

FTC Issues Food Marketing Report: Progress Noted on Childhood Obesity

The food marketing industry has made "significant progress" toward implementing recommendations made through a public-private initiative launched in 2005 to tackle childhood obesity. So concludes the Federal Trade Commission in its recent report, "Marketing Food to Children and Adolescents."

The report, which cites with approval the Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative established by the Council of Better Business Bureaus (CBBB), largely puts the Commission's stamp of approval on the industry's self-regulatory approach. Nonetheless, "there remains room for improvement," the FTC stated. The Commission urged the CBBB initiative to be expanded to include more food marketers, and recommended, among other things, that companies improve the nutritional profile offerings of food products.

The report is the result of a compulsory review of marketing data from 44 companies, and it determined that those companies spent a combined \$1.6 billion marketing food products to children and adolescents.

"The report finds that the landscape of food advertising to youth is dominated by integrated advertising campaigns that combine traditional media, such as television, with previously unmeasured forms of marketing, such as packaging, in-store advertising, sweepstakes, and Internet," the FTC said in a release.

The \$1.6 billion estimated total expenditure is significantly lower than figures cited by other studies, the FTC noted. The Commission stated this was because previous reports have included advertising directed to children for products other than food, as well as promotions such as coupons and discounts that are for children, but are targeted to adults.

One area of looming disagreement between the FTC and the food marketing industry is the definition of children's television programming. Through the CBBB initiative, participating companies have agreed to limit their advertising to healthier food products during television programs aimed primarily toward young children.

However, the FTC notes in its report that teenagers are being exposed to "a great deal of advertising that may be targeted to a general audience" through shows popular with both teens and adults, such as "American Idol," "Family Guy" and "The Simpsons."

"It's the one place where the FTC is not in sync with self-regulation," notes Reed Smith partner John Feldman in an interview with *Brandweek Magazine*. "I do not think that's where CARU is," Feldman said, referring to the Children's Advertising Regulation Unit, a self-regulatory arm of the CBBB.

Amid this backdrop, the FTC made clear its intention that food marketers continue to focus their efforts on healthier food product and lifestyle messages.

"The Commission is hopeful that continued efforts by all relevant entities will yield more progress in addressing the issue of childhood obesity," the report stated. "Going forward, the Commission will continue to monitor future developments in this area and, after allowing a reasonable time for response to the recommendations contained in this Report, will issue a follow-up report assessing the extent to which the recommendations have been implemented and identifying what, if any, additional measures may be warranted."

Read the [FTC's report](#) and a [summary](#) of the report at ftc.gov.

Read news coverage concerning the report at brandweek.com, nytimes.com, mediapost.com, and apnews.excite.com.

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