

# Targeting Teens

Grades 6-12

## Lesson Summary

Students analyze advertisements geared toward teenagers.

## Overview

In this lesson, students will:

- Identify strategies (in print) that advertisers use to persuade teen consumers to buy their products
- Watch a video about how the media influences teen trends and consumerism (Optional)

## Time 🕒

1-3 hours (1 hour + 1-2 hours for optional activity)

## Background

There is nothing accidental in an ad. It is never "just a picture." A team of marketing experts, including psychologists, puts a lot of time, thought, and money into commercial advertisements. Most often, products are pitched to make us believe that our perceived deficiencies can be overcome by buying a certain product: We will become better basketball players if we buy the right shoes, or we will have more friends if we use the right cell phone network. All of an ad's components are consciously created to try to make us think or feel a certain way, and to distract us from things that would deter us from buying that product, like the social or environmental costs associated with it. Since everything comes from something originally found in nature (natural resources), every manufactured product has an impact on the natural world. This means that buying less stuff is not only good for our pocketbooks, it also helps protect nature.

Advertisers use strategies that are meant to manipulate specific consumer groups into wanting and buying more stuff. "Targeting Teens" is one such strategy. The 33 million teenagers in the United States today are considered the country's largest consumer demographic because teens often have disposable income, and are susceptible to peer pressure and "fitting in." Not only that, but the "Merchants of Cool" are advertisers and producers that specifically capitalize on teen insecurity and ultimately use "cool" to sell products, whether it's music, shoes, or soda. On average, America's teens view 3,000 ads a day, and in 2007, they spent \$100 billion, and influenced their parents to spend an additional \$50 billion! With that much money at stake, it's easy to understand why teens are such a prime target for marketers. Teens don't have to be pawns of the advertising world. Knowledge of strategies that advertisers use can help teens be more aware of their consumer choices and influence the market in meaningful ways.



## Vocabulary

- Consumer Culture
- Consumer Demographic
- Advertising Strategies
- Brand loyalty
- Disposable Income
- Entertainment Media
- Cool Hunters
- Cross-Promotion

## Materials

- 8 teen magazines
- Ads (attached)
- *Tricks of the Trade* cards
- Computer, projector, screen, or TV/VCR (Optional)
- *The Merchants of Cool* video (TRT: 1 hr) (optional)
- *Merchants of Cool* Reflection Sheet (optional)



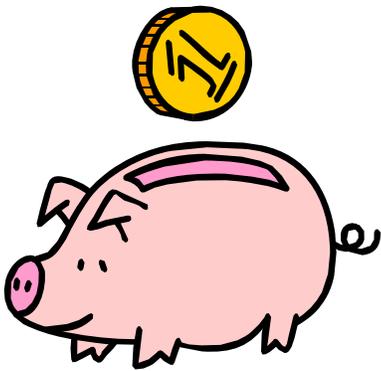
## Preparation

- Cut *Tricks of the Trade* cards into sections.
- Collect youth-focused magazines—like music or pop culture magazines (or ask students to bring in their favorite ones): 1/4 as many as number of students in your class, or 8 for a class of 32.
- (Optional) Load *The Merchants of Cool* at: [www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/cool/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/cool/) Click on “Watch the full program online”. OR Borrow from SF Environment. 415-355-3713.
- (Optional) Preview video to formulate your own discussion questions.



## Pre-Activity Questions

1. Where do you see ads? (*Billboards, buses, TV, magazines, etc.*) Do you see them in school? (*May be found on textbooks, posters, soda machines, or in lunchroom.*)
2. Why are we surrounded by so many ads? (*Because we live in a **consumer culture**, or a culture driven by buying things, which is fueled by corporate motivation to annually grow profits.*)
3. What kinds of ads get your attention? Why? (*Cool images, favorite celebrities, promising claims and appeals, informational content, testimonials, brand loyalty*)
4. Are all ads intended for the same audience? (*No. Audiences differ by age, gender, geographic location, socioeconomic group, interest.*)
5. Can you think of examples of ads that appeal to you, but not to your parents? (*Answers might include ads for video games, snack food or music – products that are a part of teen culture.*)
6. Why do advertisers market to teens? (*Teens are considered the largest **consumer demographic**, or grouping of people that buy things; teens are thought to have **disposable income**, or money that can be spent on luxury items or things you don't really need; teens greatly influence their peers and parents; establishing **brand loyalty**, or dedication to a certain brand, at a young age ensures that brand is bought for the rest of that teen's life.*)  
NOTE: Teens that don't contribute to family essentials like food and rent are generally considered to have disposable income. However, the belief that teens have disposable income doesn't apply to many teens throughout the world.
7. Tell students: Advertisers use many methods, or **advertising strategies**, like targeting teens, to try to manipulate you into buying their product. Often, they're selling an image or lifestyle, not really the product. For example, here's one ad for milk. (Show Ad #1.) It's telling you that if you drink enough milk, not only will you lose you weight, you might look like Beyonce, too! Learning some “tricks of the trade”, or advertising strategies, can help you outsmart the advertisers.
8. Why might you want to outsmart advertisers? (*Save money, oppose a product or ad you don't like, think independently*)



## Activity 1: Tricks of the Trade

1. Tell students that you are going to analyze some ads as a class to identify their advertising strategies. NOTE: There are more strategies in each ad than those listed here.
2. Show students Ad #2 and ask the following questions.
  - What is this ad selling?
  - Who is this message intended for?
  - Who wants to reach this audience, and why?
  - What story does this ad tell?
  - Is the story accurate and complete? If not, what information is absent and why?
  - How does this story get your attention and make you want to buy this product?

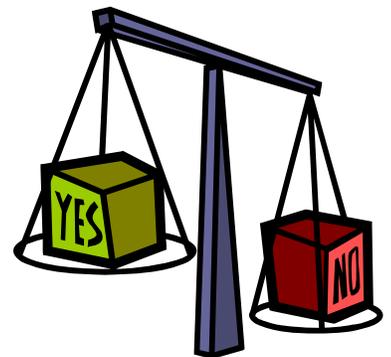
Some strategies used for Ad #2 are:

You'll be beautiful, attractive, high fashion if you buy this phone.

3. Follow the same procedure for Ads #3 and #4.

Strategies for Ad #3: You'll get a phone and a toy if you buy this phone. This phone is fun.

Strategies for Ad #4: You'll be more attractive, find a boy/girlfriend, and improve your love life if you buy this phone.
4. Tell students: As teenagers, you are constantly a target for product marketing. How many ads do you think a teenager in the United States sees on average each day? (3,000!)
5. With all this advertising, how do you decide what you do or don't buy?
6. Do ads affect your decision to buy, or not buy something? How? (This question might be redundant, depending on answers to the previous question.)
7. Tell students: Although you are advertised to constantly without your consent, you ultimately have the power to pick and choose what to buy. Your purchasing decisions have wide social and environmental impacts. All products are made from something originally found in nature, so extracting the natural resources used to manufacture this item impacts the natural world. Your decisions about what to buy, or not to buy send messages to the companies that make and advertise products. It informs them about what advertising methods work, and what products they should make more or less of. Because you're considered the largest consumer demographic, your message is especially strong. (The strongest message you can send is to buy less, or get creative and buy vintage or used items from thrift stores, garage sales and consignment stores, or just swap with your friends!) Knowing how to analyze ads can help you be more aware of your consumer choices and influence advertisers and producers in meaningful ways.
8. Split students up into groups of four and give them 1 or 2 ad strategies and 2 magazines. Give students 20 minutes to find ads to illustrate their strategies.

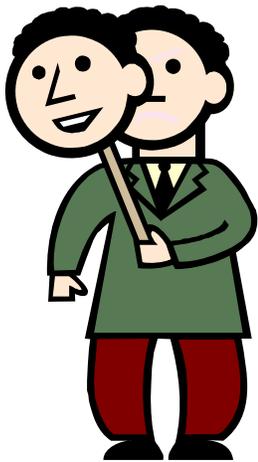




(\*Note: If you've previously taught *The True Cost of Cool* lesson plan, you can have students also determine some hidden environmental costs of the products advertised in their chosen ads.)

9. Have students share their favorite finding with the class and discuss how (and if) their attitudes and feelings have shifted as a result of this activity. Did they already know this information? Do they feel duped? Do they feel disempowered by the quantity of advertisements that bombard them daily? Do they feel empowered to make different decisions? Or do these ads just make them want to go out and buy more stuff?

### Optional Activity 2: Merchants of Cool



1. Ask: Can you think of other media sources besides print ads that advertisers and producers use to advertise to you? (*TV commercials, product placement in movies, TV, music videos, internet*)
2. Besides physical products like shoes and cell phones, what other non-material things do advertisers and producers try to “sell” to you? (*Entertainment, such as: music, movies, TV shows, events like concerts and wrestling matches*)
3. Tell students: This is called **entertainment media**- and even when it may seem like you're not directly buying anything, it's all about advertising and selling too. For instance, in 2001, MTV made a \$1 billion profit! When you watch MTV, all those advertisers pay MTV loads of money to get a chance to have you view their commercials. MTV also gets royalties from many of the records you buy and concerts you attend.
4. In entertainment media, advertisers and producers do extensive research about teen culture and what's cool so that they can reach and appeal to you. The people that do the research are called “**Cool Hunters**” and often get paid the big bucks to keep up with the latest trends. They'll actually go to high schools and pick out people they think are “cool” and then pay them to answer questions about why they buy the things they do. The advertisers and producers, who use this “cool” information to sell you more stuff, are called “**Merchants of Cool**”, and they think they know a lot about you. We're going to watch a video about Cool Hunters and their teen audience.
5. Watch DVD or video at:  
[www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/cool/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/cool/) (Approximately 1 hour. You may choose to show the first 3 segments, approximately 1/2 hour.)
6. After viewing, discuss in class, small groups, or through written responses. Some quotes and topics for student response are on the *Merchants of Cool Reflection Sheet*.



### Extensions

- More discussion and activity ideas online at:  
[www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/teach/cool/teach4.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/teach/cool/teach4.html)
- Watch “The Story of Stuff” (20 min.) [www.TheStoryofStuff.com](http://www.TheStoryofStuff.com) or borrow DVD from SF Environment: 415-355-3713. After watching, have students conduct product lifecycle analysis.

got milk?

HOUSE OF DERËON

Home bodies.

Growing up I always wanted to be just like my mom. So I drank milk. Some studies suggest that women who drink enough milk tend to weigh less and have less body fat than those who don't. So drink 24 ounces of lowfat or fat free milk every 24 hours as part of your healthy diet and see for yourself. Who says father knows best?

24/24 milk your diet. Lose weight!

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Transforms from a phone to a messaging keyboard right before your eyes.  
Introducing the **nokia 6220**



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АЛСУ  
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**Искушение музыкой**

- MP3-плеер с внешними клавишами управления
- Фотокамера 1,0 мегапикселя
- Цветной дисплей (262144 цвета)
- Встроенная память 88,5 Мб
- Bluetooth

**E720**

**Будь лидером**

**SAMSUNG**

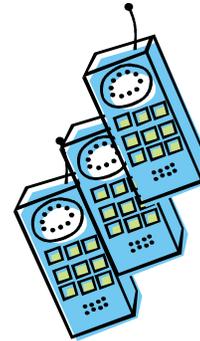
Галерея Samsung: г. Москва, ул. Тверская, д. 9/17, стр. 1.  
Фирменный магазин Samsung Mobile: ул. Никольская, д. 8/1, стр. 1. Тел.: (095) 937 7680.  
Информационный центр: 8-800-200-0-400. www.samsung.ru; allo.samsung.ru Товар сертифицирован.

## HEART STRINGS



These ads draw you into a story and make you feel good. One example is the fast food commercial where the dad and his son are shoveling snow from their driveway and the son treats his dad to a fast food burger lunch when they are done.

## REPETITION



These ads repeat the same commercial or print ad over and over again. Advertisers hope that if you see a product, or hear its name again and again, you will be more likely to remember it and buy it.

## SOUNDS GOOD



These ads contain jingles that you can't get out of your head. They are used to make you think of a product. Have you ever noticed that the volume of commercials is higher than the volume of the actual program?

Note to students: For this strategy, choose a print ad for a product that has a catchy jingle in its television ad.

## CARTOON CHARACTERS



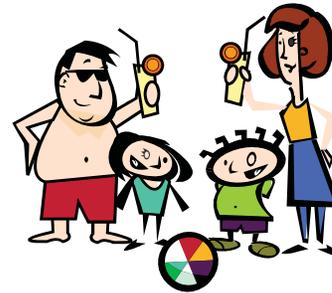
These ads rely on cartoon characters to excite young kids into wanting the products being sold. Cartoons make young kids identify with products.

## IDEAL KIDS & FAMILIES



These ads feature kids or families that seem perfect. They are hip looking, with the hottest fashions, haircuts, and toys. Ideal families are always attractive and everyone seems to get along. These ads represent the types of kids and families advertisers think the people viewing the ad would like to be.

## FAMILY FUN



These ads feature a product that is shown to bring families together, or helps them have fun together. All it takes is for Mom or Dad to bring home the “right” food, and a ho-hum dinner turns into a family party.

## EXCITEMENT



These ads promise excitement if you buy their product. One bite of a snack food and you’re suddenly snowboarding on the mountain, or onstage singing to a crowd of adoring fans!

## STAR POWER



These ads feature a favorite sports star or music celebrity using, or promoting a product as the best. For example, clothing designers give clothes to hip-hop stars to wear on stage (especially for awards shows) so millions of people will see this clothing line, and think it’s “cool.”

## BANDWAGON



These ads tell you to join the crowd! Don't be left out! Everyone is buying the latest snack food: Aren't you? If you're "cool" and want to "fit in" you should be buying it too.

## SCALE



These ads make a product look bigger or smaller than it actually is to highlight good qualities or hide undesirable qualities. For example, cereal ads will show really large berries in the bowl.

## FACTS & FIGURES



These ads use important sounding figures and statistics to enhance their product's credibility. If it sounds like there is a lot of research behind the product, then it's easier for you to believe in it.

## PUT DOWNS



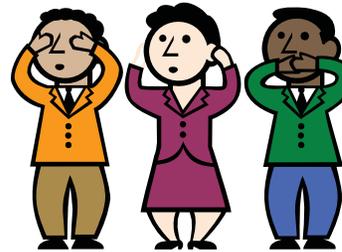
These ads put down their competition's product to make their own product seem better. They often use sarcasm, comparison studies, and testimonials.

## WEASEL WORDS



These ads use words that can mislead. Even though advertisers have to tell the truth, there are hundreds of deceptive phrases they are allowed to use. Look for: “Part of...” “The taste of real...” “Natural...” “New, better tasting...” “Because we care...” It sounds good, but means nothing.

## OMISSION



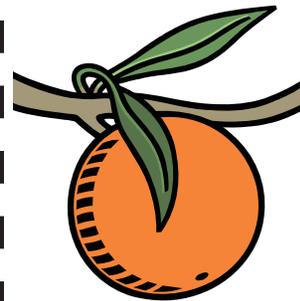
These ads don't give the full story. When a pastry claims to be “part” of a healthy breakfast, it doesn't mention that the breakfast might still be healthy whether this pastry is there or not. This omission therefore implies the breakfast will be healthier if it includes the pastry.

## R U COOL ENOUGH?



These ads try to convince you that if you don't use their products, you are a nerd. Ads do this by showing people who look un-cool: Once they try the product, they suddenly become hip looking and are shown doing cool things.

## COOKING NATURE



These ads show the transformation that occurs from raw materials to end product without showing the process. By showing oranges change straight to orange juice, it implies that when you drink processed orange juice, you are eating a natural orange, when actually it is unnaturally filled with sugar and additives!

# Merchants of Cool

Targeting Teens

Student Reflection Sheet

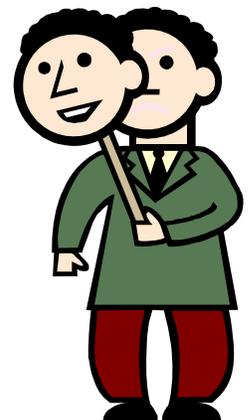
1. This film mentions a rap concert sponsored by Sprite as an example of **cross-promotion**. What does cross-promotion mean and how does it obscure, or make it hard to distinguish, what is an ad and what's just plain entertainment?



2. Five corporations own most of the country's major media sources. Together, they own 90% of the music market, most of the film studios, TV networks and major TV stations, and all or part of all commercial cable channels. How does this diminish advertising competition and encourage cross-promotion?

3. "The MTV machine doesn't listen to the young so it can make the young happier. The MTV machine tunes in so it can figure out how to pitch what Viacom [which owns MTV] has to sell." (*Mark Crispin Miller, media critic*). Are marketers truly concerned with the well being of the consumer? Why or why not? Do they answer to consumers? If so, how?

4. 'The Merchants of Cool' describes the practice of "under-the-radar" or "stealth" marketing, including hiring teens to log-on to chat rooms to talk up bands, and recruiting college freshman to throw campus parties where they distribute marketing materials. Ironically, marketers have justified stealth marketing as necessary because teens have become more media savvy. Do you think that "stealth marketing" techniques are ethical? When you are tuned in to a concert...or reading a message in a chat room, how important is it to you, to know whether or not it is a commercial?"



5. This film ends by revealing that even an underground resistance rage rock band "sold out" by signing on to a major music label. In our consumer-driven culture, with so much advertising and emphasis on profit, is resistance to mass media messages possible? Is it possible for us to buy less stuff with all these targeted ads telling us to buy more? What are some ways you resist or talk back to consumer culture in your daily life?



# Merchants of Cool

Targeting Teens

Teacher Guide

1. This film mentions a rap concert sponsored by Sprite as an example of **cross-promotion**. What does cross promotion mean and how does it obscure, or make it hard to distinguish, what is an ad and what's just plain entertainment?

*Cross-promotion is when two companies promote each other's products or services. For example, this can happen when an ad mentions another brand, like Visa Credit Card mentioning a specific store to shop at that is a national chain. Another example is when we see American Idol judges drinking from Coca Cola cups (this is called "product placement"), and when Coca Cola uses American Idol contestants in their commercials. It makes it hard to distinguish what's an ad and what's just plain entertainment because with cross-promotion strategies, entertainment like TV shows, movies, and rock concerts, which we don't typically think of as advertisements, can be!*

2. Five corporations own most of the country's major media sources. Together, they own 90% of the music market, most of the film studios, TV networks and major TV stations, and all or part of all commercial cable channels. How does this diminish advertising competition and encourage cross-promotion?

*Because so few companies own most of the media, they control what we see and hear without much competition. Competition diminishes because most smaller media companies are owned by one of these five large corporations. When two companies are owned by the same people, they will help sell each other's products rather than compete with each other. Cross-promotion takes advantage of this to sell products efficiently by turning music videos or TV shows into ads for something else, too... Why not double-up? Since ads can be embedded into most types of media through cross-promotion, unless you do research about which corporations own which companies, it can be hard to distinguish what is an ad, for say, a new rock band, and what's just plain entertainment.*

3. "The MTV machine doesn't listen to the young so it can make the young happier. The MTV machine tunes in so it can figure out how to pitch what Viacom [which owns MTV] has to sell." (Mark Crispin Miller, media critic). Are marketers truly concerned with the well being of the consumer? Why or why not? Do they answer to consumers? If so, how?

*The main goal of marketers is to increase consumption of their product so corporations can make more money. Most of the time, companies are not concerned with our well being, although they act like they are so they can sell us more stuff and make more money. This is even seen in health related sectors like pharmaceutical companies and health insurance providers! Marketers do answer to consumers through the laws of supply and demand. When consumers buy less of a product, marketers are forced to analyze their product and the advertising messages they're using to promote it. Sometimes they change their advertising strategy and; sometimes they modify the product—or stop selling it altogether. While marketers answer to consumers in this way, their response is motivated by financial profit and not the consumer's well being. This illustrates the power we have as consumers to shape the market: We can "vote with our pocket book" and therefore can help support positive marketing trends like organic, fair trade, conflict free mining, and more.*

4. 'The Merchants of Cool' describes the practice of "under-the-radar" or "stealth" marketing, including hiring teens to log-on to chat rooms to talk up bands, and recruiting college freshman to throw campus parties where they distribute marketing materials. Ironically, marketers have justified stealth marketing as necessary because teens have become more media savvy. Do you think that "stealth marketing" techniques are ethical? When you are tuned in to a concert...or reading a message in a chat room, how important is it to you, to know whether or not it is a commercial?" *Opinion*

5. This film ends by revealing that even an underground resistance rage rock band "sold out" by signing on to a major music label. In our consumer-driven culture, with so much advertising and emphasis on profit, is resistance to mass media messages possible? Is it possible for us to buy less stuff with all these targeted ads telling us to buy more? What are some ways you resist or talk back to consumer culture in your daily life?

*Narrative*