

The newsletter of the Center for Commercial-Free Public Education

not for sale!

THE
CENTER
FOR **COMMERCIAL-FREE
PUBLIC EDUCATION**

SUMMER 1999

Here comes *ZapMe*, the computer version of Channel One



Screen shots
of ZapMe's
commercial
interface.

Our readers should be aware of a new trend in commercialism that may soon be reaching your school: advertising using new technologies. The most disturbing new scheme (and the first to go mass market) is ZapMe, the computer version of Channel One.

ZapMe is an internet web browser that gives kids access to over 8,000 educational websites. The company offers 15 "free" computers to a school as long as the school has children logged on to each computer for a minimum of 4 hours a day. The entire time the students use ZapMe, advertising aimed at the teen market plays in the lower left hand corner of the screen. Sound familiar yet?

It gets worse. If the students click on any particular advertisement, they are transported directly to the advertising company's web site. ZapMe intends to have attractive advertising (imagine a Nike ad that shows a video of Mark McGwire hitting a home run) designed to lure a kid into commercial webpages where even more interactive activities await them (games, contests, videos, etc.)

In addition to the advertising, there is also an invasion of privacy issue. ZapMe has a "points program" where each student earns points for the amount of time they spend using the computer. ZapMe keeps track and sends kids prizes directly to their

homes after they earn a certain amount of points. In order to do this, ZapMe routinely collects the home information of every new student who logs on.

ZapMe offers the ultimate set up for companies looking to advertise to children during classtime. Like Channel One, they can deliver a captive audience of students that will be contractually required to use the product a certain number of hours per week. Also, because the entire network is

connected via satellite, they can actually monitor which kids in which zip codes are looking at particular ads, and report this back to the companies.

Perhaps in order to head off criticism, the Center was offered a tour of a school in Livermore, CA that uses Zap Me. Last December Senior program Director Andrew Hagelshaw and Associate Director Merede Graham toured a computer

lab where there was a class in session; making himself available for our questions was Frank Vigil, President and CEO of ZapMe.

The school situation they were shown was the most optimal situation for the ZapMe product. There were two teachers present, one of whom led the students in a directed research exercise that lasted the entire class. Since the teachers were looking over the students shoulders the entire

time, very few kids clicked on the advertising. This illustrates one of the contradictions of ZapMe; a school that doesn't have the resources to buy it's own computers also won't have the resources to constantly supervise the children to make sure they aren't spending their entire time looking at the ads.

Another fact that ZapMe fails to tell educators: the disk drive of all the computers is physically sealed shut and can't be used for anything else besides ZapMe. The computers are always on line and connected to the ZapMe system through the satellite, which is installed on the roof of the school.

ZapMe may already be assured of initial success. They claim to have schools clamoring for their service. According to their CEO, they have accumulated over 8,000 requests already, and they plan to be exposed to over 10 million kids by the year 2002. Schools who don't understand all of the drawbacks and limitations may find the line of "free computers" hard to resist, just as many schools signed up for Channel One in the early 90s before they fully understood the situation. At the Center, we will be working hard to make the public more aware of ZapMe. We plan to make it every bit as controversial as Channel One in the coming months!

If you find out that ZapMe may be coming to your school, and you want to do something about it, call us at 1-800-867-5841! ✕

You can't use the computers for anything else besides ZapMe. The computers are always on line and connected to the ZapMe system.

The Center for Commercial-Free Public Education is a national coalition of students, parents, teachers and community members working for commercial-free public education.



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Center in the News

News coverage is an important vehicle for reaching a large and diverse audience and our staff works hard to ensure the issue of advertising in public schools and our victories receive continual coverage. You may have recently read about the Center and the various forms of classroom commercialism in your local or national paper. Perhaps your local news satiation or favorite radio show has reported on the issue.

In case you missed it, the Sunday (3/21/99) New York Times ran a front page article about advertising in math text-

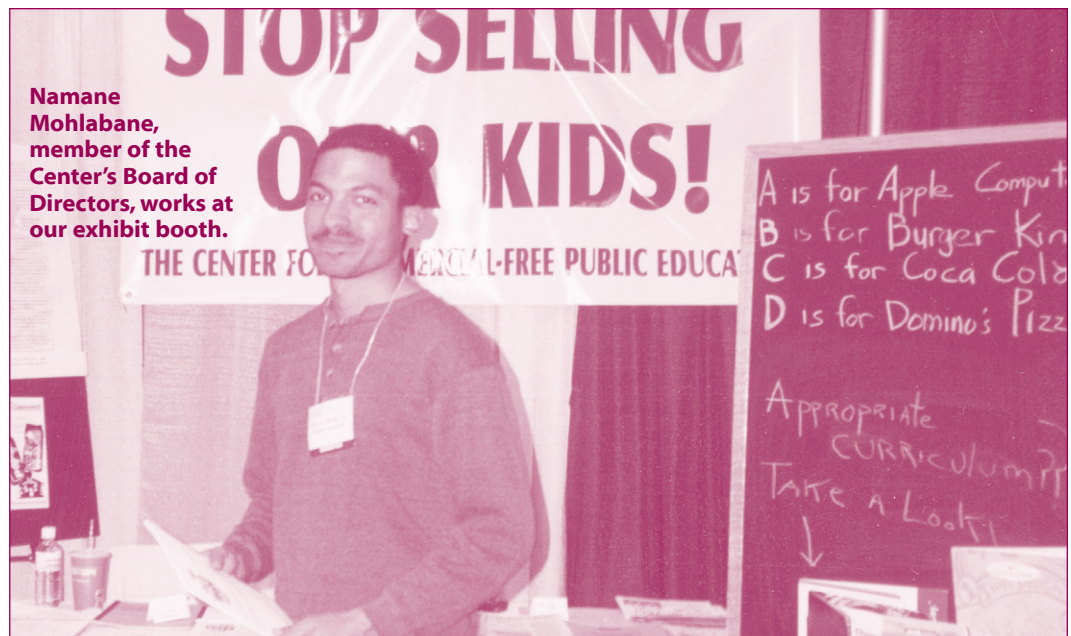
books. The article featured the Center and a California parent who brought the textbook to our attention. We are very proud to have been featured on the front page.

Additional press coverage over the past six months include:

- Time Magazine
- Chicago Tribune
- Washington Post
- US News & World Report
- San Jose Mercury News
- Houston Chronicle
- Sacramento Bee
- Baltimore Sun

- Los Angeles Times
- Associated Press
- Nicolodeon News
- San Francisco Chronicle
- National Public Radio
- Education Leadership
- Education Week
- California Schools
- The American School Board Journal
- BBC

And a front page article in our Sr. Program Director's home town newspaper, Michigan's Kalamazoo Gazette! ✕



In March the Center participated in the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development conference held in San Francisco. Over 6,000 teachers, principals and school administrators attended the conference, many of which visited our booth to learn how they could keep their schools commercial-free. The conference was very successful and a wonderful opportunity to meet with and educate school officials from across the country.

The following month in April, our staff and Board of Directors again set-up our booth for the National School Board Association Conference. We talked to hundreds of school board members from across the country who wanted more information about how they could protect their schools from the negative effects of classroom commercialism. Larry Giacomonio, a high school teacher and a member of the Center's Board of Directors shared the stage with William Rukeyser, founder of Learning in the Real World, in debating Paul Folkner from Channel One. The session was attended by over three hundred school board members, several of whom stood up to express their opposition to Channel One. We are grateful for all the positive support we received from everyone at the two conferences.

Be sure to look for us next year. ✕

Local Highlights

Actions Against Classroom Advertising

Wyoming

Community activists in Buffalo, Wyoming are fighting to get Channel One out of their schools. Community member David Romtvedt is working with local PTA members and others to bring pressure to their school board. They have had numerous articles written about their efforts in the Buffalo Bulletin, the local paper. A recent community meeting in the Buffalo Public library went well, and actions against Channel One will continue.

California

The Center is happy to report that the one of the two state bills put forward in the California legislature to curb commercialism has taken a giant step towards becoming a law! As we reported in our last newsletter, California Assemblymember Kerry Mazzoni, head of the Assembly Education Committee, authored the bills this past January. AB 116, designed to stop commercial images in school textbooks, passed the Assembly on April 7th. Center staff and volunteers went to Sacramento and testified convincingly before the Assembly Education Committee. McGraw-Hill, the publisher of the now infamous math book that started the controversy, stopped their lobbying efforts against the bill after the Center succeeded in generating a flood of publicity – including a front page article in the New York Times!

Oregon

A great success story comes out of Portland, Oregon regarding Coke/Pepsi. Recently, a request for Coke/Pepsi proposals (an RFP) was issued by Portland public schools. In response, a student named Troy Pickard helped form a student club in his high school named Students for Commercial-free Classrooms (SCC). They began a petition effort in the local community to call attention to the possible cola contract. In response to the attention, the school rescinded the RFP! Though their work is far from finished (many schools in the Portland area are continuing to consider and sign cola contracts), this serves as another example of the power of community action.

Michigan

Teachers in Alpena, Michigan are fed up with Channel One and want it out. The Center is working with a school counselor who is leading the call against advertising in his school. This is how little the Alpena teachers think of Channel One as a teaching tool: when a school principal told the

teachers at a recent meeting that getting rid of Channel One might mean losing their television sets, the teachers broke out in applause!

Canada

Unfortunately, a Channel One clone is on the move in Canada. YNN, Youth News Network, is approaching schools north of the border to sign them up to the same old tired scheme of “free” televisions in exchange for advertising to a captive audience of students. Several school districts in Canada are in contact with the Center and requesting information about Channel One in order to fight off the intrusion of YNN into their communities.

Recently the Center provided materials for a community meeting of

activists who are fighting to get YNN out of Meadowvill Secondary School in Ontario. Meadowvill is the YNN pilot school for Canada. Our materials were a hit, and are being used by activists along with information from the Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives. The Center is also in touch with students activists from the pilot school, who are bravely risking suspensions to publicly protest their opposition to YNN.

Alabama

The state based children's rights organization, Obligation, Inc., contacted the Center seeking help to remove Channel One from schools throughout the state. The issue was brought to the attention of Obligation's president, Jim Metrock, by a long time Center member and community activist. As a result of Obligation and the Center's efforts Channel One was removed from all schools in Shelby County. ✕



Vote for the Center on the 1999 Working Assets Ballot!

The Center has been chosen to be a Working Assets Company's 1999 donation recipient. Each year Working Assets' customers nominate organizations for funding and then have the opportunity to vote how the funding is distributed. Last year over \$3 million was distributed to 50 organizations.

Working Assets combines social values and smart business practices. Not only do they donate a percentage of their annual profits but each month customers can make free phone calls regarding important social issues. For example, in February customers were asked to call Speaker of the California Assembly Antonio Villaraigosa in support of two state bills to keep advertising out of textbooks and our schools. Over 5,000 phone calls were generated!

If you are a Working Assets customer we hope you will support the Center by voting for us in the fall. Also tell your friends and family to also consider the Center. If you want to support the Center by participating in the ballot process you can become a Working Assets customer by calling 1-800-788-8588. If you join Working Assets be sure to mention the Center and we will receive \$20.00 off our next long distance bill. We want to thank all of our members who nominated the Center for the Working Assets ballot—it is about to pay off!! ✕

7. Manufacturing Kellogg's introduced Cocoa Frosted Flakes in 1997. The package is a rectangular prism 12 inches high, 8 inches wide, and 3 inches deep. How many square inches did the label designer have to cover on the package?



This example is taken from McGraw-Hill's 1999 edition of Mathematics: Applications and Connections.

Setting the Record Straight: Channel One... One Savvy Lobbyist

Recently, Channel One, a twelve minute in school show containing two minutes of television commercials, registered in Washington D.C. to lobby at the federal level in order to defend themselves at possible U.S. Senate hearings. In a March 11, 1999 *Washington Post* column, Channel One claims that their aim is to promote education, not business and that lobbying is an entirely new endeavor for Channel One. One spokesman said, "We're not sophisticated Washington lobbyists. We're used to dealing with teachers." The Center for Commercial-Free Public Education, however, conducted some investigative reporting and discovered quite the opposite. From the East Coast to the West, from 1990 to the present, Channel One has actively lobbied across the country.

For example, in the early 1990's, Channel One experienced difficulty breaking into the **California** public schools market. The state's Superintendent of Education, Bill Honig, disliked Channel One so much that he threatened to reduce state funding and possibly sue schools that signed up for the program. From 1991-1994, Channel One was also threatened by legislation introduced by Senator Art Torres' (D-Los Angeles) that would ban schools from contracting with companies, such as Channel One, that included advertising via electronic media during the school day. In response, Channel One's then-parent company, Whittle Communications, hired sever-

al of the most well known lobbyists at the state and federal levels to defend their position. These firms, including Nielsen, Merksamer, Hodgson, Parrinello & Mueller, Rose-Kindel, and Carpenter & Associates, were paid over **\$1.4 million** to defend Channel One's presence in California's public schools. According to a September 1991 L.A. Times article, Whittle Communications paid **\$206,861** to well-connected individuals as well as political consulting and public relations firms insure their success in breaking into California schools.

Channel One tried to defeat legislation banning it from **New York's** public schools three times during the mid-90's. Their resulting lobbying expenditures in New York between the years 1992 and 1997 added up to **over \$500,000**.

Today Channel One is owned by Primedia, based in New York, NY. According to the Federal Clerk of the House, employers of both Channel One and Primedia registered in June, 1998 to lobby in Washington D.C. As of August, 1998 Primedia had paid **\$20,000** to firm, Thelen, Reid and Priest to represent them and as of February of 1999, Channel One had retained the lobbying firm of, Preston, Gates and Ellis for a fee of **\$120,000**. They have also retained Ralph Reed, formerly head of the Christian Coalition, to lobby on their behalf.

It is clear that Channel One is a well-seasoned lobbyist. As to Channel One's declaration that they are about education, not business, just look at these quotes taken from the promotional materials they use to solicit advertisers for the show.

➤ "Get the **UNDIVIDED ATTENTION** of millions of teenagers for 12 minutes a day,"

➤ "Teens: a \$63 Billion Market... With Channel One, your reach is more effective..."

Channel One for education? We think not.

Channel One is educated? Yes—in the art of lobbying, marketing, and making a hefty buck off exploiting our children and public schools. ✕

Join our School Watch Team!

In our last newsletter we announced opportunities to join the School Watch Team and Regional Volunteer Coordinator Programs. The response from around the country has been wonderful and we want to thank everyone who has joined our effort. There is still time to become either a School Watch Team member or a Regional Volunteer Coordinator. Teachers, students, parents – anyone who wants to expose commercialism – is invited to participate. To learn more or to report instances of commercialism found in your school call us at 1-800-867-5841. You will receive an introductory packet filled with information and tools to help you educate others about the issue and identify all the different types of classroom commercialism. Share your finds with us, thereby drawing greater attention to the overall issue. We look forward to hearing from you soon! ✕



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