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# Advertising to New Parents -- An Examination of the Ways Select Children's Product Manufacturers Attract New Parents as Potential Customers

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ADVERTISING TO NEW PARENTS -- AN EXAMINATION OF THE WAYS SELECT  
CHILDREN'S PRODUCT MANUFACTURERS ATTRACT NEW PARENTS AS  
POTENTIAL CUSTOMERS

BY

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
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Seton Hall University  
2005

ADVERTISING TO NEW PARENTS -- AN EXAMINATION OF THE WAYS SELECT  
CHILDREN'S PRODUCT MANUFACTURERS ATTRACT NEW PARENTS AS  
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ABSTRACT

Do parents respond more to television, or is email a more effective advertising vehicle? This thesis examines four of the advertising methods used by the children's entertainment product industry to determine the ones that are most effective in capturing the attention of prospective consumers. Children's product manufacturers, like all other consumer goods manufacturers, must rely on varied methods to capture the attention of potential customers and to retain existing customers. These companies spend large amounts of promotional dollars to attract buyers. Economic conditions warrant that marketing dollars be spent judiciously. There is little room for deploying methods that won't meet the objective. The focus of this research is to look at four of the methods used by the children's entertainment product industry - Direct Mail, Magazines, Newspapers, Television -- to determine the ones that work best.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank his daughter Zoe for inspiring the focus of this research and his wife Carla for standing behind him during his Seton Hall journey.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

Having a baby is one of the biggest, if not the biggest lifestage event. A new child will change a person's or a couple's shopping habits and priorities. As such, new parents are open to new products that can enhance their lives and their babies' lives (Loyle, 2001). Manufacturers of products for babies and young children are well aware of this reality. Despite a dip in average retail prices, the toy industry is a \$20 billion a year sector (Palmeri, 2004), with the infant and preschool category alone responsible for some \$2.6 billion in revenue (Toy Industry Association, 2004). Toys and entertainment products are just one group of items parents purchase for their children. Overall, some estimates indicate that the average couple in the U.S. spends \$14,000 on baby products within the child's first year (Cole, 2004). If parents view a product as high-quality, then price is not an issue (Stanley, 2000). Mothers, in particular are much more driven by rational and functional need, such as product safety and integrity, time-saving convenience and price. But Moms also seek higher rewards, wanting to please their family with the things that they buy for

them. The emotional gratification of their pleasure is an important part of their decision making processes (Lawrence, 2004).

"One of the greatest pleasures of modern parenting is the act of giving fresh and unexpected gifts to a surprised toddler," writes Gary Cross in the Journal of Consumer Research. (Cross, 2002). "Parents will self-sacrifice," says Mattel chief executive Robert Eckert in a 2001 Wall Street Journal article. In addition, Eckert states that the children's entertainment product sector is an industry that tends to hold up during economic downturns (Bannon, 2001).

Children's product manufacturers, like all other consumer goods manufacturers, must rely on varied methods to capture the attention of potential customers and to retain existing customers. Some parents, depending on their age and economic position are heavy radio listeners, while others rely more on print media for information (Merli, 1998). There is research that claims 66% of mothers in the U.S. spend more money with companies that send them useful and relevant e-mail messages, suggesting that e-mail marketing is a valuable way to reach this segment (Lucid Marketing and BSM Media, 2004). Numerous studies have shown an economic and a social dimension of attitude toward advertising. The economic dimension generally includes favorable beliefs such as advertising provides valuable information. The



social dimension carries criticisms such as advertising provides false or misleading information and persuades people to buy things they don't need (Rose, Bush, & Kahle, 1998).

This author is particularly interested in the ways toy and other entertainment product manufacturers market and advertise their goods. As the parent of a young child, this author is exposed to the various tactics these companies use to capture a positive response. Additionally, the author is employed in business-to-business (B-to-B) marketing and is interested in learning more about the methods and tactics of consumer marketing. Specifically, the author wants to learn if the B-to-B practices such as targeting potential customers, designing customized messaging and testing various marketing methods play the same role and yield the same results in consumer marketing.

#### Research Problem

Like their counterparts in other industries, marketers at companies that manufacture products for children under 5 years of age are responsible for designing and executing campaigns aimed at driving sales. These companies spend large amounts of promotional dollars to attract buyers. Their primary targets are the parents of these young children. Economic conditions warrant that marketing dollars be spent judiciously. There is little room for deploying methods that won't meet the objective. The focus of this research is to look at the various methods used in

the children's entertainment product industry to determine the ones that work best.

#### Research Question

What marketing methods are the most effective in securing a response from first time parents of children under five years of age?

#### Subsidiary Questions

As a way to accurately gauge which marketing methods are most effective, the author will also attempt to answer the following questions:

- 1.) Do the most effective marketing methods change for parents based on income?
- 2.) Does loyalty to a particular brand have any effect?
- 3.) How effective in capturing a response are the many new parent or first time parent product checklists appearing in parenting oriented periodicals?

The author will respond to these questions in the review of the literature and through an analysis of data gathered in a survey of parents who fit the parameters of the research question.

#### Definition of Terms

Following are the author's definitions of the key terms that will appear throughout this research.

Broadcast Advertising: Paid communications promoting goods or services that are broadcast over radio or television.

Direct Mail: Communications promoting a product or service delivered via US Mail in a printed form, or communications delivered to a recipient via e-mail.

Effective: Capturing the reader or listener's attention and causing the reader or listener to take action (see Response).

Entertainment Products: This category includes toys, videos and books.

Marketing Methods: Any paid form of non-personal presentation of ideas, goods or services by an identified sponsor.

Print Advertising: Paid communications promoting goods or services that appear either in newspapers or magazines.

Response: The process of answering a call to action. For the purpose of this research this "response" can be either visiting a website, calling a company, submitting a card or e-mail to get more information, or visiting a store.

#### Limitations

The marketing methods examined in the research will be limited to:

- 1.) Direct Mail
- 2.) Print Advertising

### 3.) Broadcast Advertising

The range of products examined in this research will be limited to entertainment products.

Part of this research will include an examination of data gathered during a survey. Individuals considered for this survey will be limited to:

- 1.) Married couples with at least one child under five years of age
- 2.) Combined income ranging between \$60,000 and \$120,000
- 3.) Both parents in the age range 20 to 40

Additionally, this research will only examine methods that solicit the greatest response. This research will not look at whether or not the response leads to a purchase.

### Author's Hypothesis

The author believes that marketing professionals in the children's entertainment product industry, like those in other sectors, are charged with creating campaigns that help their respective companies drive revenue. To that end, these professionals need to stay in tune with what messages make customers take an interest in their products and equally as important, how these customers choose to receive these messages. There was a time when a magazine advertisement or a television commercial or a printed piece delivered in the mail was all that

was required to capture a potential customer's attention. Now, there is a wide range of channels through which to deliver messages and a growing generation of younger parents for whom the Internet is a primary information source. The personalities, likes and dislikes of parents - just as is the case with all other consumers - are diverse. One person's informative direct mail piece is another person's junk mail. One person's favorite television advertisement is another person's distraction.

It is the hypothesis of this author that research will point out and survey data will confirm that there is no one comprehensive, most effective marketing method available to children's entertainment product manufacturers and those successful marketers in this industry rely on a variety of methods to capture a response from potential customers.

## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Background

There is a large amount of published research available centering on how consumers respond to the universe of marketing messages and what factors can lead to a consumer's decision to respond. Most of this research addresses the decision to buy or not buy a product or service, which is outside the scope of this paper. However, it is valuable to examine this research as a way to capture insights into overall consumer behavior and how certain behaviors and attitudes toward marketing and advertising can relate to the areas this paper will examine. The author's key findings are best divided into two groups:

- 1.) Nostalgic trust and credibility - Brand loyalty
- 2.) Consumer research

The Nostalgic trust and credibility - Brand loyalty section will include research from the body of literature that examines how a parent's childhood memories influence the choices they make when considering products for their children. This section will also review research that investigates parent's brand loyalty to the products and spokespersons of their childhood. The Consumer research section will show how children's

entertainment product manufacturers conduct focus groups and test their marketing messages with members of their target audience.

#### Key Findings - Nostalgic trust and credibility - Brand loyalty

There is Journal of Advertising research that suggests that corporate credibility - a consumer's view of a company - is a variable affecting consumer response patterns. The research goes on to state that the effectiveness of a company's advertising, regardless of the method, will be affected by the company's perceived corporate credibility (Goldsmith, Lafferty, & Newell, 2000). Having an established brand is an important factor in how parents respond to marketing messages. Parents trust a brand (Stanley, 2000).

Despite the technological advances of the day, parents are drawn to items that they remember from their childhood. Traditional toys account for two-thirds of the overall toy market (Fonda, 2001). The Beanie Babies phenomenon of the 1990s is a clear example of how a product reminds parents of their childhood memories of low-tech stuffed animals, making them more inclined to respond to messages in support of these products (Morris & Martin, 2000). The 1980s big seller - Cabbage Patch Kids - remains a sentimental item for parents whose memories of

their childhood toys are the inspiration for the choices they - as adults -- make for their children (Morell, 2004).

Tapping into this nostalgia are those companies that use spokespersons or characters who have survived several generations. This is another method designed to remind parents of the brands they might have used and trusted as a child. Although there appears to be a positive relationship between the use of spokespersons and favorable brand attitudes, few studies have attempted to specifically identify the types of character qualities responsible for the relationship (Garrelson & Niedrich, 2004).

According to Julie Halpin, CEO of the Geppetto Group, a children's entertainment products advertising and marketing agency, the key to capturing a parent's response is a combination of the timeless and the timely. The timeless taps into an underlying emotional, psychological need, while the timely relies on current social trends and socio-economic factors (Stanley, 2000). Additionally, there is evidence that the brands a parent held an emotional connection with as a child will be a brand that parent is attracted to as an adult. (Comiteau, 2003).



## Key Findings - Consumer Research

Current research reveals that few industries have been as successful as the juvenile products industry in attracting consumers. And the ways companies in this industry market their wares are as diverse as the products themselves (Duff, 2002). As a way to secure long time customer loyalty, some children's entertainment product companies leverage relationship marketing, shifting the focus of their marketing efforts from marketing mix manipulation for the purpose of immediate -- not always sustainable -- revenue, to those efforts that focus on longer-term relationships (Kotler, 1991). Other companies build relationships by sending potential customers coupons, free samples, direct mail pieces and links to Web sites that provide them with something they desperately need: intelligence about caring for an infant (Hein, 2003).

To gain intelligence on prospective customers, juvenile products companies conduct research to help them determine what form of media to use. Educational toy manufacturer Baby Einstein went directly to parents, in the form of focus groups; to ask them how they should best promote their product through advertising. They learned that their prospective customers would be more responsive to print advertising that wasn't focused entirely on the product, but how the product helped make for happier babies (Hein, 2003). Nigel Jones of the London based

advertising agency Claydon Heeley amplifies the view that effective messages are those that illustrate end-user benefits, "The general rule when targeting parents is to always provide the benefits for both the child and parent. Dual benefits are part of the marketing mix" (Jones, 2004). Mattel also holds focus groups to gain insights into what advertising will be most effective. In some cases, the company even learns whether or not the product is ready for release through feedback from their focus groups (Bannon, 2001). Companies whose marketing methods include email marketing with links to integrated Web pages successfully increase their credibility with customers by positioning their companies as convenient one-stop shopping sources for busy parents (Neuborne, 2001). For the newest parents, direct mail is an effective method to reach them. Once they return home with their new baby, they are generally receptive to the information that companies send to their door (Hein, 2003). "New parents are really at a stage where they're receptive to information, but they are also bombarded with it. The challenge is not to appear to be a product shill," says Ira Hernowitz, general manager for Playskool (Hein, 2003).

Some additional examples, Crayola tests e-mail marketing pitches on small groups of parents to determine what messages work best for a broader audience (Almquist & Wyner, 2001). Fisher-Price relies heavily on broadcast advertising to reach

younger mothers, a sector they say makes up 65% of the market (Kim, 2003).

A proliferation of media choices is what lead Lego marketing leaders to use various media to reach parents. Busy parents get their information from various sources and traditional television advertising is no longer enough (Frutkin, 2004). Officials at Mattel say television advertising is no longer a primary outlet for marketing messages due to increasing advertising costs and evidence that the return on investment is not always enough to justify those costs (Stanley, 2000).

While TV remains the best way to reach the masses, those audiences have become so fragmented that it's difficult for advertisers to spend enormous sums without knowing more precisely who's seeing their spots (Keegan, 2004). Targeted marketing, including direct mail tied to a related Internet page is leading the trend away from mass advertising - television advertising in particular. Marketers following this course say this method of audience refinement is more effective than delivering a message to as many people as possible (Wharton School University of Pennsylvania, 2004).

As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, new parenthood is a lifestage event. Children's entertainment product manufacturers, to be effective, must target audiences who are in the midst of this lifestyle event. A single woman

without kids isn't interested in children entertainment product ads, just as a woman with young kids is less likely to have time for an ad featuring a new nail polish color (Erskine & Shular, 2004).

#### Key Findings - Summary

Generally speaking, the effectiveness of consumer marketing hinges on how well companies research their audiences and tailor their approaches. In an interview with the Direct Marketing Association, Mary-Kay Harrity, an executive with Yankelovich Partners marketing services consultants, says, "Consumers are wary of marketers invading their personal space and infringing on their time." She adds, "Marketers need to invest in understanding the people they're targeting" (Harrity, 2003). Consumer marketing is a science in figuring out the right way to send the right message to the right person at the right time, a trend becoming known as micromarketing (Bianco, 2004).

In the juvenile products arena, companies and their marketers approach their advertising as a way to position sources of information as new parents begin to pick their favorite brands (Loyle, 2001). Leveraging direct mail, a company might use the approach of writing copy aimed at starting a conversation around a particular product. The goal being to

capture a response after the prospect has had time to think about the need for this particular product (Harrity, 2003).

Another argument in support of direct mail, research indicating that direct mail with links to related Web content further strengthens direct mail's value as an effective marketing method. Availability of one-stop shopping and access to customized Web sites are attractive features that cannot be ignored (Erdem & Utecht, 2002). The convenience of the Web's 24x7 availability is why nearly 10% of all retail toy and children's video purchases are done online. To get their message out, for example, Educational products website SmarterKids.com spends more than \$18 million dollars on marketing and Toysmart.com a joint venture between Walt Disney and Holt Educational Outlet spend more than \$25 million dollars on marketing expenses (Bannon, 2000).

There was a time when children's product manufactures relied solely on print advertising in publications such as Ladies Home Journal, McCalls and Redbook. During this same time in history, broadcast advertising messages were based on motherhood and domestic life (Katz, 2003). Those messages have changed just as sole reliance on those methods has. Research supports the author's hypothesis that children's product manufacturers leverage the full spectrum of available marketing methods to capture a response from their target audience and

there is no one most effective method. Some companies may be successful with and rely heavily on broadcast or print advertisements, while other companies depend on direct mail.

In conclusion, it appears there is no one most effective marketing method. The research illustrates two important patterns, a move away from mass advertising and the end of television's dominance as the most effective method to deliver a message. Children's entertainment product marketers leverage a variety of methods to meet their changing business needs. Needs that parallel their customers' needs for information and the changing ways they access this information.

## Chapter 3

### SURVEY RESEARCH

#### Introduction

As discussed in the REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE chapter of this research, it appears there is no one most effective marketing method that children's product manufacturers use to capture a response from the parents of young children. Companies in this industry use various approaches in marketing their products with seemingly no clear reliance on a particular method. The author believes that one way to answer the question posed in this research is to survey members of a target audience.

The purpose of this survey is to learn from a sample of targeted individuals the marketing methods to which they are most responsive.

#### Research Subjects

About 40 percent of the 10,000 babies entering the world each day in America are born to new parents, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta (Hein, 2003). It would be a project far outside the scope of this research to try to capture even a sample of such a large pool of prospects. However, the author does believe it is possible to gain meaningful insight from a smaller, targeted audience.

The candidates for this survey will be individuals that fall into the following profile:

- 1.) Married couples with at least one child under five years of age
- 2.) Combined income ranging between \$60,000 and \$120,000
- 3.) Both parents in the age range 20 to 40

Once again, this isn't an all encompassing list of possible demographics, but it will be enough to get a snapshot of opinions.

Potential responders will be solicited from the author's friends and acquaintances and select new parent Internet message boards. The initial number of potential responders and an anticipated response rate will be determined following best practice research to determine how many subjects are required to meet the target response rate. The author plans to begin testing this survey in mid January 2005 and launching it in early February 2005. The survey will run through mid March 2005.

#### Design & Methodology

Leveraging both a qualitative and quantitative approach, a mixed research design will be the framework of this survey and its accompanying analysis. The quantitative elements will be the actual questions that will make up the survey (see APPENDIX). The qualitative components will be interviews with select



responders to gain more detail, context and examples of how they were influenced by a particular marketing method. The author will also interview officials at select manufactures to learn what marketing methods they rely on in an attempt to validate what is captured in the surveys. Before distributing the survey to the pool of potential responders, the author will deliver to a small number of subjects a test version of the survey accompanied by a feedback survey. The feedback survey will contain several open-ended questions. This feedback will help the author determine if the survey questions are clear and easy to understand.

The survey will begin with six demographic questions to ensure the responder is qualified to answer the survey based on the author's target audience criteria. Next there will be three questions -- using the Likert scale -- that focus on the research subject. The last question is intended to gather insights into the responders' familiarity with five children's entertainment product companies. These are the companies where the author will seek to compare and validate data captured in this survey.

#### Data Analysis & Reporting

The data gathered in this survey will either help bolster the author's hypothesis that there is no one effective marketing method that causes parents to respond or it will help disprove

it by pointing to one method deemed most effective by a majority of responders. The author will also attempt to identify any trends in the data. For example, if there are similarities in the answers from responders in the lower income brackets (\$60k to \$80k).

To report the data, the author will use bar graphs to illustrate the findings. All raw data (except names, e-mail addresses and other identifiers) will also be included in narrative form to provide a more detailed view of the results. The answers to the specific questions as to what marketing methods are most effective will be presented to officials at select children's product manufacturers in an attempt to compare this data to what the companies' internal research shows are their most effective marketing methods.

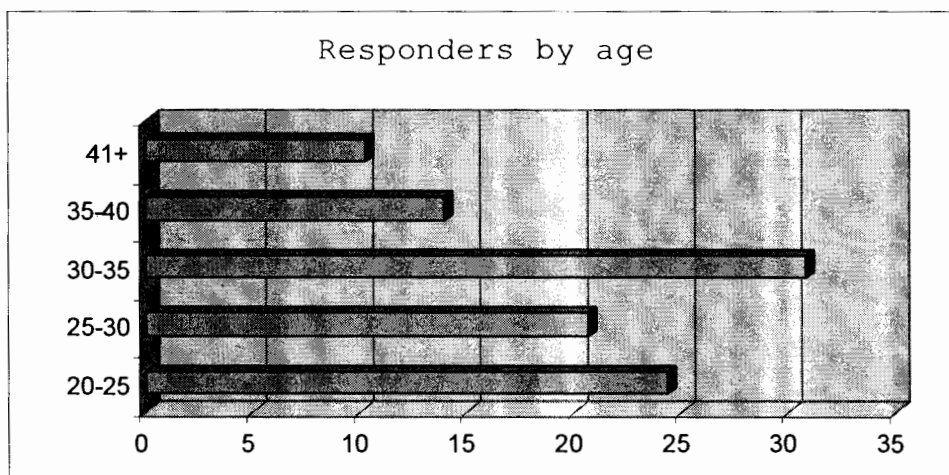
## Chapter 4

## ANALYSIS OF THE SURVEY DATA

## Introduction

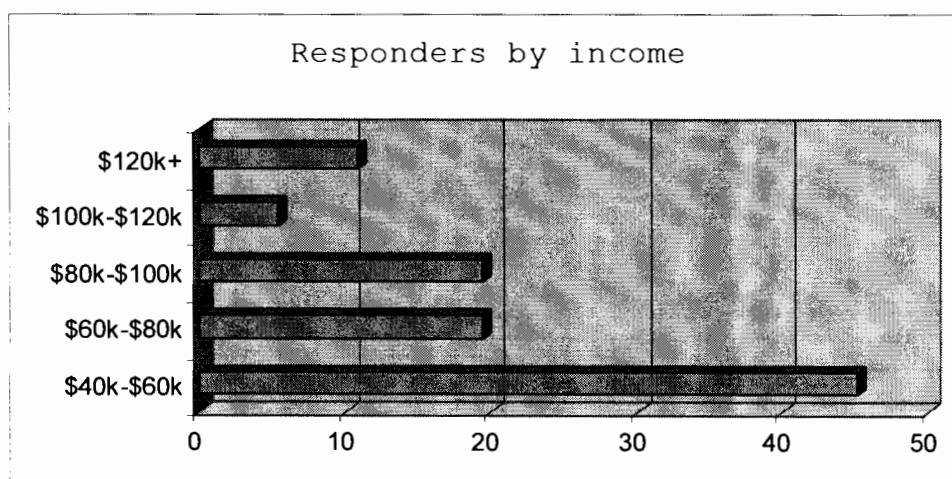
There is a body of literature that supports the author's hypothesis that children's entertainment product companies test and leverage various advertising vehicles to capture customers' attention. The purpose of this survey was to capture data that would either support or disprove the author's hypothesis.

A total of 108 responders, who are parents of at least one child under 5 years of age, completed the survey. The responders ranged in age from 20 to 41+. The majority of responders were in the 30-35 age bracket (30.8%), while the responders in the 41+ range were the in the minority (10.3%). Responders in the 25-30 age bracket made up 20.6% of the total and those in the 35-40 age range 14% (Table 1).

**Table 1**

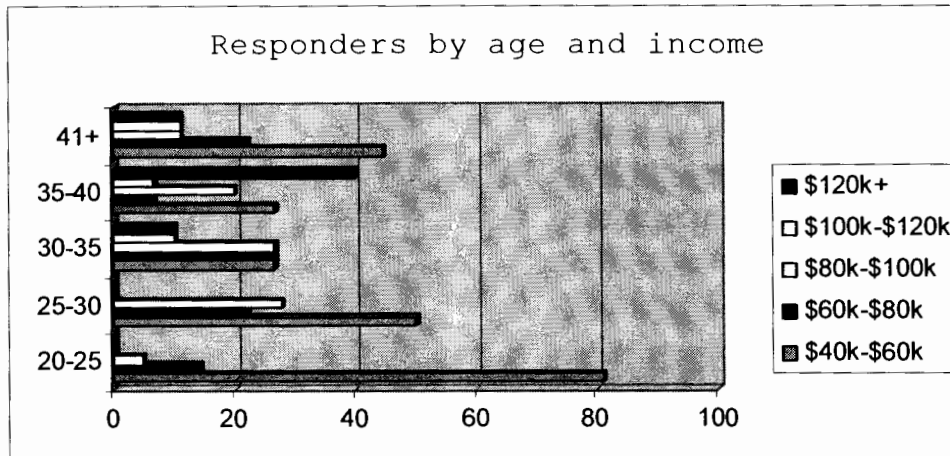
The income range of respondents was \$40,000 through \$120,000+, with the majority residing in the \$40,000-\$60,000 grouping (45.2%). The fewest responders were in the \$100,000-\$120,000 income range (5.4%). Responders in the \$60,000-\$80,000 income range made up 19.4% of the total, \$80,000-\$100,000 were also 19.4% of the total. Responders in the \$120,000+ category were 10.8% of the total (Table 2).

**Table 2**



It's no surprise that 81% of responders in the youngest age range (20-25) are also in the lowest income range (\$40,000-\$60,000). On the other end of the income scale, 40% of the responders in the 35-40 age group were in the \$120,000+ income range (Table 3)

Table 3



This survey was conducted over a 6-week period. Although some responders were drawn from the author's friends, family and co-workers, the majority of the responders were subscribers to 3 community of interest Web sites targeted to parents:

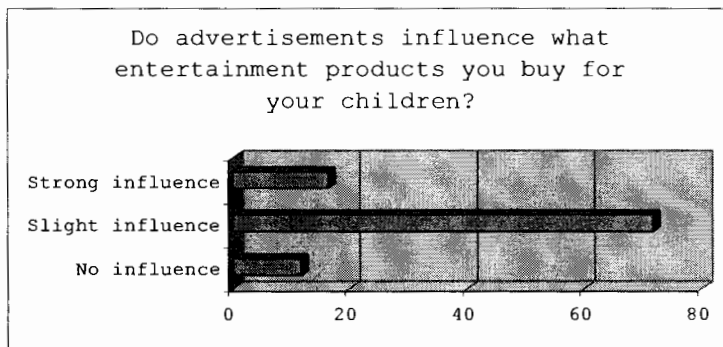
Babycenter.com, Parentingclub.com, and Todaysparent.com.

Responders were given a link to Surveymonkey.com, a website where they were able to complete the survey.

#### Data Review

Following four initial questions designed to capture demographic information came the first question aimed at setting the stage, "Do advertisements influence what entertainment products you buy for your children?" A total of 88.3% answered either slight influence or strong influence (Table 4).

**Table 4**



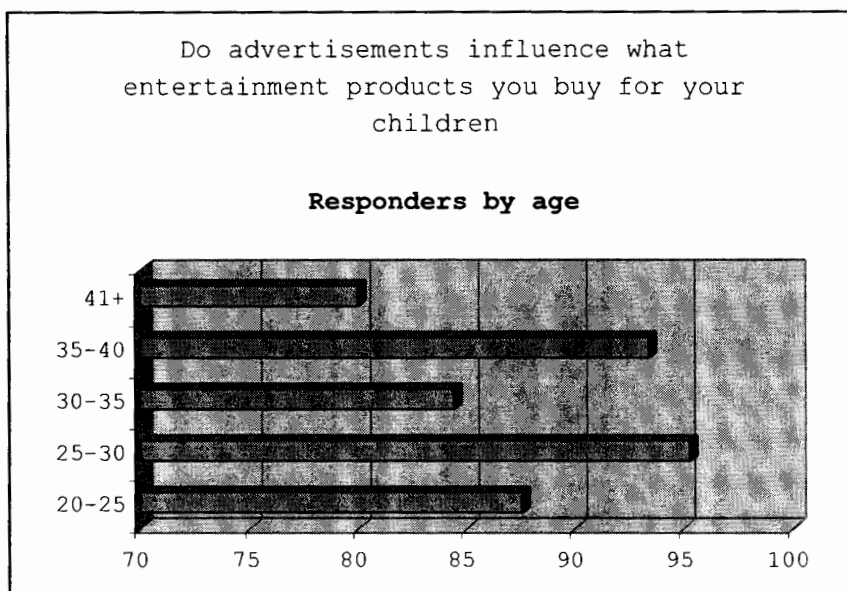
Responders answering no influence made up 11.7% of the total. Those responders who answered "no influence" were asked to explain what did influence their choice. Table 5 is a list of those responses. These answers are consistent with research that suggests that beyond traditional advertising methods, children's product manufacturers rely on positive word of mouth recommendations (Garrelson & Niedrich, 2004).

**Table 5**

Quality of product
Toy testing council reviews, recommendations from friends, child's interests
If the toy is appropriate and educational
Feedback from friends and family, other kids who've enjoyed the products, product packaging description and information, amazon.com and other site reviews
Word of mouth
Price, educational matter, ease of use
The content of the actual product, advisory labels, reviews on Amazon and Epinions as well as personal recommendations
Other people's opinions who have used the products
What catches our eye while in a store.

It is interesting to note that the oldest range of responders (41+) were influenced least by advertisements (80%) Responders in the 25-30 age range were influenced the most (95.3%). Responders 20-25 came in at 87.5%. Those in the 30-35 age range 84.4% and those 35-40 made up 93.4% (Table 6).

**Table 6**

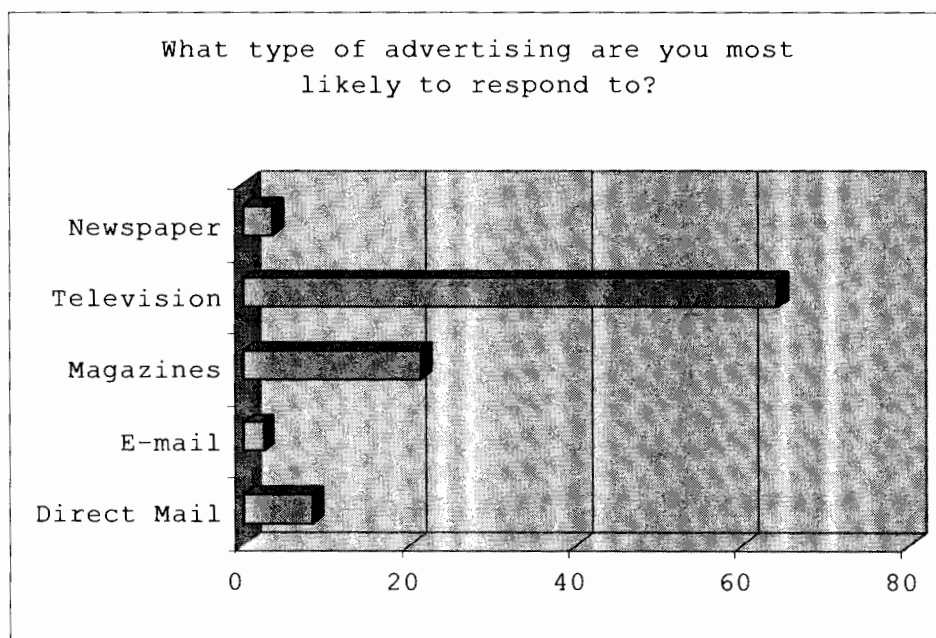


Based on the review of the literature and the author's experience in business-to-business marketing, the author had some expectations as to what the survey data would reveal. It is the author's personal experience in business-to-business marketing; that it is not uncommon for prospective customers to respond to various advertising methods. Some prospective customers respond to print advertisements in trade journals, others respond to targeted e-mail advertising messages. This personal experience makes up the basis for the author's

hypothesis and it is what lead to an assumption that survey data would confirm there is no one most effective marketing method available to children's entertainment product manufacturers and successful marketers in this industry rely on a variety of methods to capture a response from potential customers. This assumption is bolstered by the results of the literature review, where it appears there is no one most effective marketing method.

As illustrated in Table 7, the author's assumption that there is no one most effective marketing method was proven somewhat inaccurate. Among those surveyed, 64.3% say television is the most influential advertising method.

**Table 7**

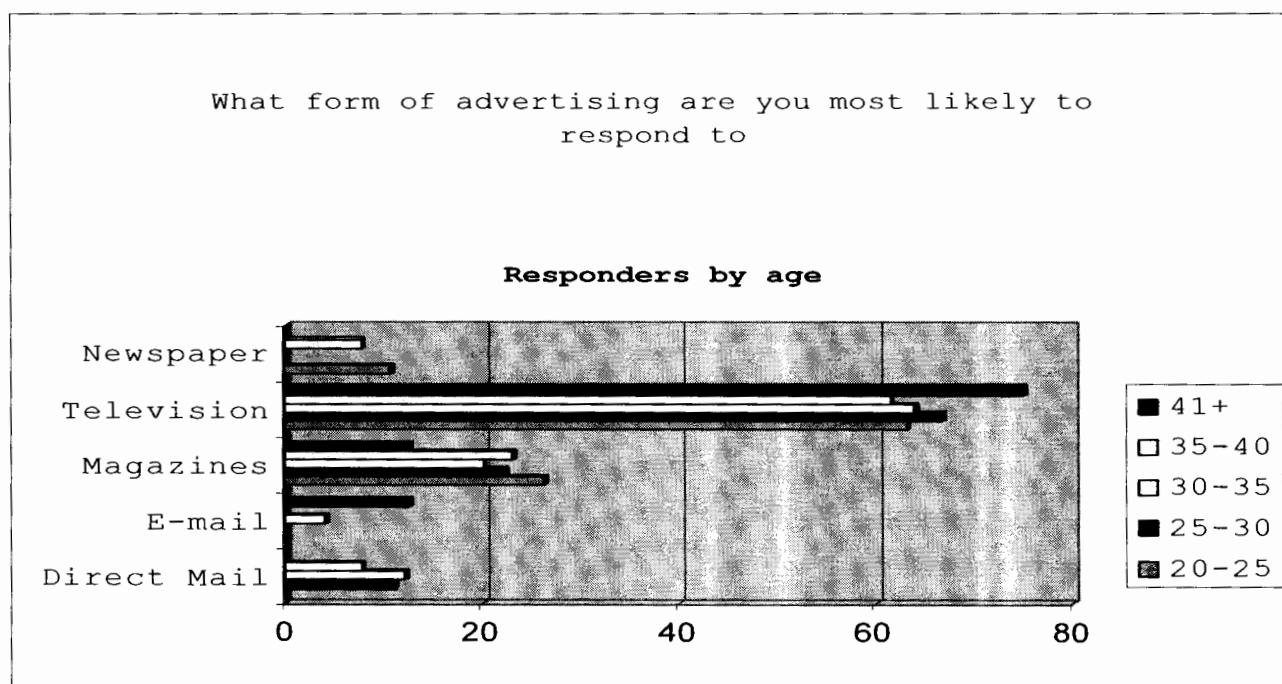


The three print advertising methods - newspaper, magazine and direct mail - combined (33.3%) lagged significantly behind



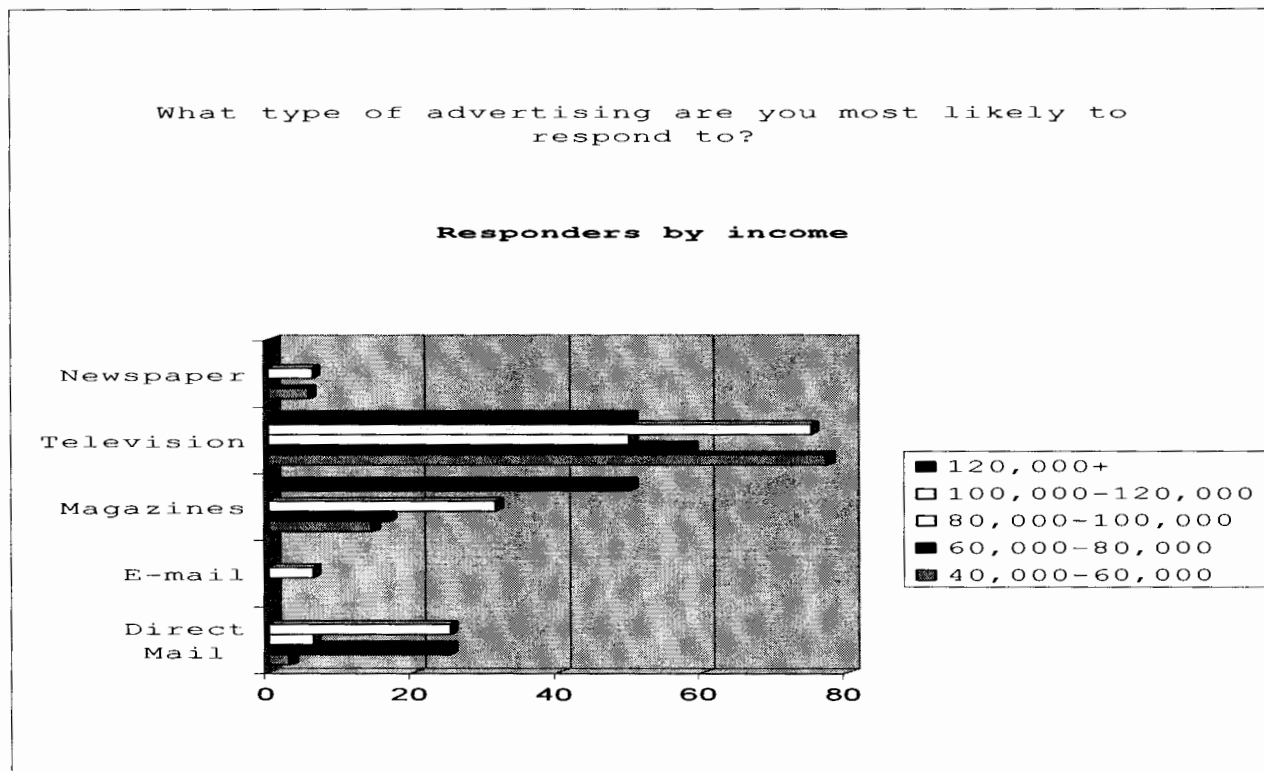
television. This means approximately 66% of these responders say they are most responsive to television advertising. Another interesting data point are the results according to age, which show that the oldest group of responders (41+) is the most influenced by television advertisements (75%), while the group just below this (35-40) were least influenced by television advertisements (61.5%) (Table 8).

**Table 8**



Reviewing these data according to income (Table 9), the results show that responders in the lowest income bracket (\$40k-\$60k) say they are most influenced by television advertisements (77.1%). How individuals respond to advertising based on demographic indicators such as age and socio-economic criteria is far beyond the scope of this research; however, this would be an interesting area to research in greater detail.

Table 9



The author is not prepared to say that advertising vehicles such as Newspapers, Magazines, E-mail and Direct Mail have no value; however, the results of this survey do contradict one key research finding that television is losing its dominance as a vehicle for advertising.

## Chapter 5

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## Review of Findings

One of the goals driving the author's interest in the focus of this research is a desire to capture some initial background on consumer marketing and how it differs and how it is similar to business-to-business marketing. The author is employed in business-to-business (B-to-B) marketing and is interested in learning more about the methods and tactics of consumer marketing. Is one of those tactics testing the effectiveness of different advertising vehicles, as is the case in business-to-business marketing? One assumption the author had at the beginning of this research project was that he would find that the children's entertainment product segment leverages more than one vehicle for getting promotional information to prospective customers. This view is based on first hand knowledge. As the parent of a young child, the author receives countless advertisements from children's product manufacturers. These messages come in the form of television ads, catalogs and email communication and the author doesn't particularly view one in any higher regard than another. Of course the author -- as a practitioner of marketing communications -- tends to read everything that comes his way. Another example of the author's first hand knowledge serving as a factor in the formulation of this assumption is the concept of leveraging a variety of

advertising channels to capture a prospective customer's attention. In one particular case, a print advertisement directed a prospective customer to a Web site where they had the opportunity to sign up for more information via e-mail or provide a phone number if they were interested in being contacted by a salesperson. In this real example, various methods were used in an integrated form to accomplish the same goal.

The literature review detailed in Chapter 2 of this research validates the author's view that there is no one most effective way to reach parents. In fact, it appears many of the children's entertainment product companies follow the same integrated approach outlined above. An integrated advertising and marketing campaign is launched that enables these companies to take advantage of several vehicles to reach their audiences.

The most interesting revelation in this research is an apparent inconsistency between the literature and the data gathered in a survey of parents who buy these products. The survey points out that a majority of those questioned are most influenced by television advertising. Additionally, the author had a conversation with Steve Ferry who is the Senior Manager for Consumer Contact at Binney-Smith, the parent company of Crayola.

According to Mr. Ferry, the results captured in the author's survey are consistent with what he sees in the marketplace. Television is the most effective way to capture a response from parents. When asked about other forms of

advertising, Mr. Ferry said that Binney-Smith is moving toward Internet advertising and their print advertising is limited to catalogs, produced by retailers such as Toys-R-Us. One final point, that is somewhat outside the scope of this research, but valuable to note. According to Mr. Ferry, Binney-Smith only targets parents when promoting products for children under 5 years of age. He says once a child turns 5, they turn their focus away from parents and onto children, because at that point, "toys are a kid's request."

The author attempted to reach executives at other children's entertainment product companies, but was only successful in making contact with Binney-Smith. A question for Mr. Ferry, or any of his industry colleagues might be to ask why are the advertising and marketing trade journals reporting so heavily on how these companies leverage various advertising channels, when it appears only one is most effective? Another question for those in the industry could be, why are other advertising channels beyond television are even considered, when it appears television is the most effective? The questions would be valuable to include in future research and future industry executive interviews. One could argue that the reason these companies continue to utilize the advertising vehicles with lesser impact is based on a need to maintain visibility in those media. Using the survey data as an example, there were no advertising vehicles that failed to capture at least a small percentage of responders who viewed it as effective.

Of course the 108 responders in the author's survey represent just a small sample of the total addressable market for children's entertainment products; however, it is a large enough sample to set the stage for additional questions and future research.

#### Future Research

The inconsistency between the data gathered in the survey and the author's hypothesis, a view bolstered by a body of literature leads to the question: if the literature is to be believed, and children's product manufacturers leverage various advertising channels while prospective customers are only responsive to one, why do these companies continue to test and use anything other than television? More specifically, why would these companies incur the expenses associated with other forms of advertising if those funds could be better spent on one channel - television?

Should the author pursue another advanced academic degree, these unanswered questions could serve as a platform for more, in-depth research, perhaps conducted over a longer time frame. Additional executive interviews would be necessary along with engaging a larger pool of survey responders. As a work of professional research, the author might focus on one specific issue such as television's effectiveness compared to other advertising vehicles. Potential outlets for this type of research might be marketing journals or marketing periodicals.

Other ways to approach supplementing this research would be more detailed investigations into how people respond to advertising based on such demographics as age and socio-economic indicators such as income. Such research could prove valuable to children's product manufacturers, who as the literature suggests, are constantly testing their audiences to learn what messages and approaches work best. Another way to enhance this research could be to look at other children's products beyond entertainment products. Would the research and survey data be the same if more expensive items were reviewed such as car seats, strollers or baby furniture? One final way to take the next step with this research is to go beyond the scope of this thesis and launch an investigation into the advertising methods that are most effective in getting prospective customers to purchase a product. It would be interesting to see if there is a difference between the advertising vehicles that capture one's attention and those that actually capture one's dollars. Do people rely on television for their initial information then gather additional information from printed ads or the Internet? Or is television just effective enough to get a prospective customer into a store where an even more effective sales person closes the deal?

#### Recommendations

The implications of any of the future research options detailed above, in the author's opinion, are all positive. The outcome of this research, particularly the results of the survey, lead the author to recommend that these companies take a

similar look at the effectiveness of the advertising channels they are using. Research that clearly reveals an advertising vehicle that is most effective in capturing a prospective customer's attention would be very valuable to executives at children's entertainment product manufacturers. It could help them plan their advertising budget and provide a meaningful tool in negotiating price when purchasing what the research indicates are the less effective advertising channels. Taking a more optimistic view, these companies could take the money saved by moving away from ineffective advertising vehicles and apply those funds toward lowering their product costs.

#### Conclusion

The question the author sought to answer in this research is, "What marketing methods are the most effective in securing a response from first time parents of children under five years of age?" The author's literature review and survey data provide different answers to this question. It appears this research may have opened the door to more questions and provided more opportunities for additional, supplemental research. This wasn't the author's intent at the beginning of this project; however, the author doesn't consider this an unfavorable outcome. In the short term, current professional interests and in the longer term, future academic pursuits will provide the outlet for the author to explore some of the questions borne from this research.



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## APPENDIX

## Survey questions:

1. Are you married?

Yes

No

2. What is your age?

20-25

25-30

30-35

35-40

41+

3. What is your total household income?

\$40,000-\$60,000

\$60,000-\$80,000

\$80,000-\$100,000

\$100,000-\$120,000

\$120,000+

4. Do you have children?

(If not, please skip to question 12)

Yes

No

5. How many children do you have?

6. What is the age of your youngest child?

7. How familiar are you with the following brands?

Crayola –

Not familiar

Somewhat familiar

Familiar

One of my child's favorites

Fisher-Price

Not familiar

Somewhat familiar

Familiar

One of my child's favorites

LeapFrog

Not familiar

Somewhat familiar

Familiar

One of my child's favorites

Mattel

Not familiar

Somewhat familiar

Familiar

One of my child's favorites

Sony Wonder

Not familiar

Somewhat familiar

Familiar

One of my child's favorites

8. Do advertisements influence what entertainment products you buy for your child(ren)?

1. No influence

2. Slight influence

3. Strong influence

9. If you answered "no influence" on Question 8, please explain what does influence your choice.

10. If you answered "slight influence" or "strong influence" on Question 8, what type of advertising are you most likely to respond to?

Advertisements received in the mail

Advertisements received via email

Advertisements appearing in magazines

Advertisements seen on television

Advertisements appearing in

newspapers

11. How influenced are you by products appearing in new parent checklists?

No influence

Slight influence

Strong influence

12. Would you be interested in receiving the results of this research?

Yes. My email address is:

No