

MARKETING MADNESS

For this lesson, show students an example of a newscast utilizing a video news release and discuss it. You can do either watch a lot of TV news and tape an example when you see one, or order Toxic Sludge Is Good for You from the Media Education Foundation. (In the middle of this documentary about the public relations industry is a short bit about VNRs that you can excerpt.) Ask students what sort of information is missing from the story. How might this newscast differ from a more journalistic look at the subject?

What's a video news release?

Companies create advertising video in the form of a newscast and send it to TV news stations. Local news get these things, and they often run these videos as part of the news because it's easy and cheap. They don't have to go out and investigate anything. Anchors do voice-overs.

What's "stealth advertising"

Advertising masqueraded as something else.

Why do companies use VNR and other forms of stealth advertising?

- People aren't as resistant since they can't tell it's advertising. Therefore, more believable.
- People can't easily avoid it.
- Allows corporations to say things that they couldn't say in advertising

Jim Beam VNR example in reading:

VNR says Jim Beam uses only American grains in its bourbon;
liquor advertisements are banned on TV, but VNRs are okay

Pharmaceuticals example in reading

Salon article:

Straight-up celebrity endorsements had created backlash (Bob Dole, Joan Lunden)
——> Secret deals on talk shows (Rob Lowe, Kathleen Turner)

- Allows companies to avoid FDA regulations, which required disclosing side effects or to be directed to another source for more info.

Why regulate drug advg? Eli Lilly example: arthritis drug killed 26 people.

- Dramatic illustration of importance of keeping editorial and advertising separate.

How do VNRs differ from traditional newscasts?

In traditional journalism, the goal is balance, truth—journalism aims to show both pro's and con's of a particular subject. In advertising, the goal is to sell, so often mention only the pro's are mentioned.

Other forms of stealth advertising? (not just in reading)

- Infomercials
- Hiring former newscasters to do commercials in news style
- Walt Disney bought time on newscasts for “Movie News”; ads include anchor, look like rest of the show
- Newspaper and magazine advertorials
- Magalogs
- Late-night talk shows (Leno, but not Letterman) have celebrities on to plug spots

Why do media outlets like infomercials?

- Cheaper than producing own programming
- Advertising friendly content

VNR IN-CLASS EXAMPLES:

With any stealth advertising, it's helpful to ask what sort of information is missing. What sort of info is missing from this story?