

Common Advertising Strategies

1. Ideal Kids - The kids in commercials are often a little older and a little more perfect than the target audience of the ad. They are, in other words, role models for what the advertiser wants children in the target audience to think they want to be like. A commercial that is targeting eight-year-olds, for instance, will show 11- or 12-year-old models playing with an 8-year-old toy.

2. Heart Strings - Commercials often create an emotional ambiance that draws you into the advertisement and makes you feel good. The McDonald's commercials featuring a father and daughter eating out together and the AT&T Reach Out and Touch Someone ads are good examples. We are more attracted to products that make us feel good.

3. Amazing Toys - Many toy commercials show their toys in life-like fashion, doing incredible things. Airplanes do loop-the-loops, cars do wheelies, dolls cry, and spring-loaded missiles hit gorillas dead in the chest. This would be fine if the toys really did these things.

4. Life-like Settings - Barbie struts her stuff on the beach with waves crashing in the background, space aliens fly through dark outer space, and all-terrain vehicles leap over rivers and trenches. The rocks, dirt, sand, and water don't come with the toys, however.

5. Sounds Good - Music and other sound effects add to the excitement of commercials. Sound can make toys seem more life-like or less life-like, as in a music video. Either way, they help set the mood advertisers want.

6. Cute Celebrities - Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles sell pizza. Spuds McKenzie sells beer. "Joe Cool" camel sells cigarettes. All of these are ways of helping children identify with products either now or for the future.

7. Selective Editing - Selective editing is used in all commercials, but especially in commercials for athletic toys like Frisbees or footballs. Commercials show only brilliant catches and perfect throws. Unfortunately, that's not the way most children experience these toys.

8. Family Fun - "This is something the whole family can do together!" or "This is something Mom will be glad to buy for you." Many commercials show parents enjoying their children's fun as if the toy will bring more family togetherness.

9. Excitement! - Watch the expressions on children's faces. Never a dull moment, never boring. "This toy is the most fun since fried bananas!" they seem to say. How can your child help thinking the toy's great?

10. Star Power - Sports heroes, movie stars, and teenage heartthrobs tell our children what to eat and what to wear. Children listen, not realizing that the star is paid handsomely for the endorsement.

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