



Ads... Always about Spending?

Objective

Advertising is all around us and serves a number of purposes. The next activity will help your child discover the difference between commercial and public service advertising.

Preparation

Ask your child to read the following two advertising texts:

Grow Up Now!

Everyone loves the new drink Grow Up Fast!, whether for the fresh explosion of its unique taste or for its extraordinary human growth properties. A magic ingredient stimulates your muscles and will make you grow 15 cm in only three months! You'll finally get some attention in the schoolyard! Because one bottle a day of Grow Up Fast! will improve your life forever.

Being hard-headed won't protect you!

Jeremy is 11 years old and loves snowboarding, but he will never walk again. Every year in Québec, thousands of kids are seriously injured because they played sports without the right protection. Whether you're biking, skating, sliding, skateboarding, or practising another high-risk sport, just wearing a helmet can save your life. Don't be a statistic, protect yourself with a helmet!

Steps

1. Discuss the following questions with your child:

- What are the main objectives of each ad?

Potential answer: To sell a product and make money, in the case of the Grow Up Fast! drink, and to sell the idea of wearing a helmet and preventing accidents, for the helmet-wearing campaign.

- Who pays for these kinds of ads?

Potential answer: A company, in the case of Grow Up Fast!, and the government, a non-profit organization or an association (for example, the Québec association of pediatricians), for the second text.

- Which ad could have a negative effect on kids? Why?

Potential answer: The ad for the new Grow Up Fast! drink may have a negative impact on children because it can make them wrongly believe that a product can have a magical effect on their bodies.

2. Both texts are advertisements. However, there are real differences between a commercial ad and a public service one. Use the table below to effectively explain these differences to your child:

Questions	Commercial advertising	Public service advertising
What is the purpose of the ad?	Tries to sell a specific idea, product, brand, or service	Tries to sell an idea or change the public's behaviour for a healthier lifestyle
Who benefits from the ad?	Merchant's interest: the beneficiary is the company that wants to sell its product, service or idea.	Public interest: the ideas or behaviours aim to improve the quality of life for the general public.
What outcome is the advertiser hoping for?	The ad must be profitable, that is, it must encourage people to buy the product in order to boost sales.	An ad's effectiveness is not measured by how much money it makes, but by the improvement in a given situation. (For example, wearing a helmet reduces the number of serious injuries.)

Questions	Commercial advertising	Public service advertising
Does the product or service advertised give consumers short-term satisfaction?	The good or services generally satisfy the customer for a short time.	The idea or behaviour generally does not provide short-term satisfaction, but a long-term benefit. (For example, cutting out cigarettes can be hard in the beginning even though it's good for the smoker's health.)
What does the law say about this type of advertising?	Commercial advertising to kids under age 13 is prohibited. (Children's well-being is not always the concern of advertisers: their goal is to make money rather than improve children's quality of life. Kids are not always in a situation where they can think critically and distinguish true information from promotion.)	Public service advertising can target kids, subject to certain conditions.

3. To help your child grasp the difference between the two types of advertising, ask them to identify whether each of the following statements applies to a commercial or public service ad.

Statements	Commercial	Public service
A. Ad campaign against drunk driving.		
B. Radio spot announcing the next flu vaccine campaign.		
C. A classified ad is published in the newspaper to sell a used car.		
D. A television ad touts the achievements of a political party.		

Statements	Commercial	Public service
E. A live radio broadcast is promoting a special event being held downtown.		
F. A message from the government of Québec announces a new program for seniors.		
G. An association of fruit and vegetable producers in Québec is advertising to encourage people to eat more fruits and vegetables every day.		
H. The stars of a popular TV show encourage you to donate money to sick children.		
I. Mathilda is wearing a "Buy Local" t-shirt she was given by the Envirolocal non-profit organization.		
J. Luc is given a promotion pencil that says "Tobacco can kill."»		
K. The mascot for the city's Police Department is visiting your school to spread a crime prevention message.		
L. While at the grocery store, you are given a sample of a new organic bread.		

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

Conclusion

To conclude, ask your child to name the commercial and public service advertising they saw or heard recently.

Over the next few days, work together to analyze the advertising you hear on the radio or see in various places (television, bus stops, billboards, magazines, Internet, etc.). Decide if the ads are commercial or public service ones.

Answer Key

Statements	Commercial	Public service
<p>A. Ad campaign against drunk driving.</p> <p><i>Explanation: The message aims to save lives and improve a societal situation.</i></p>		X
<p>B. Radio spot announcing the next flu vaccine campaign.</p> <p><i>Explanation: The message aims to safeguard people's health and improve their quality of life.</i></p>		X
<p>C. A classified ad is published in the newspaper to sell a used car.</p> <p><i>Explanation: The seller who is paying for the ad is the one who benefits if the ad convinces someone to buy the good.</i></p>	X	
<p>D. A television ad touts the achievements of a political party.</p> <p><i>Explanation: The political party is selling its ideas and, in return, it increases the number of people who intend to vote for one of its candidates. Unlike a message from the government, the purpose is political rather than societal.</i></p>	X	
<p>E. A live radio broadcast is promoting a special event being held downtown.</p> <p><i>Explanation: Event organizers pay for live broadcasts in order to attract more visitors and thus increase their sales.</i></p>	X	
<p>F. A message from the government of Québec announces a new program for seniors.</p> <p><i>Explanation: The purpose of this type of advertising is to inform people of changes that are in the public interest.</i></p>		X
<p>G. An association of fruit and vegetable producers in Québec is advertising to encourage people to eat more fruits and vegetables every day.</p> <p><i>Explanation: Although the advertiser is basing itself on information that aims to improve health (Canada Food Guide), the purpose is to increase sales for its members.</i></p>	X	

Statements	Commercial	Public service
<p>H. The stars of a popular TV show encourage you to donate money to sick children.</p> <p><i>Explanation: Although stars often take part in promotions for commercial purposes (like selling show tickets), in this situation, the donations they generate through advertising will go to sick children, not the advertiser. The celebrities' fame is used here to improve a societal situation.</i></p>		X
<p>I. Mathilda is wearing a "Buy Local" t-shirt she was given by the Envirolocal non-profit organization.</p> <p><i>Explanation: Envirolocal does not benefit directly from the sales of local merchants. Rather, its objective is societal and environmental. If the same t-shirt were given by an association of downtown stores, it might instead be commercial advertising intended to sell more products.</i></p>		X
<p>J. Luc is given a promotional pencil that says "Tobacco can kill."</p> <p><i>Explanation: The pencil is used to convey a message and change people's behaviour for better health.</i></p>		X
<p>K. The mascot for the city's Police Department is visiting your school to spread a crime prevention message.</p> <p><i>Explanation: Instead of promoting a product or a brand, the mascot is there to spread a message about safety and to improve a societal situation.</i></p>		X
<p>L. While at the grocery store, you are given a sample of a new organic bread.</p> <p><i>Explanation: The bread sample was given to you for the sole purpose of telling customers about it so they buy it and so the grocery store will sell it.</i></p>	X	