

## Arizona State University

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Commercialism in Education Research Unit (CERU) at ASU

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#### **SCHOOLS BECOME PART OF ‘TOTAL MARKETING ENVIRONMENT’**

**Schoolhouse commercialism report finds schools, young people vulnerable to new advertising trends**

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TEMPE, Ariz., October 15, 2007—Schools are becoming part of a “total marketing environment” in which commercialism pervades virtually the entire experience of growing up. That is the conclusion of *Adrift: Schools in a Total Marketing Environment, the 2006-2007 Report on Schoolhouse Commercialism Trends* released today by the Commercialism in Education Research Unit (CERU) at Arizona State University.

*Adrift* is the 10<sup>th</sup> annual report by CERU director Alex Molnar. The report surveys news on commercialism and youth marketing both in the popular media and in the trade press, with a particular focus on schoolhouse commercialism.

Molnar has been studying schoolhouse commercialism for more than two decades. He is the author of *Giving Kids the Business* (Westview Press) and *School Commercialism* (Routledge).

The 2007 report identifies three broad trends in the advertising and marketing industries:

1. Advertising is becoming more pervasive
2. The boundary between advertising and editorial content is becoming less distinct.
3. The relationship between marketers and consumers is becoming more interactive.

These trends are reflected in marketing programs aimed at adults and young people alike, and they seem likely to have an impact inside schools as well as in the world outside of the classroom. Taken together, they point to the creation of a “total marketing environment.”

Examples of school commercialism cited in the report include the Maryland Department of Education authorizing a significant expansion of a program using comics sponsored by the Disney Corp. as part of a reading and writing curriculum; and the maker of popular Vans shoes using the Internet and other venues to target 50 high school students, who were given the company’s latest products in order to promote them on their high school campuses.

The report argues pervasiveness of these kinds of activities is a sign of “greater cultural acceptance of marketing as an everyday fact of life, a friendly political environment, and a willingness on the part of marketers and advertisers to breach boundaries that previously limited their activities.”

The ubiquity of marketing persists and schools are not immune, Molnar concludes in his report. “Sometimes a promotion appears as a traditional advertisement, and sometimes it is masked as a product review, a cute video, or a gymnasium,” Molnar writes.

“Consumers assume its presence, and not only fail to question it, but actively participate in it by turning to marketers for information and by disseminating marketing materials in the guise of YouTube links over e-mail.”

While noting that there is popular opposition to school commercialism, the report finds that such opposition tends to be focused on marketing junk food. According to Molnar, “advertising’s pervasive quality, in schools as well as out, leads consumers to assume its presence as a fact of life.”

Molnar argues that commercialism’s pervasiveness ultimately undermines the role of education in fostering democracy.

“The question is whether the lessons that commercialism teaches children correspond with what we expect of our schools,” he says. “Do we want them to produce adults who are compliant consumers or, worse, too cynical about all messages to engage in the work of self-government and building society? Or do we want, instead, new generations of independently minded, educated citizens who can take up the work of self-government armed with the skills of discernment and critical thinking?”

Find Alex Molnar’s report, “Adrift: Schools in a Total Marketing Environment” (EPSL-0710-244-CERU) on the web at:

[http://epsl.asu.edu/ceru/CERU\\_2007\\_Annual\\_Report.htm](http://epsl.asu.edu/ceru/CERU_2007_Annual_Report.htm)

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The Commercialism in Education Research Unit (CERU) conducts original research and provides independent analyses on the topic of school commercialism to help inform the public debate.

Visit the CERU website at <http://www.schoolcommercialism.org>