

Children are getting Media Smart in the UK

Barbie Clarke interviews **Paul Jackson**, Executive Director of Media Smart, the industry funded media literacy programme.

PAUL JACKSON IS a busy man, but his enthusiasm and belief in what Media Smart stands for is evident, and he is clearly passionate about its objectives, and why it was necessary to set it up in the first place. 'Recognising that advertising is increasing, and is not going to go away, we felt strongly that children need to be informed and educated about the media, and how advertising works,' he explains.

A seasoned European marketing expert, Paul has a track record of twenty-five years working for Mars, including European Marketing Director for the Confectionery business, and General Management roles in Holland and Spain. As well as his role as Chairman of Media Smart, he is Vice President of the World Federation of Advertisers, and Chairman of the Responsible Advertising and Children group. He also lectures in international marketing at Brunel University, and in branding, communications and consultancy at Warwick Business School. Added to this, he runs Silverfin, a brand-doctoring consultancy.

How Media Smart evolved

Launched in the UK in November 2002, Media Smart is a non profit media literacy programme for school children aged six to 11 years old, focused on advertising. Funded by the advertising business in the UK, Media Smart develops and provides, free of charge, educational materi-

als to primary schools that teach children to think critically about advertising in the context of their daily lives.

'Media Smart is now recognised by many as a world-class media literacy programme,' Paul tells me. 'It is the only programme in Europe that brings together the resources of the industry, expertise of leading academics and the advice of the government into one comprehensive national programme. In the UK, it is one of the only media literacy programmes in which OFCOM plays an active role.'

Media Smart plays a key part in developing young people's understanding and constructive use of modern media, including advertising content. It is, it claims, an important contributor to building a media literate society in the UK.

Responsible advertising and children

In Paul Jackson's dual role as Chairman of Media Smart, and Chairman of the Responsible Advertising and Children group (RAC), which represents the interests of European Advertisers, Agencies and the Media, Paul has a unique understanding of the challenge of self-regulation within the industry across Europe. 'RAC was set up in response to concerns from Sweden some years ago about advertising to children and it promotes and encourages self-regulation.' The group meets four times a year in Brussels. 'The Responsible Advertising and Children group programme



School children playing the Media Smart 'Game of Life'.

advertising in the context of their daily lives. Paul explains 'Members are committed to developing media literacy projects worldwide, and it was from this that Media Smart was developed in the UK, based on the highly successful Canadian model of Concerned Children's Advertisers (see page ???).'

How the Media Smart programme works

The programme is by no means a eulogy to the advertising industry. As Editor of this journal, and as an experienced children's marketer, I would hope to have some understanding and experience of advertising to children. But I found I was challenged by the content of the Media Smart programme to re-think many of the issues that are taken for granted. For instance the use of celebrity, licensed characters, and the advertising of food and toys, are issues that are presented to children in a fair

was launched in 1998 under the leadership of the WFA to bring together advertisers (WFA members), agencies and the media in order to promote and defend responsible advertising to children,' he says.

The group recognizes that the debate on advertising and children is becoming increasingly important, at a national, EU and global level. Advertising to children is criticized both from a moral point of view, and also for the advertising of particular products such as fast foods, confectionary, soft drinks, toys, mobile phones etc. The group believes that advertising bans do not work, but that media literacy teaches children to understand and interpret

Recent Achievements

Media Smart has made much progress since its launch in 2002.

- 1 million UK children have been taught with Media Smart materials so far
- Over 7,200 UK primary schools use Media Smart materials - 30% of all primary schools
- Over 80% of teachers surveyed by Media Smart 'found lessons about the selling purpose of advertising extremely useful'
- Almost 90% 'want more materials about advertising for children'
- Over £2.5 million of airtime has been donated by broadcasters to show Media Smart's infomercial
- Over 50% of UK children know about Media Smart
- Media Smart is also running in Germany, Netherlands and Belgium, more European countries are to follow
- Supported by Rt Hon Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport
- Supported by Ofcom, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Department for Education and Skills and the European Commission

and open way, leaving space in lessons for consideration, open discussion, and no doubt some criticism of some of the tactics advertisers are employing.

The content of the Media Smart pack is excellent, and highly informative, and should be included in any company's review of social responsibility in the context of advertising to children.

Module 1

Media Smart provides teachers with three modules, accompanied by materials and a DVD. Module 1, called 'An introduction to Advertising', includes a plethora of information, from an exploration of what ads are, the notion of ads selling ideas, the language advertisers use, advertising research, the way in which ads are made, regulations, and the use of premiums, cartoons and consideration of the part played by celebrities in selling. It includes content on

'When ads get it wrong', and selling celebrities, and includes many familiar ads as examples.

Perhaps most interesting is the section on 'controversies'. This gives a balanced view both for and against advertising to children. To allow children aged six to 11 to be part of this debate must be a highly positive move. This section includes Malcolm Earnshaw, Director General of ISBA (Incorporated Society of British Advertisers), speaking directly to camera, telling viewers that 'ISBA has a dual role. We speak with Government, agencies, the media and others to defend the freedom of advertisers.' He goes on 'The primary role of advertising is to inform consumers about products and brands, and to encourage consumers to buy this product or this brand versus other products and brands'. Interposed on Earnshaw's explanation of the purpose of advertising we view Sue Dibb from the NCC (National Consumer Council), who tells us, equally reasonably 'We exist to protect

consumers. Advertising is part of our culture ... it's all around us ... but NCC is concerned about some aspects of advertising to children ... particularly foods that are not very healthy ... that we shouldn't eat too much of, yet they are the foods we see heavily advertised on children's TV'.

Module 2

Continuing the clear objective of treating children as informed consumers, Module 2 of the programme looks more specifically at ads aimed at children, with sections including 'Toy Advertising', with examples from Mattel of Barbie Doll and Hot Wheels commercials. There is a section on 'Toys in Fast Food Advertising' with ads from Burger King and McDonald's, and 'Selling food with favourite characters' featuring Winnie the Pooh and Kellogg's Honey B's, and 'Celebrities selling food and drink' with examples from Pepsi advertising including David Beckham and the infamous Britney, Beyonce and Pink ad.

Module 3

Jackson says 'If teachers feel uncomfortable about tackling commercial areas we also have Module 3 that deals with non-commercial areas such as government sponsored campaigns, such as the green cross code (road safety campaign).' This section too though is powerful, with 'Shock Tactics' including the emotive campaigns from Friends of the Earth and Lennox Lewis's ad for joining the police.

But I wonder how effective just showing non-commercial advertising to children would be, and I ask if there is any indication about what take up there is from teachers for non-commercial areas only. Paul believes that there is no differentiation, with teachers happy to discuss the more overtly commercial issues as much as the non-commercial areas. He adds 'And teachers have given feedback that they want it to be 'real life', meaning they want to be able to show story boards, and play read ads in the classroom'. This is confirmed later when

The current concern about advertising and marketing to children is not going to go away, and it is in the industry's interest to take an active part in encouraging children to understand fully what advertising, and marketing, is all about

Paul's team follows up our interview with more information. 'Out of the requests that we receive, 92% of requests are for all three modules, 5% of requests ask for module 1 only (An introduction to advertising), 2% of requests ask for module 1 and 2 only (An introduction to advertising/Advertising to children), and just 0.03% of requests ask for module 1 and 3 only (An introduction to advertising/Non-commercial advertising)'. Clearly teachers are keen to include all aspects of advertising when teaching children to be more aware of media messages.

Age group

I ask Paul about the age of the children involved in the programme, 'You target children aged six to 11, why not older, or younger?' He explains, 'This was the age group that we considered to be 'vulnerable consumers'. All our research shows that it is around the age of six that children become commercially aware, they begin to understand what is involved in spending their pocket money, they begin to have an understanding of advertising. Younger than that they are not as engaged in advertising, and once over 11 they are likely to be more commercially savvy. It is at that vulnerable age in primary school – ages six to 11 years – where children

Media Smart Expert Group members

- Professor David Buckingham, *Centre for the Study of Children, Youth and Media, Institute of Education*
- Dr Rebekah Willett, *Centre for the Study of Children, Youth and Media, Institute of Education*
- Jenny Grahame, *English and Media Centre*
- Michael Simons, *English and Media Centre*
- Andrew Carruthers, *Ofcom*
- Simon White, *Department for Culture Media and Sport*
- Tony Halston, *Department for Education and Skills*
- Matteo Zacchetti, *European Commission*
- Janet Moffat, *Melcombe Primary School*
- Graham Brown, *Abbott Mead Vickers BBDO*
- Anna Chapman, *Hasbro*
- Laura Simons, *independent consumer affairs consultant*

are absorbing advertising, and need to make informed judgements, that we wanted to concentrate. We monitor response by running on-line surveys with children on our website, so we have a good idea of what is working and how successful it is. We know for instance that over 50% of UK children know about Media Smart’.

Broadening the remit of Media Smart

Although fairly early days, I wonder whether Media Smart will begin to tackle other areas that are of concern for children, such as bullying, and levels of activity and healthy eating as the CCA has done in Canada. Jackson is very clear that it is important to stay with the main issue, that of informing children about advertising, and what it means.

Jackson explains, ‘In the UK there are several organisations that deal with children’s issues. The COI is the largest advertiser in the UK, and it is running some excellent campaigns together with government departments on issues such as anti-bullying and anti-smoking. There are also organisations like the FAU (Food Advertising Unit) that is looking at the way in which food and drink is being advertised to children. We feel it is important in this country therefore not to broaden it, in the way that Concerned Children’s Advertisers in Canada has, but to focus on media literacy and advertising. Currently it is TV advertising we focus on, but we will be considering including a radio module, and maybe the internet.

Companies and organisations involved in Media Smart

Although there are many companies involved in the programme, it does seem surprising that, given the current climate of concern about marketing to children, and the way in which corporate responsibility is taken very seriously, there are not more companies queuing up to take part in the Media Smart initiative. Looking at the list of companies and organisations involved there are some surprising omissions. I ask Jackson about this, and he agrees, he too would like to see more companies involved, not least because to extend to programme to all schools, extra funding is needed. ‘We are immensely grateful to our supporters, nearly 30 companies and organizations that include the Advertising Association, BSkyB, Hasbro, Kellogg’s, McDonald’s and Unilever. But we would wish that more companies would join us and help us to develop programmes in schools; this needs to be a joint effort. The issue we have is that we don’t send out packs, our packs have to be requested by schools, so we would wish for extra funding and support to help us raise the profile of Media Smart among teachers even more. We aspire to the Canadian model where,

after 15 years, around 90% of Canadian children are aware of Concerned Children's Advertisers' Jackson declares.

Government support

The Canadian model is heavily supported by government, and I wonder what support government gives in the UK. 'Media Smart was developed with the support and encouragement of Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. At first we had a softly, softly approach, but Tessa Jowell, and her department, made it clear that they did not want to steer away from commercial issues.' Paul explains. 'It is also supported by Ofcom, the Department for Education and Skills, and the European Commission.'

Media Smart supporters

- Advertising Association
- Abbott Mead Vickers BBDO
- DDB London
- British Toy and Hobby Association
- BSkyB
- Business in the Community
- Cadbury Trebor Bassett
- Jetix
- GMTV
- Hasbro
- H J Heinz Co Ltd
- Incorporated Society of British Advertisers
- Institute of Practitioners of Advertising
- ITV
- Kellogg's
- Lego
- Logistix Kids
- Masterfoods
- Mattel
- McDonald's
- Mindshare
- Procter & Gamble
- Turner Broadcasting
- Unilever
- Viacom Brand Solutions
- Young Media Ltd

Future expansion – European involvement

Finally, given Paul Jackson's experience in Europe, and his involvement in the Europe-wide Responsible Advertising and Children Group, I wonder to what extent Media Smart is involved with the rest of Europe. 'We are broadening it out to other European countries. Netherlands is well established (see page ??). Belgium is up and running, and Germany is about to launch. The intention is to spread it to all of Europe. While we are happy to support other European countries, share our knowledge, and for them to use our logo, we do not want to impose our British model on them. We are very aware that education is an emotional issue and is very much a national affair, so it is important that the programme fits in with the teaching methods of each individual country.'

With Paul Jackson at the helm, there is no doubt that Media Smart is becoming a successful model to help and encourage other countries to adopt such a scheme. The current concern about advertising and marketing to children is not going to go away, and it is in the industry's interest to take an active part in encouraging children to understand fully what advertising, and marketing, is all about. Remarking on Paul's enormous enthusiasm for the task, he tells me, 'Well, when I first mooted the idea, someone very wise said to me ' Paul, if you can't internalise the argument, don't take part. And he's right, but I have'.



Paul Jackson is Chairman of Media Smart – an industry funded media literacy programme. He is also vice president of the World Federation of Advertisers and Chairman of the Responsible Advertising and Children group which represents the interests of European advertisers, agencies and the media. www.mediasmart.org.uk