

PART A: TELEVISION ADVERTISING (MEDIA MONITORING)

The Council Looks at the Codes

Prompted by the concerned calls from parents, professionals and other Canadian consumers, the Canadian Toy Testing Council decided to look at how well advertisers are following advertising and broadcasting codes when advertising toys to children. While the majority of the CTTC study focused on television advertising, the study also touched upon print advertising and Internet advertising, which is deserving of greater research.

In Canada, advertising codes provide guidelines for acceptable commercial messages in print and on radio, television and cable TV networks. The Canadian Advertising Foundation (CAF) is the national industry organization which represents advertisers, advertising agencies, the media and industry suppliers. It has developed and administers advertising standards or codes which its members agree to follow. The advertising industry is self-regulating, but broadcasters are responsible for the advertisements they air. To protect them, the CAF's special clearance committees screen commercials directed at children. Adherence to the Broadcast Code for Advertising to Children is a condition of licence required by the CRTC (Media Awareness Network; www.media-awareness.ca; 2001).

Codes affecting advertising to children include the Canadian Code of Advertising Standards, Gender Portrayal Guidelines and the Broadcast Code for Advertising to Children.

Canadian Code of Advertising Standards (1990)

The Canadian Code of Advertising Standards (Code) was developed to promote the professional practice of advertising and was first published in 1963. Since that time it has been reviewed and revised periodically to keep it contemporary. The Code is administered by Advertising Standards Canada/Les normes canadiennes de la publicité (ASC) (formerly the Canadian Advertising Foundation/la Fondation canadienne de la publicité). ASC is the industry body committed to creating and maintaining community confidence in advertising.

The code contains 20 guidelines. Key commitments include:

- Accuracy and clear information on price, availability or performance of a product or service.
- No deceptive price claims or discounts, unrealistic price comparisons or exaggerated claims of worth or value, e.g. when discounting prices, "regular price" must mean that the item was actually sold at that price within the preceding six months in the market place where the advertisement appears.
- Full explanations of guarantees and warranties.
- No depictions of product use in situations which could encourage unsafe or dangerous practices.
- Advertising directed to children will not exploit their credulity or innocence and will not present information which could result in their physical, emotional or moral harm.
- Products forbidden to minors will not be advertised in such a way as to appeal particularly to persons under legal age.
- Advertising will be tasteful, i.e. it will not present demeaning portrayals of individuals or groups and must not exploit violence, sexuality, children, or the customs, convictions or characteristics of religious or ethno-cultural groups.

Gender Portrayal Guidelines (1993)

The code contains 12 guidelines. Key commitments include:

- Equal portrayal of men and women as single decision-makers for purchases and equal participants in joint decision-making, in the workplace or at home.
- Avoiding the inappropriate use or exploitation of sexuality of both women and men.

Examples provided by the guidelines are:

- people must not be portrayed as primarily sexual or defined by their sexuality.
- boys and girls under 16 must not be portrayed as displaying adult sexual characteristics.
- using or displaying a woman's sexuality in order to sell a product that has no relation to sexuality is by definition sexually exploitative.
- sexual harassment must not be portrayed as normal behaviour and women.
- should not be represented as objects of uncontrolled desire.
- no violence or domination of one sex over the other, either with overt or implied threats, or actual force.

- the portrayal of women and men in fully diverse roles and as equally competent in a wide range of activities, both inside and outside the home.
- avoiding language that misrepresents, offends or excludes women or men.

The Broadcast Code for Advertising to Children (1993)

"Children's advertising" refers to paid commercial messages directed to persons under 12 years of age. The code contains 30 guidelines. Key commitments include:

- No subliminal messages, i.e. messages below the threshold of normal awareness.
- No exaggeration of product characteristics such as performance, speed, size, etc.
- Results from a drawing, construction, craft or modelling toy or kit should be attainable by an average child.
- No advertising or child-oriented promotion of products not intended for use by children, e.g. drugs, medicines in pharmaceutical form, etc.
- No advertising which directly urges children to buy or ask their parents to buy a product or service.
- A ban on the use of puppets, persons and characters (including cartoon characters) well-known to children, to endorse or promote products, premiums or services.
- Prices must be clear and complete. If accessories seeming to be part of the purchase are available only at extra cost, this must be clearly said and shown. If toys shown together are sold separately, this must be made clear.
- No advertising, except specific safety messages, can portray adults or children in clearly unsafe acts or situations (e.g. using flames or fire, or tossing food into the air and attempting to catch it in the mouth, etc.).
- Advertising cannot imply that owning or using a product makes the owner superior or that without it the child will be open to ridicule or contempt, except in references to educational or health benefits.

Advertising to children in Quebec is prohibited by the *Quebec Consumer Protection Act*.

Rules for Advertising to Kids

Canada's Media Awareness Network (www.media-awareness.ca) has broken down these guidelines into 10 easy-to-understand rules.

In Canada, there are rules that advertisers must follow when advertising to children. Here they are:

1. Advertisers must not use words like "new," "introducing" and "introduces" to describe a product for more than one year!

- New products always seem more exciting, so advertisers are only allowed to promote a product as "new" for a year.

2. Advertisers are not allowed to exaggerate!

- Some advertisers want to make you believe that their product is bigger or faster or better than it really is.

3. Advertisers may not promote craft and building toys that the average kid can't put together!

- When you get a kit that is supposed to be for kids, you should be able to make it yourself.
- Also, your finished project should look like the picture of the finished product that appears on the box.

4. Advertisers are not allowed to sell products that aren't meant for kids!

- For example, a commercial that sells vitamins or drugs should be aimed at adults, not kids. Check out some ads for adult products - do they use cartoon characters, jingles or images that would attract kids?

5. Advertisers are not allowed to recommend that you *have* to buy their product, or that you *should make* your parents buy it for you!

- In commercials, advertisers can't say things like: "Hey kids, tell mom and dad to run down to the store and get you one now! " or "You must have our product, or you won't be cool! " But they are still going to try to make you want to do these things, so watch commercials closely to see how they make you feel this way without telling you directly.

6. Advertisers may not use well-known kids' entertainers (including cartoon characters) to promote or endorse a product!

- Although advertisers can create their own characters for kids, like "Tony The Tiger" or the "Nestle Quick Bunny, " they can't use performers or characters from kids' shows in their TV commercials. This rule does not apply to packaging, so you might find cartoon characters or famous people on the front of your favourite cereal box.

7. Advertisers can't make you believe that you're getting everything that's shown in the commercial!

In their ads, advertisers have to tell you exactly what you are getting when you buy the toy, and what it will cost. Advertisers are supposed to clearly state:

- The complete price of *every part* of the toy they are showing, whenever the price is mentioned in an ad.
- Any parts of the toy shown in the commercial that *cost extra*.
- Any other toys in the commercial that are *sold separately*.

Next time you watch a toy commercial, see how the advertiser obeys the rule, while still giving a false impression. Look for really small writing on the screen at the end of the ad saying "Batteries not included, " or an announcer's voice talking very fast.

8. Advertisers are not allowed to show kids or adults doing unsafe things with the product!

- Unless it's part of a safety message about what *not* to do, advertisements can't show kids or adults doing dangerous things that children might try to copy.

9. Advertisers can't suggest that using their product will make you better than other kids!

- They also can't make kids think that people will make fun of them if they *don't* use the product.

10. Advertisers cannot show more than one commercial for the same product in a half-hour period!

- In other words, No Brainwashing Allowed!

BE AN AD DETECTIVE! SEE HOW WELL ADVERTISERS FOLLOW THE RULES FOR ADVERTISING TO KIDS!

Source: The Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) Broadcast Code For Advertising

Scanning the Commercials

The Canadian Toy Testing Council decided to become ad detectives and see just how well advertisers are following the rules. In order to evaluate adherence to codes, and to evaluate the effects of advertising on children, the Council engaged 19 of its volunteer testing families to watch television over a four-month period (November 2000-February 2001), and undertook three focus groups, specifically to watch toy or toy-related

advertising. While today's children are generally more media savvy than ever before, the CTTC found that many of the ads viewed often accentuated fantasy and excitement--treading a thin line with regard to the rules--in order to instill desire for a toy.

Not surprisingly, the bulk of this study encompasses television viewing. According to Statistics Canada, Canadian kids watch, on average, 16.8 hours of television a week (*Variety* magazine, January 3, 1999). In 1999, A.C. Nielsen Media Research and the *Toronto Star* reported that CBC's Saturday morning ratings had increased nearly 40 percent since 1997. In addition, 90 percent of children's show producers competing for air time presented the merchandising plan first, according to Adrian Mills, head of CBC children's programming. In 1998, 51 toy lines connected to TV shows were launched worldwide, contributing to the \$22 billion toy licensing business (A.C. Nielsen Media Research and the *Toronto Star*; March 17, 1999).

Canadians of all ages watched television for an average of 22.7 hours per week in 1997. Of those hours, 1.3 hours was spent viewing videotapes on VCRs (*The Culture Statistics Program Television Project*, by the CRTC, Canadian Heritage and Statistics Canada, 1998, and CBC Research [Nielsen Media Research], February 1999.) In addition, of all media surveyed by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of core educational programs on ten commercial broadcast stations in the Philadelphia area during the 1999/2000 season, children spent the most time with the television, over two hours per day (147 minutes) (*Is the Three-Hour Rule Living Up to Its Potential?* Annenberg Public Policy Center, June 26, 2000).

Parents Keep Watch

The Canadian Toy Testing Council's families have been specially trained to evaluate toys and to observe children's play with toys. Each household must fill out a detailed form to record their observations. Similarly, in this study, each family was provided with forms to record their observations as TV commercials promoting toys were viewed, and compared the commercial to specific code points to see if rules were met. Commercials were viewed both pre- and post-Christmas buying season (November 2000-February 2001).

Parents also noted comments or observations made by their children. For the purposes of the study, some parents videotape-recorded the toy commercials and then

viewed and evaluated them after their children were in bed at night. One participant wrote, "Many hours of commercials were watched without the kids watching. There is no way I would let them watch that much TV, and most of what they do watch is 'commercial-free' TVO and PBS."

The families viewed commercials on a random basis so the toy advertisements viewed varied from traditional board games to the newest computer games to dolls to fast food bonus toys. Some commercials were seen by many viewers; some were seen by a single viewer. The opinions voiced made by a viewer were sometimes personal; that is to say, if the parent felt the commercial depicted aggressive or inappropriate behaviour.

For the purposes of this study, commercials depicting McDonald's and Kinder Surprise toys were included, as the toys incited the children to want the product.

While the majority of the commercials seen were aired on Canadian networks (YTV, Global, CTV, Teletoon), ads appearing on the American channel Fox were also included. With the abundance of U.S. channels available to Canadian viewers via cable and satellite dishes, Canadian consumers (including children) are exposed to U.S. commercials.

The Commercials and the Code

Over 70 commercials were viewed, forming the basis of this part of the study. Families noted the following (see chart for exact break-down):

- **SAYS "NEW"**
- **URGES KIDS TO BUY**
- **EXCESSIVE FANTASY**
- **SHOWN MORE THAN TWICE IN 1/2 HOUR**
- **POSTS WEB ADDRESS**
- **EXAGGERATION OF TOY CAPABILITIES**
- **ENDORSEMENT OF PRODUCT BY PUPPETS, KIDS' ENTERTAINERS (INCLUDING CARTOON CHARACTERS)**
- **SHOWS SEVERAL TOYS IN SAME COMMERCIAL**
- **OTHER (OBSERVATIONS BY VIEWER)**
- **ENCOURAGES GENDER STEREOTYPING**
- **SHOWS FLAME OR FIRE (UNSAFE ACTIONS)**

- **VIEWED ON STATION**
- **MANUFACTURER**
- **TOY BASED ON TV SHOW, CARTOON OR OTHER MEDIA***

** While not a part of the viewing or code criteria, this has been noted due to the proliferation of cross-media licencing.*

In the chart, the first column features the name of the commercial followed by the number of viewers. The subsequent columns note incidents of straying from the code or other observations the parents thought important.

Commercial Descriptions

The following describes the commercials viewed and included in the CTTC study chart.

- **Action Man and Blizzard Dog:** Action figures. Toys make electronic noises; dog has a pack on his back to shoot an arrow (or similar weapon); Action Man rides on dog.
- **Action Man Super Speeder:** Action figures and accessories. Cars and missiles shooting; changes from real men to action men; numerous visual sentences flick off screen before you can read them.
- **Ask Me More Eeyore:** Interactive toy. Shows stuffed Eeyore asking questions and giving answers to questions he has been asked.
- **Barbie Airplane:** Doll plane and accessories. Commercial notes assembly required and batteries not included.
- **Barbie Beach Bungalow:** Doll house. Shows the house with lots of different Barbie dolls being seated, etc.
- **Barbie Bedtime Baby and Sister Chrissy:** Dolls and accessories. Barbie helps her sister sleep by rocking her; crib lights up; looks like Barbie can rock the baby in her arms by herself.
- **Barbie Magic Genie Bottle CD-ROM:** Computer game. Two girls play on a computer, opening a genie bottle by rubbing it; look for hidden jewels, play puzzle games.
- **Barbie Pet Rescue CD-ROM:** Computer game. Shows two girls finding real kittens, and then playing on the computer.
- **Barbie Picture Pockets:** Toy and craft. Girls show off their picture pockets as the narrator explains how to make the picture pockets.

- **Barbie Princess Bride:** Doll and accessories. Barbie changes from princess to bride; comes with magic mirror; help Barbie plan the perfect wedding; Ken sold separately.
- **Blue's Clues All Ears Blue:** Interactive toy. Plush Blue's Clues character; moves her ears, sings a song; "Lots to do to Blue"; movie or DVD sold separately.
- **Bob-It Extreme.** Game. Guys in commercial look like they are dancing; toy tells one what to do and player has to do it quickly before next instruction is given.
- **Connect 4:** Board game. Kids enjoy playing Connect 4.
- **Cootie Jitterbug:** Game. A walking bug throws out balls; the children have to pick them up and put them back into the bug.
- **Dancing Debbie:** Doll. Shows girl dancing with doll.
- **Digimon Action Figures:** Child is shown playing Digimon; over 300 monsters near and far; children invited to join up and let the battle begin.
- **Easy Bake Kitchen CD-ROM:** Computer game and toy. Children play on the computer with the CD-ROM and game control that covers the keyboard; they are "baking" on the computer.
- **Etch-A-Sketch:** Drawing toy. Commercial shows how you turn the dial, how lines appear on the screen and how "magical" it can be to erase them by shaking.
- **Fib Finder:** Game. Children believe toy could tell if opponent is lying.
- **Frogger:** Computer game. Commercial shows Frogger CD-ROM screen, then shows a real frog being hit by a car and taken to the hospital where teens are waiting to heal him.
- **Game Boy Donkey Kong Country:** Video game. Presented as if you are in the game; enlarged version of Donkey Kong Country shown, then shows Game Boy and screen, and talks about the game.
- **Game Boy Pokemon Gold & Silver:** Video game. Shows new characters available in gold and silver editions of Game Boy.
- **Guess Who:** Board game. Commercial promotes board game.
- **Gundam Wing Action Figures:** Building models/action figures. Extreme articulation of Gundam action figures stressed; no glue needed; "Earth is in trouble--we need Gundam".
- **Hopscotch Heather:** Doll and accessories. This doll hops to help; comes with hopscotch pad (she has everything she needs).

- **Hot Wheels Criss Cross Crash:** Toy cars. Shows two boys having a great time with the Criss Cross Crash play set.
- **Hot Wheels Formula Super Track:** Toy cars. Racetrack with side-by-side lanes for cars; exaggerated speed (turbo charged) and crashes (cars flying into air); kids excited.
- **Hot Wheels Tornado:** Toy cars. Cartoon image of tornado shown as cars go up tunnel; cars race at excessive speed and fly around off track; flame and fire animated on Hot Wheels logo.
- **Hot Wheels X-Treme Moto:** Toy cars. Boy transforms into bike rider (toy); bikes down on track and then takes a jump; "Powerslide Action."
- **Jammin Draw:** Art activity. A drawing board has markers for kids to draw pictures; as children draw, music plays; music can be changed; "Make your pix sing."
- **Jenga Cubes:** Game. Two people close a door left, then right, covering half of the Jenga name; then the Jenga game is shown and commercial says it is the latest in the Jenga family of games.
- **Key Cars:** Toy cars. Put keys in the car; makes them go.
- **Kinder Garden Babies:** Dolls. Shows several young girls carrying dolls on their front; doll attaches; stuffed dolls are scented.
- **Kinder Surprise:** Chocolate with toy. Animation shows types of toys child finds in Kinder Surprise.
- **Leap Pad:** Electronic toy. Book is brought to life and teaches kids to read; shows kids learning while using book; kids show what they learned on vacation; girls learn to read.
- **Lego Star Wars:** Building models. A kid interacts with a Sith warrior and builds Lego Star Wars vehicles.
- **Lego:** Building models. Collect all eight racing models; each set sold separately.
- **Little Sniffles:** Doll and accessories. Doll feels sick; with help from her "Mom", she feels better.
- **Magic Sing Along Suzie:** Doll. Shows doll and how child can sing to her with a microphone; point it at the doll and she sings; point it at child for child to sing.
- **Max Steel Arctic Commando:** Action figures. Three toys advertised; stresses lots of play value.

- **Max Steel:** Action figure. Transforms/converts into pulley; head breaks apart (still attached); new head in middle.
- **McDonald's 102 Dalmations:** Fast food toys. Shows dog jumping into cup on its own; Ronald McDonald and child rollerblade to McDonald's; he shows her the dog near cup and has it jump in.
- **McDonald's Buzz Lightyear:** Fast food toy. Shows how Buzz Lightyear is now at McDonald's.
- **Me and My Shadow:** Electronic pet. Shows a girl and boy playing with toy dog; shows how child can make toy dog do tricks.
- **Monopoly and Scrabble:** Board games. Games like Monopoly and Scrabble are played on family game night.
- **Mousetrap:** Board game. Kids playing game; shows quick building to its final completion and catching the mouse (animated mouse).
- **My Dream Baby:** Doll. This commercial shows a doll that "grows", learns her ABCs, learns how to talk, crawl, etc.; Doll grows somewhat awkwardly.
- **My Real Baby:** Doll. Doll coos and burps; voice-over talks about being a real "Mom"; says quickly, "Doll's face movements make mechanical sounds."
- **Nerf Power Clip Bazooka:** Action toy. A child shoots a wrestler in a wrestling ring.
- **Oopsy Daisy:** Doll. Doll crawls and falls; starts to crawl again.
- **Pac-man for PC:** Computer game. Commercial shows Pac-man on screen (shows what the computer game does) but he also jumps out of the computer and runs around.
- **Pikachu (Hey You Pikachu):** Computer game. Talking dog complains how he's not loved because child is always playing game; full screen size of Pikachu shown as if real.
- **PlayStation Nicktoons Racing:** Computer game. Rugrats characters race around a track; shown going very fast.
- **PlayStation Spyro Year of the Dragon:** Video game. Presents scenes from a new PlayStation game; shows buildings being burned and people running. Adult grabs child who was watching video game on TV outside of store; then game is shown, and commercial asks if player can "take the heat; things are about to get hot."
- **Pokemon Think Chip Battle Station:** Battle station using Pokemon figures; player scores "hit" points to make Pokemon stronger.

- **Polly Pocket (3 Different Sets):** Dolls and accessories. Girls playing with miniature dolls and accessories.
- **Poo-chi (Super Poo-chi):** Electronic pet. Shows a dog show where Super Poo-chi demonstrates how much smarter he is than regular Poo-chi.
- **Poo-chi:** Electronic pet. Shows teen girls playing with Poo-chi.
- **Pop-up Pirate:** Game. Commercial shows whoever makes the Pop-up Pirate pop up is out of the game; notes that it's "a barrel of fun."
- **Power Rangers:** Action figures. Talks about travelling through time with the Power Rangers and showing evil that it had no place to hide; kids shoot; promotes "new vector cycle and time jet by Bandai"; notes items sold separately.
- **Radio Shack Toys:** Battery-operated toys. Shows kids testing toys at Radio Shack.
- **Risk:** Board game. Shows a boy playing game.
- **Robo Chi Chi Pets:** Electronic pets. Energize for touch and sound; energize to feed; teenage girls pet dog; notes each sold separately, and batteries not included.
- **Rocket Dog:** Electronic pet. Moves to master's commands; child has headphones on to control dog with voice commands.
- **Roller Coaster Tycoon CD-ROM:** Computer game. Guy designs roller coaster in his room; all of a sudden, people are behind him. He tells them about the improvements he has made to the amusement park for their enjoyment; once they disappear, he intones, "Tourists!"
- **Sing and Swing Angelica:** Doll. Shows two girls playing sing-a-long with doll.
- **Skate Board Shannon:** Doll. Doll is having fun skateboarding; voice-over says: "Skate Board Shannon... you're in control" as it shows two young girls and remote for the toy.
- **Smoochies:** Plush toys. Commercial promotes stuffed toys that glow in the dark and say "I love you".
- **Sonny the Seal:** Game. Rings are put on seal's neck as the seal moves.
- **Speed Wrench:** Toy cars. Remote control RV vehicle that has a special wrench to change tires from regular to monster tires; "You're in control."
- **Starter Up Steve:** Toy car. Punch in commands to drive battery-operated car in 32 directions, spin on wheels, make horn blow.

- **Tekno**: Electronic pet. Shows a boy playing with his new Tekno puppy; Dad encourages him to check out Tekno website.
- **Tonka Power Tools**: Computer game. Kids assemble car wheels on the computer screen.
- **Tonka Space Station**: Computer game. Commercial promotes software for PC and gaming stations; shows boys playing games, floating as if there is no gravity; looks very realistic; shows kids on computer.
- **Trouble**: Board game. Kids pop the centre bubble to "roll" the die; kids laugh and play.
- **Twister**: Game. Shows kids playing Twister and when they put their hands and feet on circles, electric shocks come out of the circles; this makes the game appear more exciting.
- **UNO**: Game. Shows family playing game; "Fast action."
- **X-Men**: Action figures. Shows several characters; the commercial moves so quickly from frame to frame that it is hard to tell what each character is doing.

General Observations: "I Want That!"

Participants in the study were encouraged to comment on the commercials and how their children reacted to them. One parent wrote:

"I found the commercials eye-opening to say the least. My educational background is in Media communication and I spent years studying "media" and its effects on everyone and everything. However, looking at the commercials with an eye to the message being conveyed to our children leaves me frustrated and disappointed. My children were definitely affected by the commercials and the message seemed to be 'I want it': that was the bottom line. 'Mommy, can I have that?' they ask."

This participant further noted:

- My children expect the TV to go on now. They are always asking to watch it.
- The kids would be upset if I had the tape fast forwarding through the shows; they would demand to watch the TV shows OR they wanted to see the commercials again. (Sometimes I would rewind a commercial five or six times if I needed to verify

something.) They were upset that they could not watch the entire commercial each time I played it.

- The Barbie commercials always created an excited reaction by both the 4- and 5-year-olds. "Mom, I want that. Can I buy it now... how about for my birthday? Look. it's Barbie Picture Pocket; Mom can we go buy it now!?" etc. For the first time ever, my 5-year-old saw this Barbie in the store and was extremely upset that I would not buy it immediately. She refused to accept "no" and sulked all the way home in the car. It seemed to be a resentment that I would not buy it. (The kids have allowances and normally she would say she would start saving for a toy she wants.)

- Brand name loyalty *was evident* for the Barbie items. Cereal brands that we buy had the second biggest reaction: "Look, we have that here!"

- The toy store became a difficult place to visit because the kids see many of the things that they have seen on TV. They like these things and *want* these things...

- I found it hard to find a TV station on a week day morning that had age-appropriate shows and that had commercials. I usually ended up on the YTV channel. The TV stations lower down on the dial, I believe Channel 8 is an example, did not have any commercials. Channel 3, Global, had children's programming from 6 - 9 a.m. At 9 a.m. the programming switched to adult shows.

- I found that in the 6 a.m.- 9 a.m. schedule, 90 percent of the commercials repeated themselves every hour. If you had six commercials in one hour, at least five of the same products would be repeated in the next hour. These commercials would also repeat themselves in almost the same manner during the week. I have heard so many Lucky Charm and Barbie Picture Pocket commercials that I know the dialogue by heart.

- I found a lot of the "male" oriented toys were almost always violent in some manner or another. It seemed that the world needed to be saved and there were bad guys that needed to be conquered. The boys on the commercial were shown shooting at the enemy or hitting someone or wrestling. I did not see the same type of behaviour on any of the "girl" toys. That is another point, there seemed to be a large gender barrier between many of the toys, a clear idea of boy toys and girl toys. When it came to commercials for cereals, they were not gender biased.

General Observations: Circumventing the Code

Advertisers may be aware of the rules for advertising to children, but many commercial broadcasts tread a thin line with regard to the code. A number of viewers reported commercials that were aired more than twice in half an hour: Barbie Beach Bungalow, Barbie Bedtime Baby and Sister Chrissy, Barbie Genie Magic Bottle CD-ROM, Barbie Pet Rescue CD-ROM, Barbie Picture Pockets, Bop-It Extreme, Cootie Jitterbug, Hot Wheels Formula Super Track, Hot Wheels Tornado, Hot Wheels X-Treme Moto, Magic Sing Along Suzie, Max Steel, McDonald's 102 Dalmations. My Dream Baby, Hey You Pikachu, Poo-chi, Risk, Rocket Dog, Sonny the Seal, and UNO.

One participant in the study wrote:

- Many stations show the same commercial close together, but in different half-hour blocks (e.g., 7:28 and 7:35). I guess they can get around the rules this way, but kids still see the same commercial over and over again, close together.
- All the commercials seemed to be aimed at kids!
- Most of the commercials had website addresses written at the end of the commercial. Only one (Tekno dog) had verbal and written warning about asking parents for permission before going online!

Interpreting the Results: Techno-Toys and More

Observations from this study as well as the Canadian Toy Testing Council's attendance at the 2001 New York Toy Fair supports the Council's belief that techno-toys are the favoured playthings of today's kids. These toys are promoted heavily, and CTTC representatives witnessed elaborate ad campaigns and advance commercials for the "next hot toys"--mostly electronic marvels--at Toy Fair.

Just looking at the commercials viewed in this study provided an interesting commentary on how toys have changed. Toys have always reflected a child's fascination with the adult world, and for the children of the twenty-first century, toys are embracing technology. These include computer games, interactive dolls, and robo-pets, among others, and children are being exposed to high-tech toys at younger and younger ages.

In his State of the Industry address given February 8 at Toy Fair 2001 in New York, Patrick Feely, Chairman of the Toy Manufacturers of America, Inc., said:

"Toys for infants and preschoolers showed the highest increase of any category--at 11.2 percent, with dominant players like Leap Frog, featuring their educational technology toys such as the Leap Pad, and Kid Designs with their Barbie Talking Boom Box contributing to this jump. That being said, Fisher-Price continued to dominate this category in 2000, with such introductions as the Intelli-Table."

In the CTTC review, participants noted some six commercials on interactive pets alone (Me & My Shadow, Tekno, Rocket Dog, Poo-chi, Super Poo-chi, and Robo Chi Chi Meow Pets). This, too, appears in keeping with the proliferation of techno-toys. Patrick Feely, Chairman of the Toy Manufacturers of America, Inc., commented:

"Another trend changed the meaning of pet owner. Robotic pets, included in the "All Other Toys" category, helped drive the category up 5.3 percent. Tiger's Poo-chi and Manley's robotic pets that hit toy store shelves in 2000, taking the "Robotic Virtual Pets" category from \$5 million to \$159 million [US dollars] in one year."

A participant noted in the CTTC study that the TV commercial for Poo-chi may induce unrealistic expectations in a child of what the toy can do. In CTTC's own test of this product, the Council found it was a novelty toy and reported:

"This was an appealing silver plastic robot-like dog that offered four basic functions--waking up, feeding, barking and falling asleep. Its digital eyes would change depending on the dog's "mood" (hearts for happy, half-moons for sad and circles with lines for blinking). The doggie did sing/bark four songs and would sit or stand, but could not walk. Kids liked feeding this robo-puppy its special bone but could not understand why the bone could not be placed directly into its mouth (as per instructions). This toy was best enjoyed when two or more kids had one and could play together. NOTE: Three "AAA" batteries required (not included)." (*Toy Report*; www.toy-testing.org; 2001).

Tiger Interactive has also introduced Super Poo-chi (not yet tested by CTTC), an upgraded version of the robo-pup that apparently can walk, and according to its commercial, is better than Poo-chi. This advertisement, as well as the one for Poo-chi and fellow robo-dog Tekno, all encouraged kids to visit their toy's websites. Tekno's ad strongly encouraged children to do this, but did include a verbal and written warning about asking parents for permission before going online (as previously noted).

The other categories of toys in the ads viewed were:

- **Electronic dolls or toys** (16): Ask Me More Eeyore, Blue's Clues All Ears Blue, Dancing Debbie, Hopscotch Heather, Leap Pad, Magic Sing Along Suzie, Little Sniffles, My Dream Baby, My Real Baby, Oopsy Daisy, Pokemon Think Chip Battle Station, Radio Shack Toys, Sing and Swing Angelica, Starter Up Steve; Skate Board Shannon, Smoochies;
- **Games** (14): Bop-It Extreme, Connect 4, Cootie Jitterbug, Fib Finder, Guess Who, Jenga Cubes, Monopoly and Scrabble, Mousetrap, Pop-up Pirate, Risk, Sonny the Seal, Trouble, Twister, UNO;
- **Video and computer games** (13): Barbie Magic Genie Bottle CD-ROM, Barbie Pet Rescue CD-ROM, Easy Bake Kitchen CD-ROM, Frogger, Game Boy Donkey Kong Country, Game Boy Pokemon Gold & Silver, Pac-man for PC, Pikachu (Hey You Pikachu), PlayStation Nicktoons Racing, PlayStation Spyro Year of the Dragon, Roller Coaster Tycoon CD-ROM, Tonka Power Tools, Tonka Space Station;
- **Action figures*** (8): Action Man and Blizzard Dog, Action Man Super Speeder, Digimon Action Figures, Gundam Wing Action Figures, Max Steel Arctic Commando, Max Steel, Power Rangers, X-Men;
- **More traditional dolls and accessories*** (7): Barbie Airplane, Barbie Beach Bungalow, Barbie Bedtime Baby and Sister Chrissy, Barbie Picture Pockets, Barbie Princess Bride, Kinder Garden Babies, Polly Pocket (3 Different Sets);
- **Toy cars** (6): Hot Wheels Criss Cross Crash, Hot Wheels Formula Super Track, Hot Wheels Tornado, Hot Wheels X-Treme Moto, Key Cars, Speed Wrench;
- **Food toys** (3): Kinder Surprise, McDonald's 102 Dalmations, McDonald's Buzz Lightyear;
- **Construction toys**** (2): Lego Star Wars, Lego;
- **Art activities** (2): Etch-A-Sketch, Jammin Draw;
- **Active play toy** (1): Nerf Power Clip Bazooka.

** Dolls seemed to be for girls; action figures for boys. The tone of ads for these toys (parental, domestic situations versus save-the-world, action-packed situations) made this very clear.*

***Gundam Wing Action Figures were technically model kits children could build to become action figures, but they seemed to be promoted as action figures.*

Playing the Game(s)

It was interesting to see the number of traditional games advertised in addition to the video and computer games, and electronic toys. Manufacturer Milton Bradley (Hasbro) in particular strongly promoted the notion of “family game night”, where Mom, Dad and the kids can all be together and play board games, perhaps in an attempt to wrestle children away from the computer screen.

The TV commercials attempted to make playing these games exciting, especially games for younger kids. That excitement could be exaggerated at times, when it came to portraying game play. Fib Finder, for example, was an ad for a game that made kids watching it expect that the game was actually going to expose lies (a finding further supported by the focus group testing).

Viewers also felt several computer game commercials tended to exaggerate the toy’s capabilities (Frogger, Hey You Pikachu, Game Boy Donkey Kong, Roller Coaster Tycoon). The use of animation—sophisticated computer animation in particular—made it very easy for the ads to make the characters look larger than will appear on the actual computer screen.

When advertising to children, no advertising, except specific safety messages, can portray adults or children in clearly unsafe acts or situations (e.g. using flames or fire, or tossing food into the air and attempting to catch it in the mouth, etc.), according to the code. Viewers noted that animated fire was used in the logo for Hot Wheels toys ads, and that the animated dragon appearing in the Spyro Year of the Dragon commercial also made use of animated fire--in fact, that ad asked players if they can “take the heat; things are about to get hot.”

In the case of Frogger, participants noted instances of unsafe portrayal (the frog is hit by a car); in and Roller Coaster Tycoon, participants noted inappropriate behaviour where ridicule and contempt is portrayed as “cool” (youth in commercial tells people about the improvements he has made to the amusement park for their enjoyment; once they disappear, he intones, "Tourists!"). This may be a matter of taste; other viewers watching the commercials may merely think of them as funny. This points to how parents should watch TV (and other media) with their children and form their own opinions.

Boys Will Be Boys

Despite the many changes in society with regard to the roles of men and women--equality at home and at work--toy ads still seem to make obvious divisions in the types of toys offered to boys and girls. In the TV commercials viewed, Barbie was definitely a “girl” thing, as were Kinder Garden Babies, Polly Pocket (3 Different Sets), Dancing Debbie, Hopscotch Heather, Magic Sing Along Suzie, Little Sniffles, My Dream Baby, My Real Baby, Oopsy Daisy, Sing and Swing Angelica, Skate Board Shannon and Smoochies; these girls were preparing for motherhood. On the other hand, the boys were either racing cars (Hot Wheels Criss Cross Crash, Hot Wheels Formula Super Track, Hot Wheels Tornado, Hot Wheels X-Treme Moto, Key Cars, Speed Wrench, Starter Up Steve) or doing battle to save the world (Action Man and Blizzard Dog, Action Man Super Speeder, Digimon Action Figures, Gundam Wing Action Figures, Max Steel Arctic Commando, Max Steel, Power Rangers, X-Men, Pokemon Think Chip Battle Station), etc

Computer and video games also seemed to have strong gender divisions. CD-ROMs like Barbie Genie Magic Bottle CD-ROM, Barbie Princess Bride CD-ROM, Barbie Pet Rescue CD-ROM and Easy Bake Kitchen CD-ROM, with their dress-up, nurturing and baking activities, were clearly aimed at girls. Meanwhile, video and computer games like Frogger, Game Boy Donkey Kong Country, Game Boy Pokemon Gold & Silver, Hey You Pikachu, Spyro Year of the Dragon, Roller Coaster Tycoon, Tonka Power Tools and Tonka Space Station, with their training, battling, entrepreneurial, auto repair, and adventure themes, were clearly aimed at boys.

Kids seemed to find equal ground with board games and robo-pets, however.

Cartoon Characters Abound

While the participants in this study did not specifically note any instances of a cartoon character, children’s entertainer or puppet promoting a product to children, the toys themselves are often cartoon-like (Max Steel, Hey You Pikachu, Frogger, etc.) or based on an existing cartoon. Those connections are noted in the last column of the chart. Even if the toy is not based on existing media, it often has a very strong branding of its own (Barbie, Hot Wheels).

You're in Control

It was interesting to note the commercials that had the message for children of giving commands or “you’re in control” (Rocket Dog, Skate Board Shannon, Speed Wrench). This seems to indicate that kids need to feel more in control of their environment, and the ads suggested to them that they could achieve this by “taking control” of their toys.

APPENDIX

- 1. The Canadian Code of Advertising Standards**
- 2. Monitoring Log: Toy Advertising Practices and their Impact on Children**
- 3. Questionnaire for Families: Toy Advertising Practices and their Impact on Children**

The Code

The *Broadcast Code for Advertising to Children* was developed by the Canadian Advertising Foundation in collaboration with the Canadian Association of Broadcasters. “Children’s advertising” refers to paid commercial messages directed to persons under 12 years of age. Compliance with the *Code* is a condition of license for Canadian broadcasters. The Canadian Toy Testing Council has outlined the *Code* to assist you in the completion of the questionnaire. Please retain this copy for your reference.

Factual

1. No messages below threshold of awareness
2. No exaggeration
3. Establish relative size
4. Results of craft, construction kits reasonably attainable
5. New/introducing used for only one year
6. Specific product claims re performance, safety, speed, durability, etc must be supported by available evidence (but not in the ad itself)

Undue Pressure

1. Must not directly urge purchase
2. No direct response techniques

Scheduling

1. Not more than once in a half hour of children’s programming
2. No more than 4 minutes per half hour or 8 minutes per hour of children’s programming
3. During school-day mornings ALL commercials must be addressed to the family/parent/adult, not to children
4. Avoid scheduling of commercials with known characters adjacent to programs with same characters.
5. **In Quebec:** No broadcasting of any advertising to children

Promotion/Endorsement

No endorsement or personal promotion by puppets, persons or cartoon characters well known to children (unless representing nutrition, safety, educational attributes)

Pricing and Comparisons

1. Make clear if parts/accessories cost extra or if several toys are shown in same commercial
2. No use of “only/just/lowest prices” etc
3. Audio indication required if not delivered completely assembled
4. No comparisons to diminish competitive products
5. No comparisons to last year’s model

Safety & Social Values

1. No clearly unsafe acts or situations (absolutely no flame or fire)
2. No use of product in unsafe way
3. Values must be consistent with moral, ethical, legal standards of contemporary society
4. No implication that possession/use of product makes owner superior; or lack of product will result in ridicule/contempt

Questionnaire for Families

Toy Advertising Practices and their Impact on Children

Your Name _____ Phone number _____

Product Advertised _____ Sponsor/Manufacturer _____

Date & Time of Commercial _____ Station _____

1. Negative Commercial Content (Check one or more)

Factually misleading

- Exaggeration of toy capabilities
- Relative size misrepresented
- Results from craft/construction kit unrealistic
- Claims re performance, safety, speed durability not provable
- No audio indication, that product needs assembly
- Several toys/models shown in same commercial, and commercial does not make this clear
- Not clear that parts or accessories are extra
- Excessive fantasy or misleading enhancement*
- Other (Describe) _____

Undue Sales Pressure

- Directly urges purchase
- Has “direct response” capability (call now to order, etc)
- Implies possession/use of product makes child superior, or lack of product will result in contempt/ridicule
- Endorsement or promotion of product by puppets, persons or cartoon characters well known to children (nutrition, safety, educational attributes excepted)
- Subliminal messaging, message below threshold of awareness
- Other (Describe) _____

Pricing/Comparisons

- Use of “only \$”, “just \$”, lowest prices, etc
- Comparison which diminishes competitive product
- Comparison to last year’s model
- Use “new” or “introducing” for more than one year
- Other (Describe) _____

Scheduling

- Same commercial shown more than once per half hour of children’s programming
- Different commercials, but for same product, shown more than once per half hour of children’s programming
- If during school-day mornings, commercial addressed to child rather than family/parent/adult
- Commercials with known characters scheduled adjacent to programs with same characters.
- Other (Describe) _____

Safety

- Clearly unsafe acts or situation; product used in unsafe way
- Flame or fire shown in commercial
- Other (Describe) _____

Social Values

- Values inconsistent with moral ethical, legal standards of contemporary society
- Sexually suggestive poses*
- Encouraging age-inappropriate behaviour*
- Excessive gender or race stereotyping*
- Other (Describe) _____

2. Other Content -- Does the commercial include:

- The words “new”, “introducing” or similar phrases
- A web site address (either in audio or in writing)

3. Impact on Children – Did you note any impact on the children watching this commercial? (This may occur somewhat after the commercial is seen)

- Unrealistic expectations of toy
- Demands to Purchase
- Inappropriate Language
- Inappropriate social behaviour
- Inappropriate physical behaviour
- Aggressive
- Excessive loyalty to particular brand
- Mimicing of “cool” behaviour in ad (e.g. ignoring adult authority)
- Other (Describe) _____

4. Please describe in a few words:

- What was shown in the ad or commercial
- AND
- How it breaks one of the guidelines above OR Why you think it is a negative advertising practice

5. During your children’s program viewing time, did you see:

- More than 4 minutes in total of commercials (of any type) per half hour
- More than 8 minutes in total of commercials (of any type) per hour

Date _____ Time _____ Station _____

THANK YOU!