

Guidelines

on Toy Advertisements on Television

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1. Toy advertisements should respect civic and democratic values.

As with any other product aimed at children, toy advertisements should use pictures, sound and voiceovers that respect values considered socially positive, including equality, cooperation, freedom and respect for differences.

Guidelines to manufacturers and advertisers:

2. Toy advertisements must be clear and not cause confusion amongst children.

Particular care should be taken with toy advertisements to prevent children from being deceived and given a misleading idea about the look, qualities, size or capacity of a toy. On this point, it is important to bear in mind the age of the future user. This consideration is particularly important with regard to young children. The Council thus recommends:

a) Not showing a toy or any of its parts making any movement unless such attributes are real. For example, in the case of dolls and puppets, this would involve showing a hand manipulating them or, in the case of building toys, it would include the way parts are assembled. The Council understands that this recommendation should be rigorously respected, in the sense that the imaginary or fantasy movements of a toy should not be used to introduce any type of configured animation. This is particularly important in the following cases:

- products aimed at children of pre-school or infant-school age;

- products such as dolls and figures, miniature vehicles and building toys or toys that require assembly, because of the ease with which children could be confused as to their real characteristics.

b) Toys should be presented with a reference that children can easily understand, which show their real size, e.g., through the use of a person's hand or the presence of a child's body. A correct understanding of the advertisement requires that size references do not appear only occasionally but at least in the majority of the shots and airtime of the advertisement.

c) Effects that a toy does not really have (e.g., a real engine sound) should not be used.

d) There should be no systematic resource to the use of images of real people or regular or computer-generated cartoons along with the shots of the real toy. Often a creative combination of these types of images does not appeal to a child's fantasy so much as create doubts with respect to the real features of the toy. It is important to be aware that there is already a lot of advertising on TV and it is not always easy for children to discriminate between reality and fiction.

3. Children must be able to read superimposed messages.

The inclusion of superimposed messages that inform consumers about the features of a toy (e.g., "this toy requires assembly", or "priced at over 5,000 pesetas") must be adapted to children's ability to understand and read information with regard to the length, size and contrast of the typography used. To this end, the Council believes the following standards are suitable:

a) The size of the text should be at least 12 television lines.

b) The on-air time of messages should be:

- short texts (<10 words): 2" + 0.2" per word;
- long texts (>10 words): 3" + 0.2" per word.

c) The text colour should contrast clearly with the background colour.

4. It is important to prevent a toy from being identified as exclusively appropriate to boys or to girls.

The actors, voices and language used in toy advertisements should include both sexes indifferently and independently of the product announced, so that the respect for difference does not have sexist connotations.

5. Toys should not be presented in a violent or aggressive fashion.

Advertisements must prevent the aggressive or violent presentation of particular toys. Violent or aggressive attitudes should never be associated with excitement, bravery, success or any other positive value.

Advertisements for warlike or pseudo-bellicose toys, i.e., usually puppets, figures and their accessories, must be careful to respect precautions regarding the presentation of violent actions. To this end, the Council recommends:

- a)** Preventing the positive reinforcement of violent actions through the use of voiceovers.
- b)** Preventing the inclusion of images from films or of real people (actors/actresses) making violent or aggressive actions.
- c)** Not including any type of configured animation of movement or sound.
- d)** Not showing children making violent or aggressive actions.

Guidelines to television companies:

6. Firstly, television companies should scrupulously respect the law.

Public and private TV companies must be aware of the well-known influence of their broadcasts and the fascination they hold for children. It is thus important to take scrupulous care to respect regulations on advertising aimed at minors, particularly the Spanish Act 25/1994 on Television Without Frontiers, modified by Act 22/1999, and the Catalan Act 8/1995 on the care and protection of children and adolescents.

7. Children must be able to clearly distinguish between programmes and toy advertisements.

To prevent confusion between programmes and toy advertisements, it is important to not feature any type of involvement of programmes aimed at children (particularly children's clubs), the presenters of these programmes or real or fictional TV personalities in promoting and advertising toys. In particular, the Council proposes:

a) Not using telesales in programmes especially aimed at children. Simply writing "advertisement" on the screen is not enough to prevent confusion amongst children.

b) Not using any type of advertisement starring the presenters of children's programmes or characters from children's shows.

c) Not including value judgements on products in the presentation of prizes and gifts on children's programmes, but rather simply showing them. Images from the advertisements of the toy being given away should not be used.

d) Establishing a time band before and after children's programmes in which there is no promotion of merchandising products related to the programmes.

Guidelines to administrations:

8. Administrations must promote viewer education.

Administrations must help educate viewers to be responsible consumers: e.g., information campaigns on the obligations of television stations with respect to toy advertising, spaces on public television stations, the promotion of civic associationism, etc.

9. It is important to reinforce audiovisual education amongst children.

The audiovisual education of children is key to ensuring a critical reading of advertising. Administrations with responsibility for education and teaching must promote the preparation of teaching materials and activities that help children learn to read and assess audiovisual messages.

Guidelines to the public:

10. Parents should actively claim their rights with regard to toy advertising.

Parents have the final responsibility for the education of their children and should thus take an active attitude with regard to television. In terms of toy advertising, they should know the following:

- a)** Sitting down with their children while they watch TV provides many opportunities for commenting on and de-mystifying toy advertisements.
- b)** Contrasting advertising with a vision of the real toy (e.g., in a shop) can counteract the glamour effect typical to television advertising.
- c)** Reporting breaches in advertising to official organisations (e.g., the Catalan Audiovisual Council), self-regulation authorities (e.g., the Advertising Self-Regulation Association) or viewers' associations is a useful tool for stopping particular campaigns.