

Advertising targets, affects teens

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By Megan Dolan

Advertising is a pervasive influence on teens. In one year, teens view more than 40,000 ads on T.V. alone and are also exposed to advertising on the Internet, in magazines and even in schools.

No matter where you are or what you are doing, advertising is around you in some way. Store windows, billboards on the side of the road, Internet ads and even your favorite weekly TV show are some of the many ways advertisers reel you in.

“Advertisers utilize focus groups to see which ideas are viewed as ‘cool’,” psychology and social studies teacher Carolyn Braley said.

Teens are often the target of advertising because they have money to blow and a growing hunger for the newest “luxury” items. Teens strive to have the newest electronics, clothing and other overly advertised items.

Marketers know to target teenage issues and stresses such as body image, peer pressure and the need for acceptance.

Ads are targeted toward teens because of teens’ persistent attitude. From persuading their parents to upgrade their cell phone or to get them a new iPod with more memory to tempting a friend to buy the cute shirt that just happens to be their size too.

“Some of the products I feel teens are most targeted by their advertising are cigarettes, alcohol and the newest technology,” junior Nick Mills said. “There are so many trends and new items to keep up with.”

On average, young people are exposed to 3,000 ads per day. Advertisers target children at an earlier age in hopes of developing a preference for their product as soon as possible. Nearly \$250 billion is spent yearly on advertising to sell almost 900,000 different brands.

Teenagers, on average, spend \$155 billion per year on advertised products, also influencing their parents to spend another \$200 billion per year.

Advertising can be a costly strategy to spread word of products. A 30 second advertisement during the Super Bowl now costs \$23 million, but reaches 80 million viewers. During prime time, when children are most likely to be watching TV, nearly 16 minutes of every hour is advertising.

Tobacco manufacturers spend \$30 million per day on advertising and promoting their products. Recent studies have shown tobacco companies especially target teenagers as young as 13 years old.

Another major advertiser is the alcohol industry, spending \$5.7 billion per year. Often their ads feature young, attractive people drinking or posing with their beverages.

Another worry about advertising is media violence. By age 18 the average child is exposed to 200,000 acts of violence on television. Media violence can affect children and teens by an increase of aggression, making them less sensitive to violence and victims and can enlarge their appetite for violence in entertainment and their everyday lives.

“Advertising misguides my thoughts towards the product and makes me want something I really don’t need, like a new cell phone that was used on a TV show or a cute new shirt and pair of jeans to keep up with the newest trends,” junior Erin Conley said.

Advertising affects teens psychologically by painting an image that advertisers consider the “life.” Teens are exposed to ads that suggest they are not what the entertainment business considers attractive.

Magazines and billboards all around the world display altered pictures of models who have been starved to a size zero, leaving girls to believe that it is the only form of beautiful.

Advertising can be harmful to teens by dwindling their self esteem and ability to be themselves. Teens are made to believe they need the newest technology and clothes to fit in at school and with their friends.

“Most advertisements contain a certain image to attract viewers, they present some ‘ideal’ and ‘unrealistic’ image of a teenager,” Braley said. “According to a PBS documentary entitled ‘Merchants of Cool,’ advertisers also continually attempt to come up with the latest ‘cool’ image to attract teenagers.”

It seems advertising companies have strategies in place that target teens, ensuring that their products are desirable and a must have item.