

Information at Your Service

Objective

Food packaging is printed with information that is useful to consumers, but also advertising elements intended to influence purchasing behaviour. This activity will help your child learn to distinguish advertising from information on product packaging. They'll also consider the usefulness of these various elements.

Preparation

Choose two different products in your pantry or refrigerator. For example, it could be a box of sugary cereal and a condiment jar.

Steps

1. Ask your child to examine the packaging and identify its different elements. Discuss how useful these elements are, from your child's perspective. You can use the table below to guide the discussion.


Elements	Purpose
Product name	Advertising, so the consumer can recognize the product.
Common name of the product (type of product)	This is mandatory information.
Brand	Advertising, used to distinguish one product from another.
Mascot	Advertising, so the consumer can recognize the product.
Slogan	Advertising, so the consumer will remember the product.
Illustration or photo	Advertising, to make the product appealing.
Colours	Advertising, to make the product appealing.
Weight	Compulsory information.
Nutritional claims	Information/advertising; these claims provide the consumer with nutritional information, but are also there to serve the product, to convince the consumer to buy it, even if these claims are regulated.
Nutrition facts and comparison portion	Compulsory information.
Expiry date	Compulsory information.
Recycling logo	Information, tells the consumer the packaging can be recycled.
Other logos	Advertising, instills trust, gives the product an edge in convincing the consumer to buy it
Contest	Advertising, encourages the consumer to buy the product in order to participate.
Surprise inside	Advertising, encourages the consumer to buy the product in order to obtain the surprise.
Collectible items	Advertising, encourages the consumer to buy the product and collect the items.
List of ingredients	Compulsory information, tells the consumer what the product contains, by descending order of quantity.
Barcode	Information, allows of the product pricing to be read by store scanners.


- Your child probably noticed that some of the packaging elements are used more to sell the product than to inform the consumer. The manufacturer often makes these choices intentionally.

Talk to your child about what the maker of each product intended for the packaging. What message do they think the manufacturer wants to convey to consumers?

- ▶ Potential answer: The manufacturer is looking to convince consumers that they absolutely need this product and should spend money to buy it. This is how the company will make a profit. The manufacturer designs the packaging to include elements that advertise the product, such as the brand, product name, logos, attractive colours or the fact that it contains a surprise. All these strategies aim to persuade consumers to choose this product over others.
- ▶ However, the company is required by law to include specific information for the consumer on its packaging: the list of ingredients, the nutrition facts table, its weight, etc. This information allows the consumer to compare the products available on the market and to make choices based on what's important to them.

- Your child has learned that there are both information and advertising on product packaging. Ask them to test what they just learned by filling in the table below. Your child must indicate whether each element is information or advertising by marking an X in the applicable column.

Elements	Information	Advertising
No added salt		
Ingredients: wheat flour, sugar, etc.		
"Win a trip to a sunny destination"		
Best before September 3, 2022		
Drawing of a person eating the product		
Nutrition facts showing 325 cal per 100 g portion		
Logos for fair trade or organic certifications		
Coupon inside		
Picture of perfect fruit		
 9 781565 924796		
"Start the day off right with ABC Cereal"		

Elements	Information	Advertising
325 g		
"Collect all four figurines"		
		
A good source of fibre		



See the [answer key](#) on the last page for the answers.

Conclusion

To conclude, talk to your child about what they learned. For example, you can ask them the following questions:

- Did anything surprise you about the information and advertising on product packaging?
- How can you compare products and, in so doing, make a sound purchasing decision?
- Is there a specific aspect to which you will pay more attention the next time you buy something?

Answer Key

Elements	Information	Advertising
No added salt	X	X
Ingredients: wheat flour, sugar, etc.	X	
“Win a trip to a sunny destination”		X
Best before September 3, 2022	X	
Drawing of a person eating the product		X
Nutrition facts showing 325 cal per 100 g portion	X	
Logos for fair trade or organic certifications		X
Coupon inside		X
Picture of perfect fruit		X
 9 781565 924796	X	
“Start the day off right with ABC Cereal”		X
325 g	X	
“Collect all four figurines”		X
	X	
A good source of fibre	X	X