents' purchasing behaviour, for a number of reasons - including fewer children per parent; fewer parents per child (ie more single parent families); postponement of having children; and dual working families.

It went on to cover techniques for understanding children, and the use of sensory evaluation for flavour screening, 'prioritising' product development, new concept/product evaluation. An effective way of testing children's reaction to products is 'smiley face' scales (see illustration).

Children can provide useful information about products if the right

*Continued on page 5 ...*



... Continued from page 5

methods are employed, the paper concludes, but it must be recognised that they should be handled with quite different procedures from those routinely employed with adults.

## Marketing: the Hard Sell

Clive Addison, group marketing manager for Sega-Ozisoft, gave some insights into the marketing strategies of a company which claims to have 65 per cent of market share in computer games, ahead of Nintendo.

The immense popularity of these games is shown in the statistics Addison produced: 70 per cent of 10-14 year olds and 57 per cent of 5-9 year olds play at least weekly. And older

people are not left out - a quarter of 20-29 year olds also play them weekly. An average 26 per cent of the population play weekly, 11 per cent daily.

Sega's target market is 13-17 year olds. Formerly they targeted boys but they have now found that 19 per cent of users are girls and that there is high awareness among females 10-30. Addison showed a TV commercial which showed an eight year old girl playing in a field of daisies with a voice over saying 'now here's a really nice thing to do' as the screen fills with typical game sequences of kick boxers zapping attackers, mutants and the rest. Commercials like these are designed to be a tongue-in-cheek response to the critics of computer games.

Sega's emphasis is heavily on direct marketing, with a database of nearly 200,000 players which every six months receive information on new products, and tips such as how to cheat

and get to the higher levels.

Every game now released has a secret code allowing players to 'cheat'. This is a clever marketing ploy which plays on the desirability of being 'in the know' and make children hungry for information.

Sega frequently markets in conjunction with other child-oriented brands: McDonalds, Cottees, McCains Pizza.

Asked about regulation, Addison said that there is a 'strict industry code' among the two major manufacturers, and they are working with the OFLC to develop industry standards for everyone. All material is vetted and violence is rejected, he said. (The controversial *Night Stalker*, which the company did not release after criticism of its portrayal of violence against women, has now been classified by the OFLC as suitable for 12-17 year olds.) □



Graphics: Colmar Brunton Research

## Children's Radio Revival?

**One Australian in five is a child under 12, but no mainstream radio serves this 19.4 per cent of the population. The ABC axed the international award winning 'Ticklepot' in 1990. Only Radio for the Print Handicapped and 5MMM, public radio in Adelaide, now provide regular programs for children.**

As part of its work in the broad areas of information poverty, the CLC is researching the reasons why radio, the cheapest and most accessible medium of information and entertainment, largely neglects children. When children are developing linguistic, listening and imaginative skills, radio is a far more suitable medium than TV, which encourages passivity.

The search so far has turned up quite different approaches overseas. BBC Radio 5 in the UK is exclusively devoted to sport and children's programs. BBC Radio Scotland produces children's magazine and educational programs. The BBC World Service produces young people's programs for overseas broadcast in Bengali, Hindi, Vietnamese, English, Bulgarian, Burmese and Arabic. Finland, Sweden and Norway all have a strong tradition of public broadcasting for children, as have many former eastern bloc countries.

A great deal of money is presently being spent in the US on establishing children's radio networks in the belief that while many adults will resist advertising encouraging spending on

themselves, they are more open to further spending on their children. As advertisers focus on this factor and the increasing spending power of children themselves, the commercial potential of children's radio becomes more obvious. That will raise significant ethical issues, which the research project will attempt to forecast.

Readers are encouraged to contact Bruce Shearer on (03) 642 0282 at the Melbourne office of the CLC with information or ideas about children's radio.

Bruce Shearer