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## **The Breaking News English.com Resource Book**

“1,000 Ideas & Activities For Language Teachers”

<http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/book.html>

## **Food companies targeting kids online**

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**24 July, 2006**

## THE ARTICLE

### **Food companies targeting kids online**

Ever-greedy corporate marketers have found a new means of ensnaring children into the net of consumerism. Not content with bombarding kids on TV, in the streets and at schools, marketing executives are utilizing Internet games to tout their wares to unsuspecting children. The latest insidious and pernicious ploy of more than eighty percent of the world's chocolate and snack food companies has been brought to light in a new report, entitled "[It's Child's Play: Advergaming and the Online Marketing of Food to Children](#)". It is "the first comprehensive analysis of the nature and scope of online food advertising to children". The research was commissioned by America's Kaiser Family Foundation and exposes the questionable tactics of companies such as Mars, Hersheys and McDonalds in targeting children to promote their products. The latter company, in particular, focuses its ads more on enticing kids with cheap, giveaway toys than food.

The report sadly increases the likelihood of a new word entering the English vocabulary – the "advergame" – an immoral and callous technique to get kids hooked while having online fun. In addition, a variety of other advertising and marketing tactics designed to lure kids into spending an unlimited amount of online time being blitzed with corporate logos are employed on these sites. These include viral marketing (encouraging children to contact their peers about a specific product or brand, found on 64% of sites); sweepstakes and promotions (65%); memberships (25%); on-demand access to TV ads (53%); and incentives for product purchase (38%). Kaiser's William Dietz said the scale of this advertising was an "eye opener". It raises ethical concerns about the role food advertising plays in childhood obesity. Kaiser vice president Vicky Rideout warned the reach of online advertising is much deeper than that of television.

## WARM-UPS

**1. GAMES:** Walk around the class and talk to other students about computer games and the dangers to kids. Ask what kind of games food companies might put online for children. Share your findings with new partners.

**2. CHAT:** In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words from the article are most interesting and which are most boring.

*Greed / consumerism / marketing / ploys / chocolate companies / tactics / nutrition / vocabulary / immorality / logos / peers / promotions / eye openers / obesity*

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

**3. MARKETING:** Ask your partner(s) about which of these products it is OK for companies to target children using ads. Write down from what age it is OK to target children. Share your thoughts with new partners.

\_\_\_\_\_ Hamburgers

\_\_\_\_\_ Cola

\_\_\_\_\_ Sportswear

\_\_\_\_\_ Condoms

\_\_\_\_\_ Music CDs

\_\_\_\_\_ Computer games

\_\_\_\_\_ Cosmetics

\_\_\_\_\_ Mobile phones

**4. QUICK DEBATE:** Students A believe there is nothing wrong with food companies targeting children. Students B food companies that target children are the lowest of the low. Debate this with your partners. Change partners often.

**5. ADVERTISING:** With your partner(s), talk about the advertising of the following (or similar) companies. Rate whether or not the advertising techniques used by the companies are bad for kids (10 = shockingly bad / 1 = not at all bad).

\_\_\_\_\_ McDonalds

\_\_\_\_\_ Coca Cola / Pepsi Cola

\_\_\_\_\_ Snickers

\_\_\_\_\_ Wrigley's Gum

\_\_\_\_\_ Baskin Robbins (ice cream)

\_\_\_\_\_ Pizza Hut

\_\_\_\_\_ Dunkin' Donuts

\_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

**6. CONSUMERISM:** Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with consumerism. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

## BEFORE READING / LISTENING

**1. TRUE / FALSE:** Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- a. Marketeers have found a way of protecting kids from consumerism. T / F
- b. Some kids are bombarded with advertising at school. T / F
- c. Over 80% of food companies use the Internet to target kids. T / F
- d. McDonalds ads for kids focus heavily on its burgers and healthy food. T / F
- e. "Advergame" may become a new English word. T / F
- f. "Viral marketing" is all about making children aware of bugs. T / F
- g. A report spokesperson said the findings were not so interesting. T / F
- h. Advertising to kids on TV reaches deeper than advertising online. T / F

**2. SYNONYM MATCH:** Match the following synonyms from the article:

- |               |                |
|---------------|----------------|
| a. greedy     | impact         |
| b. bombarding | peddle         |
| c. tout       | induce         |
| d. insidious  | uncaring       |
| e. enticing   | money-grabbing |
| f. callous    | contemporaries |
| g. lure       | sly            |
| h. peers      | encouragement  |
| i. incentives | inundating     |
| j. reach      | tempting       |

**3. PHRASE MATCH:** Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- |                                       |                                      |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| a. ensnaring children                 | pernicious ploy                      |
| b. tout                               | much deeper than that of television  |
| c. The latest insidious and           | and scope of online food advertising |
| d. analysis of the nature             | ethical concerns                     |
| e. exposes the questionable           | into the net of consumerism          |
| f. increases                          | tactics of companies                 |
| g. being blitzed                      | to contact their peers               |
| h. encouraging children               | their wares                          |
| i. It raises                          | the likelihood of                    |
| j. the reach of online advertising is | with corporate logos                 |

## WHILE READING / LISTENING

**GAP FILL:** Put the words in the column on the right into the gaps in the text.

### Food companies targeting kids online

\_\_\_\_\_ -greedy corporate marketeers have found a new means of ensnaring children into the net of consumerism. Not \_\_\_\_\_ with bombarding kids on TV, in the streets and at schools, marketing executives are utilizing Internet games to \_\_\_\_\_ their wares to unsuspecting children. The latest insidious and pernicious \_\_\_\_\_ of more than eighty percent of the world's chocolate and snack food companies has been brought to \_\_\_\_\_ in a new report, entitled "It's Child's Play: Advergaming and the Online Marketing of Food to Children". It is "the first comprehensive analysis of the nature and \_\_\_\_\_ of online food advertising to children". The research was commissioned by America's Kaiser Family Foundation and exposes the questionable \_\_\_\_\_ of companies such as Mars, Hersheys and McDonalds in targeting children to promote their products. The latter company, in particular, focuses its ads more on enticing kids with cheap \_\_\_\_\_ toys than food.

*light*  
*content*  
*giveaway*  
*ploy*  
*ever*  
*tactics*  
*tout*  
*scope*

The report \_\_\_\_\_ increases the likelihood of a new word entering the English vocabulary – the "advergame" – an immoral and callous technique to get kids \_\_\_\_\_ while having online fun. In addition, a variety of other advertising and marketing tactics designed to lure kids into spending an \_\_\_\_\_ amount of online time being \_\_\_\_\_ with corporate logos are employed on these sites. These include viral marketing (encouraging children to contact their \_\_\_\_\_ about a specific product or brand, found on 64% of sites); sweepstakes and promotions (65%); memberships (25%); on-demand \_\_\_\_\_ to TV ads (53%); and incentives for product purchase (38%). Kaiser's William Dietz said the scale of this advertising was an "eye opener". It \_\_\_\_\_ ethical concerns about the role food advertising plays in childhood obesity. Kaiser vice president Vicky Rideout warned the \_\_\_\_\_ of online advertising is much deeper than that of television.

*reach*  
*unlimited*  
*access*  
*hooked*  
*peers*  
*raises*  
*sadly*  
*blitzed*

## LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

### Food companies targeting kids online

Ever-greedy \_\_\_\_\_ marketeers have found a new means of ensnaring children into the net of consumerism. Not content with \_\_\_\_\_ kids on TV, in the streets and at schools, marketing executives are utilizing Internet games to \_\_\_\_\_ their wares to unsuspecting children. The latest insidious and pernicious ploy of more than eighty percent of the world's chocolate and snack food companies has been brought to \_\_\_\_\_ in a new report, entitled "It's Child's Play: Advergaming and the Online Marketing of Food to Children". It is "the first comprehensive analysis of the nature and \_\_\_\_\_ of online food advertising to children". The research was commissioned by America's Kaiser Family Foundation and exposes the \_\_\_\_\_ tactics of companies such as Mars, Hersheys and McDonalds in targeting children to promote their products. The latter company, in particular, focuses its ads more on enticing kids with cheap \_\_\_\_\_ toys than food.

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## AFTER READING / LISTENING

**1. WORD SEARCH:** Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'lure' and 'hook'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS:** Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**3. GAP FILL:** In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

**4. VOCABULARY:** Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

**5. STUDENT "ADVERGAME" SURVEY:** In pairs / groups, write down questions about the ethics of food companies using Internet games to tout their wares to children.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

**6. TEST EACH OTHER:** Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- |           |          |
|-----------|----------|
| • means   | • sadly  |
| • wares   | • lure   |
| • ploy    | • viral  |
| • scope   | • access |
| • tactics | • scale  |
| • latter  | • reach  |

## DISCUSSION

### STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. Have you heard of advergames before?
- c. Do you think it is just a sign of the times that food companies are targeting kids and nothing to worry about?
- d. Do you think the executives designing games to lure children to their products have bad morals?
- e. What kind of laws do you think should be placed on advergames?
- f. Do you think kids are sensible enough to know food companies are trying to manipulate them?
- g. What do you think of food companies placing advertisements in schools?
- h. Are you concerned that McDonald's ads that target kids focus on cheap, giveaway toys and not food?
- i. Would you allow your child to play online games that encourage children to buy hamburgers and soft drinks?
- j. What do you think of the word 'advergame'?

### STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read – was it an eye opener?
- c. What do you think of the technique of viral marketing whereby kids mail their friends to recommend a new product?
- d. Is it OK for junk food companies to tell kids they can get extra powers in games by buying products that contain special codes?
- e. Is television advertising or online advertising more dangerous?
- f. Do you like Ronald McDonald?
- g. Do you think the advergames could be good for kids?
- h. Games tell kids they can view TV ads online "over and over right now" instead of having to wait for them to be on TV. Is this OK?
- i. Would you like your child to have a McDonalds screensaver?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

**AFTER DISCUSSION:** Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?



## SPEAKING

**ADVER-CHILDHOOD:** Imagine you are a marketing executive for a junk food company. With your marketing partner(s), write down some strategies for the areas below to entice children into getting hooked on your products:

	Strategies
School	
Internet	
Place of worship	
Hospital	
Library	
Playground	

1. Change partners and share your ideas.
2. Discuss whether each of your ideas are ethical or not.
3. Are there any companies doing these things now?
4. Do you think the ideas you thought of above will be commonplace in the future?

## **HOMEWORK**

**1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION:** Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

**2. INTERNET:** Search the Internet and find information about advergaming. Talk about what you discover with your partner(s) in the next lesson.

**3. SURVEY:** Conduct a survey of your family and friends. Find out their opinions on advergaming. Share what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson.

**4. LETTER:** Write a letter to the advertising executives designing new tactics to get children to be consumers. Ask them three questions. Which letter did you like best and why? Your partner(s) will answer your questions in the next lesson.

## ANSWERS

### TRUE / FALSE:

- a. F      b. T      c. T      d. F      e. T      f. F      g. F      h. F

### SYNONYM MATCH:

- |               |                |
|---------------|----------------|
| a. greedy     | money-grabbing |
| b. bombarding | inundating     |
| c. tout       | peddle         |
| d. insidious  | sly            |
| e. enticing   | tempting       |
| f. callous    | uncaring       |
| g. lure       | induce         |
| h. peers      | contemporaries |
| i. incentives | encouragement  |
| j. reach      | impact         |

### PHRASE MATCH:

- |                                       |                                      |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| a. ensnaring children                 | into the net of consumerism          |
| b. tout                               | their wares                          |
| c. The latest insidious and           | pernicious ploy                      |
| d. analysis of the nature             | and scope of online food advertising |
| e. exposes the questionable           | tactics of companies                 |
| f. increases                          | the likelihood of                    |
| g. being blitzed                      | with corporate logos                 |
| h. encouraging children               | to contact their peers               |
| i. It raises                          | ethical concerns                     |
| j. the reach of online advertising is | much deeper than that of television  |

### GAP FILL:

#### Food companies targeting kids online

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