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By: Julian Lee

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Children's junk food ads 'made for adults'

Julian Lee
 MARKETING EDITOR

ADVERTISERS are bypassing rules aimed at curbing junk food marketing to children by claiming their ads are targeting adults, an analysis claims.

The industry ad watchdog dismissed complaints about ads for Oreo, Smarties and LCMs rice bars after accepting manufacturers' claims that their ads were aimed at adults, despite the presence of children in the television commercials.

Ads for chips, sweets or fizzy drinks are covered by industry guidelines only if their content is "directed primarily at children".

Health campaigners such as the Obesity Policy Coalition say the rulings by the board of the Advertising Standards Bureau have made it uncertain what constitutes an ad for children.

The coalition's senior legal adviser, Sarah MacKay, said the lack of definition in the rules had

CRUNCH TIME

The Oreos advertisement THEME
Two boys play a game with their Oreos by pulling it apart and seeing who gets the side with the icing.

WHAT THE BOARD SAID
The ad was more likely to be taken as being directed to adults who look back with amusement at school behaviour

allowed a loophole for advertisers to emerge. The Oreo and Smarties ads were pulled after they were found to have been aired during children's programs, thereby breaching the industry rule that says only ads for healthy foods can be shown in children's programs.

"It seems an absurd outcome that an ad that only features children playing a childlike game [as



from boys and girls ... Agreed the ad would be attractive to children but that it is not "directed primarily at children".

in the Oreo ad] that is shown in *Dora the Explorer* is not captured by the code," Ms MacKay said. "We are worried that it's going to set a precedent. If these aren't ads directed at children then I don't know what is."

A complaint about a Smarties website was also rejected by the bureau's board after it agreed with Nestle that the content of the website, which included a colour-

ing competition for three- to 10-year-olds, was not directed at children but rather to mothers as an aid for craft ideas for children.

There are four industry codes governing the advertising of junk food to children, but not all agree on a single definition of a child or a children's program.

Health campaigners have consistently argued the industry's narrow definition of where junk food ads cannot appear – namely in children's programs – is meaningless because more children are watching popular early evening shows. An Australian Communications and Media Authority review in 2006 found that the average television audience of under-12s leaps from 80,000 between 4pm and 5pm – when children's programs are aired – to 500,000 between 7pm and 8pm.

No one at the bureau or the Oreo manufacturer, Kraft, was able to comment. Nestle apologised for airing the Smarties ad in children's programs.



Fat kids, blame parents

WHY is it the responsibility of governments to fix childhood obesity?

We have read that 25 per cent of Victorian schoolchildren are overweight, but the solution offered is that the Federal Government should step up the fight.

That is the lazy option.

This major health problem can only be fixed if there is a partnership — public money, plus parents and children.

Because it is the parents and children who also need to step up — or perhaps that should be step out — on bike tracks, footy fields and parks.

And talking of lazy, we don't need a 10 per cent tax on junk food.

How typical is that? Whacking on a tax as a cure-all, when much better surely would be a subsidy for fresh food, even free fresh fruit to schools.

What we need is a helping hand for parents to do the right thing, without the abnegation of their responsibility.

This obesity "tsunami", as it has been labelled, has not crept up on us. So why is it that the best we can come up with is to demand the Government fix it?

We now have an Obesity Policy Coalition and its senior policy adviser, Jane Martin, says more is needed to tackle the issue. Agreed.

“ This obesity

tsunami has not crept up on us

Ms Martin's coalition wants restricted marketing of junk food to children, which is fair enough, and better food labelling included as part of the action plan. That also gets a tick in my book.

But what about making parents more accountable for what they put on their children's plate? It must start there, surely.

Oh, the experts moan that the parents can't help it because the kids see the junk food ads and then pester them for it.

Here is a thought: say no.

There is also a Parents Jury, but its last media release in May again put the responsibly back with governments.

Recently an ad that likened junk food to heroin caused a furore because it was graphic.

It carried the message: "You wouldn't inject your children with junk — so why are you feeding it to them?"

It was quickly yanked from YouTube.

Why?

Scare tactics have long been part of the road safety campaign.

What claims the most lives in the long run?