



R18+ games for review?

The present restrictions on an R18+ classification for computer games are to be the subject of public consultation.

This was the outcome of the debate by the federal, State and Territory Ministers responsible for censorship at their meeting in the Barossa on March 28 on the issue of whether the longstanding prohibition on R18+ games in the sale and hire system should remain.

The industry and some gamers have argued that these more extreme games should be allowed, but parent groups and other agencies, such as Young Media Australia, have argued that the games presently allowed at the MA15+ level are violent enough. Further, there are indicators of harm from violent games, and there are no effective mechanisms for keeping R18+ games out of the hands of minors.

Processes for such a consultation are expected to be reviewed at the next meeting of Ministers.

Inquiry into obesity in Australia

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Aging, chaired by Mr Steve Georganas MP, is conducting an inquiry into obesity in Australia.

The committee will inquire into, and report on, the increasing prevalence of obesity in the Australian population, focusing on future implications for Australia's health system.

Recommendations will be made as to what governments, industry, individuals and the broader community can do to prevent and manage the obesity epidemic in children, youth and adults.

The closing date for submissions is 16 May 2008.

<http://www.aph.gov.au/haa>

Food marketing and children - new findings.

Researchers from the University of Amsterdam have investigated the link between children's exposure to television advertising and food consumption patterns using a household diary approach. In a study of 234 households with children aged 4-12, the advertising for energy dense foods was found to influence not only the consumption of the brands advertised, but also consumption of other energy dense foods. Family communication about consumer matters was seen to play an important role in moderating this media effect.

Buijzen, M et al (2008). **Associations between children's television advertising exposure and their food consumption patterns: A household diary-survey study.** *Appetite*, Vol. 50, No. 2-3, Pp 231-239.

Two articles of interest have also appeared in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. The first is entitled **Children, television viewing, and weight status: summary and recommendations from an expert panel meeting.**

In April 2006, an expert panel meeting was convened to meet and address children, television viewing, and weight status. Panel members were Dimitri A Christakis, Barbara A Dennison, Nancy A Gelbard, Steven L Gortmaker, Kristen S Harrison, Leonard Jason, Donna B Johnson, Michael Rich & Donald Roberts. It was co-chaired by Amy B Jordan & Thomas N Robinson.

Overweight and obesity among American children has reached epidemic proportions. More than 9 million youth between ages of six and nineteen years are considered overweight, and more than 80 percent of overweight adolescents will go on to become obese adults. Research has indicated a wide range of factors believed to contribute to obesity among children, but of growing concern is the potential contribution made by children's media use.

This article reviews the evidence discussed at this meeting about the role that media, specifically television, play in the prevalence of overweight among children. It lays out the panel member's conclusions

STOP PRESS

The Australian Association of National Advertisers(AANA) has released the updated *Advertising to Children Code*.

The Code has been renamed the *AANA Code for Advertising and Marketing Communications to Children* to more accurately reflect the scope of the Code, which will now capture new and emerging media.

<http://www.aana.com.au/>

about the most promising strategies for reducing the negative effects of television on children's weight status and makes recommendations for future research that is needed to fully understand the relationship.

The second article is titled **The effects of food marketing on children's preferences: testing the moderating roles of age and gender.**

A large body of research suggests that food marketing affects children's food preferences, short- and long-term dietary consumption, and purchase requests directed to parents. It is frequently argued that younger children are more susceptible to marketers' messages than older children because they do not understand the persuasive nature of advertising; however, little direct evidence supports this claim. Employing an experimental design, this study examined the influence of food marketing on children's preferences and tested whether age (and gender) moderated the effects of ad exposure. The sample consisted of 133 children between the ages of five and eleven. Results indicated that exposure to food commercials increased children's preferences for the advertised products. Age did not moderate this effect; younger and older children were equally persuaded by the commercials. Boys were more influenced by the commercials than girls. Implications for the study of food marketing to children are discussed.



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EDITORIAL

ISP level content filtering - the miracle cure?: An educated perspective.

There has been continuing debate about the Government's proposal to implement Internet Service Provider level filtering. Small screen asked Matthew Wigzell of Webshield Internet Services to comment. He writes:

"Much of the current debate about ISP level content filtering has centred around the presumption that the Government is proposing a single solution that will: take out the bad but never the good; provide a total solution which meets all individual needs, thus keeping everyone happy and the pigs flying.

One thing which everyone agrees upon is that such a model is never going to happen and is not possible for a number of reasons.

- 1) The Internet has moved beyond being a big library of information and is now seen as an alternative way of living which is as complex and diverse as society itself.
- 2) The individuals who use the Internet each have needs and expectations which vary from person to person
- 3) The Internet is not neatly divided up into good and bad but rather a billion different shades of grey.

Webshield has served a growing base of satisfied customers for over 4years. We bring to this debate the unique perspective of actually being in the arena, when the loudest voices are simply speculating from the stands. Webshield has multi layered technology that is 100% customisable and operates under the policy of "freedom of choice".

Off line approach needed to solve online problem

In real life everyone acknowledges that a multi layered response is needed to keep society's ills in check. Reacting to drugs by treating each teenager as a potential addict would be considered extreme. Consequently a scalable response that presents a choice between education, prevention, deterrent and cure is offered with education and advertising to encourage people to assess their situation and choose the appropriate solution.

Content filtering needs to be approached in the same way. Each user requires a vastly different solution with competent advice to ensure an educated decision.

Risk vs Convenience

It is now possible to do more, virtually, in the online world than it is in real life. Therefore it is naive to suggest that a single solution will meet everyone's filtering needs. Sites such as blogspot, flickr, groupsmsn are just a few of the legitimate services through which one can access pornographic content. For an addict such sites would be off limits despite the inconvenience; however the user requiring a deterrent would be happy to live with the risk in exchange for the convenience.

Policy, expectations, technology

What is lacking in this debate is a set of clear parameters aimed towards achievable objectives; instead, each commentator argues the point from their own ideological perspectives achieving little more than total confusion.

Put simply, a solution which achieves total risk management will incur some inconvenience. A solution which achieves zero false positives will at best be a deterrent. A solution which places protection in the hands of parents is only as good as the technological literacy of the parent and the guidance they give their children.

The fact is, without a multi layered response, clear policy objectives and lots of education, any solution implemented will be a failure with its objectives meeting the needs of only a tiny percentage of the community. We need to ask:

- What is the objective of nation wide ISP level content filtering?
- Is it a one-size-fits-all solution, or should it be customisable?
- Is it aimed at providing a deterrent, total risk management, or both
- Is the filtering technology used going to err on the side of performance, protection, or both depending on the needs of the user?
- Will each individual user be assisted to enable a filtering configuration which meets their needs?

Until we have answers to those questions, any further debate on this issue is meaningless.

Protection lags progress

The fact is the world is not ready for content filtering. We are still in the middle of an information revolution; the prevailing sentiment driven by the media, advertising and industry is one of euphoria and excitement not protection and caution.

This principle applies to all new technologies, namely, that protection lags behind progress. It was true of the car where laws for seatbelts took over 50 years, and it's true of the Internet today where use of filtering is seen as a sign of weakness. Until the anything, anywhere, anytime gospel of technology can be moderated by a culture of caution, the ideological bias of society will be opposed to content filtering regardless of how effective it happens to be.

It falls to the Government to provide the balance and it is heading in the right direction. History warns that attitudes are more effectively changed through disasters than education. As we stride boldly into this brave new world of technological progress, we need to heed H. G Wells "we are in a race between education and disaster"

Matthew Wigzell

<http://www.webshield.net.au/>

Clips 'n' Cuts

small screen no. 240 March 2008

Unlikely innovators bag interactive awards

Simon Canning

THE federal Government and the ABC have proved more adept at innovation in the digital world than big-spending corporations, walking away from the 14th Australian Interactive Media Industry Association Awards with a swag of honours.

Between them the ABC Innovations division and the Smart Population Foundation won six of

the 22 awards. The ABC, which has been heralded as a world leader in podcasts, won awards across several areas.

Its Dust Echoes website, featuring 12 animated Dreamtime stories, won two awards for best children's interactive and digital media content and another for best cultural lifestyle or sport.

The public broadcaster also won the award for best cross-platform content or content inte-

gration, for the development of the ABC television website. The ABC children's website Roller-Coaster Interactive TV scored the go for best interactive TV.

Divonne Holmes a Court, wife of South Sydney Rabbitohs co-owner Robert Holmes a Court, won two awards in the categories of best non-profit or government and best learning and education for the *Raising Children* DVD and the related Smart Population

website. Last year the federal government decided to send the parenting DVD to millions of Australian households.

"We managed to get five hours of content on one dual-layer disc, covering from birth to five years old," Mrs Holmes a Court said.

Ad agency Host was the big award winner for an interactive campaign for Air New Zealand, which also captured the effectiveness award.

The Australian, 13 March 2008

School children struggle to sleep

CALLIE WATSON

A SLEEP education program should be introduced in South Australian schools as children increasingly struggle for shut-eye.

Dr Sarah Blunden, from the UniSA sleep centre, said research showing children aged 10 to 15 are sleeping 30 minutes less than a generation ago had prompted a successful sleep education pilot program late last year.

The study compared



UniSA

data from a 1985 survey to one in 2004. Both involved about 500 children from the same eight SA schools and found that though waking at the same time, new students are going to bed 30 minutes later.

Dr Blunden said a lack of sleep can lead to behavioural problems, increased aggression and loss of appetite.

"There's also research that shows children who don't sleep have worse marks at school," she said.

The sleep education pilot program was tried out in four metropolitan schools. "The feedback we've had from 100 per cent of students is that this (the program) should be taught in all schools," she said.

The Advertiser,
8 March 2008

Nine Network invests in Hi-5

Lara Sinclair

THE Nine Network has bought a 50 per cent share of Hi-5 and taken on a new partner as it seeks a bigger return from international sales linked to the children's television show and merchandising empire.

Nine confirmed yesterday it had bought for an undisclosed amount the half-share owned by Kids Like Us — the production company in which Nine's former chief of drama, Posie Graeme-Evans, still held a minority interest.

Nine has formed a joint venture that will result in production company Southern Star producing the show and helping to market it overseas.

The deal comes a week before a replacement is due to be announced for Charli Delaney — the third original cast member to leave.

A three-time Logie Award winner, Hi-5 was eighth on



Graeme-Evans

it has spawned 25 DVDs, 11 CDs and almost 80 books, while its live shows have sold more than two million tickets.

However, it ranks well behind the Wiggles, whose annual earnings are estimated to top \$50 million.

Co-founder and majority shareholder in Kids Like Us, Helena Harris, said there was still "enormous potential" for Hi-5 to expand as only 70 of more than 500 episodes had been translated into other languages — Spanish and Portuguese.

Ms Graeme-Evans — who in 2005 became one of a string of

high-profile departures from Nine as its No 1 network status began to erode — could not be contacted for comment yesterday.

Ms Harris said Hi-5 had been designed to be formatted by other markets with their own cast. "We've only had one other cast — for America," Ms Harris said. "There's the potential of doing another cast in the UK."

"We have only just gone into South America (where four live touring casts have been contracted) and we're doing very well there."

Southern Star Group chief Hugh Marks said Nine — which is under pressure after losing its ratings share and suffering a decline in advertising revenue — wanted to maximise overseas sales. "For 10 years, Hi-5 has been a ground-breaking success," he said. "To have a more established business with more international connections (as a partner) is a big advantage."

The Australian, 12 March 2008

ABC pushes for children's channel as part of digital drive

Michael Bodey

THE ABC is best placed to drive audiences to digital platforms, according to ABC managing director Mark Scott.

Minutes before Communications Minister Stephen Conroy announced a \$37.9 million package to push free-to-air digital TV penetration, Mr Scott told the Broadcasting Summit in Sydney the ABC's TV, radio and internet platforms would become the drivers of digital take-up, if the Government adequately funded the public broadcaster.

"We believe that there is a compelling case for the funding

of a children's channel for the ABC," he said.

"We think there will be very strong take-up of digital television if there is a free-to-air children's channel available, funded by the Government, commercial-free, largely made up of Australian content, available in every family home."

The Rudd Government has vacillated on the Howard government's planned establishment of a devoted children's channel and Senator Conroy made it plain at the summit that expenditures were being cut rather than expanded in the upcoming federal budget.

Mr Scott also noted the

ABC's foray into digital radio would push consumers onto that platform.

Ahead of this year's triennial funding submission, the ABC chief reiterated ABC TV's call for more funding for Australian drama, in a line likely to be used against the sector by commercial networks reticent to invest in costly local drama.

Mr Scott noted the greater choice in the new digital environment meant "fragmenting audiences make it harder and harder for commercial television to deliver an audience of critical mass that can be monetised."

He said a public broadcaster was best placed to deliver it.

"A cornerstone of our push for funding from the new government will be funding high quality, distinctive levels of Australian content recognising our stories need to be told and it will be harder to afford to tell them in an era of fragmented media."

He added there was no chance the ABC would resort to advertising to make up funding shortfalls.

"There is strong integrity about the ABC being commercial-free," he said. "We think that is the clear expectation of our audience, that is the clear expectation of government and that's the model we're following through."

The Australian, 27 March 2008

Pong creator foresees tectonic shift for games' big player

Simon Canning
Advertising

THE man who invented the world's first video game, Pong, predicts advertising will become an unavoidably integral part of the future of gaming and entertainment.

Al Alcorn — who helped design the simple but addictive video game that spawned an industry that now outperforms Hollywood — today runs a company measuring mobile phone content and advertising use in the US.

But he has also kept a close eye on the industry he helped form.

His name runs thick through the history of gaming and computing: he was a founding member of the team that created Atari (which is about to celebrate its 25th anniversary) and was one of the first members of Apple, with Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak.

"The way people consume media has changed drastically over the past 20 or 30 years," Mr Alcorn said.

"Twenty or 30 years ago, people sat around the television watching a program as a family.

"Now my kids, who are in their 20s, don't even watch television."

Mr Alcorn said he did not view his simple ping pong simulation as being a disruptive technology when he first set up the co-operated oddity in a California tavern in the early 1970s.

"The market was there: they were selling pinball machines (and) games that were coin-operated entertainment, such as jukeboxes," he said.

"All we did was make a different medium with the video game."



Prime mover: Al Alcorn was a founding member of the team that created Atari and was one of the first members of Apple

The power of Pong was demonstrated within days when the owner of the tavern called Mr Alcorn to come and remove the "broken" machine.

When he opened the coin box, it was full to capacity.

Pong swiftly made its way into thousands of bars and arcades around the world before being reborn as a home-console game.

"It was probably the first truly digital device that people got their hands on," Mr Alcorn said.

The creators of Pong and the rudimentary video games that came after them had no idea, three decades ago, that they were creating a new media channel that is now poised to become a major destination for advertising.

"Did we have any idea it

would become this big?" Mr Alcorn said. "Gosh, no. I thought it would fail in a couple of years."

He said companies in the entertainment industry were going through a tectonic shift in how they operated and advertising would be a central player.

"What they are really in the business of is selling entertainment and it is very hard for them

to transition to a whole new merchandising way," Mr Alcorn said. "I think we are going to see more advertising done in a way that will not offend the user much, but will pay for some of this content. The new technology is very accessible."

Mr Alcorn cites YouTube as a prime example of a channel that will become a major player in advertising.

The Australian, 24 March 2008

Nine appeals against ICE-TV program ruling

Susannah Moran
Courts

THE battle over copyright and television program guides has returned to the courts, with the Nine Network appealing against last year's Federal Court decision that found electronic program guide supplier ICE-TV had not breached Nine's copyright.

The parties were recently in the Full Federal Court arguing about the issue, with seven barristers retained in the case.

Nine argues ICE-TV is infringing its copyright by compiling information relating to the pro-

grams it puts to air, using "skill and labour".

But ICE-TV says it "predicts" what shows will be on the TV and only checks its guides against those published.

When it was pointed out that only a "sliver" of Nine's TV program details were reproduced in ICE-TV's guide — the time and title of programs — Nine's barrister, Tony Bannon SC, said a sliver of something was often "the best part".

Mr Bannon also said the judge hearing the case last year should not have been satisfied with the evidence given by Mitchell Rilet,

who said he had been hired by ICE-TV to help devise an independent TV schedule template.

Mr Rilet said he watched TV for three weeks — which he described as "torture" — and made notes about what time programs were on TV as well as their title, genre and classification.

"Although he set about making contemporaneous notes of what he did at the time he destroyed it and didn't produce any evidence for examination," Mr Bannon said.

In her judgment, judge Annabelle Bennett said that although Nine challenged Mr Rilet's evi-

dence, "he was not a substantial shareholder in ICE Holdings and no sufficient reason was established for him to exaggerate his achievements".

ICE-TV's barrister likened part of its argument to that of a "trainspotter" — someone who watches trains and notes their time of arrival, or passing through a station.

By writing down that information, the trainspotter is not breaching the copyright of any timetable, ICE-TV argued.

A decision in the case is likely in the coming months.

The Australian, 24 March 2008

CHILD'S PLAY: THE DANGERS OF TOY GUNS

The Today Show 23/4/07

Will toys guns make your kids more aggressive? Early childhood development expert Dr Catherine Neilsen-Hewett talks about the dangers of toy guns.

Australian parents are becoming increasingly concerned about the rising level of violence in children's toys and computer games.

"Children's play is really a reflection of the cultural context of which they are a part... while adults are fighting wars, children will continue to play war games," says Dr Neilsen-Hewett.

Therefore, a child's fascination with guns and gun play "is nothing new", says Dr Neilsen-Hewett. But she says that we need to minimise the amount of

this type of play with guns and weapons to avoid any harmful effects on children.

The long term effects of playing with toy guns depends on the child, says Dr Neilsen-Hewett. However, adults don't typically understand children's play and when they play often see them as aggressive.

Children who are at risk of any long term effects of playing with toy guns tend to be more aggressive, have violent parents, and boys are more risk than girls says Dr Neilsen-Hewett.

In the short term, the effect of playing with toy guns on children depends on how the guns are used in the context of play. "If they play with weaponry and play in a more constructive and imaginative way — then its not as

damaging. You can use this type of play to talk about your values — that you don't agree with killing and that you don't agree with shooting", says Dr Neilsen-Hewett. However, a child's aggressive behaviour could increase if they play with toy guns often and if the context of play is violent, she says.

"I would not go out and buy toy guns. If you have a child who is drawn to it and interested in playing, you need to look at how a child uses these toys and it is not something I would promote," she says.

Dr Neilsen-Hewett says that if you don't prevent children from playing with toy guns — down the track it maybe more problematic. However, banning your child from playing with guns can lead

to resentment she says. "We want to ban guns but it becomes a forbidden fruit scenario", she says.

At the end of the day it's up to parents whether or not to buy toy guns for their child, says Dr Neilsen-Hewett, however she explains that to avoid any negative effects of children playing with toy guns parents should be involved with their child's play, and talk to their children about this play.

"Parents have the ultimate control of what their children are playing and we need to be aware of that", says Dr Neilsen-Hewett. "Parents should be part of their play and understand what meaning children are taking from those play experiences and talk to them about it", she says.

Network News, March 2008

Sport to suffer if alcohol ads stop

The Australian, 27 March 2008

Lara Sinclair

SPORTING groups claim the cost of participating in grassroots sport will rise if proposed laws to limit alcohol advertising on television and radio are passed.

But welfare groups have called for an outright ban on alcohol advertising in submissions to the Senate inquiry on liquor marketing that were made public this week.

Calls were also made for the use of sports stars to promote alcohol brands to be prohibited, and for proposed restrictions for TV and radio to be extended to other media, including magazines and the internet.

The welfare lobby did not hold back in several submissions this week that claimed the proposed alcohol advertising bill — which would require health labels to be put on alcohol products and ban TV and radio alcohol advertising between 5am and 9pm, as well as introduce other restrictions — did not go far enough.

“We strongly believe that advertising of alcohol beverages should be totally banned, with the exception of promotional materials displayed inside liquor shops, pubs and bars,” the Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies (NSW) submission states.

The Northern Territory Police called for the proposed ban to include “the promotion of alcohol products via highly prominent sporting stars”.

But sporting bodies as well as broadcasters and advertisers, who are facing calls for increased regulation on several fronts, argued strongly against the proposed laws.

The Coalition of Major Professional Sports, which represents seven key sporting bodies, predicted the bill could drive up the cost of grassroots sports by reducing the advertising revenue broadcasters could attract and therefore the broadcast rights fees that sports could demand.

COMPS, which represents all four football codes as well as golf, tennis and cricket, estimated between 5 per cent and 23 per cent of sports’ revenue came directly from alcohol sponsorship: “There is a possibility of compromising the primary commercial driver in modern professional sporting business models,” its submission says.

“The potential impact ... may

ultimately contribute to an increase in the direct financial or societal cost being passed on to consumers.”

In all, 65 submissions to the Senate inquiry on alcohol advertising sparked by Stephen Fielding’s Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill were published. It is due to report back by June 18.

Submissions closed last week as another inquiry was called into the broadcasting codes of practice that restrict swearing on TV and radio.

The advertising industry is already facing a Senate inquiry into the sexualisation of children in the media.

Earlier this month Kevin Rudd announced a \$53 million program to tackle binge drinking.

A submission from Free TV Australia, which represents the commercial networks, says the proposed restrictions on alcohol advertising unfairly targeted broadcasters as only 25 per cent of alcohol advertising dollars were spent on TV, compared with 48 per cent in print.

“(Extending the alcohol ban from 8.30pm to 9pm) is an inefficient method of reducing young people’s exposure to alcohol advertising,” the Free TV submission states.

“The proposed restriction would impact strongly on the advertising and sponsorship revenue associated with sporting coverage.”

The Advertising Federation of Australia struck at other parts of the bill that proposed a new alcohol advertising pre-approval system, arguing there was an unfounded prejudice in the bill against self-regulatory schemes such as the Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code that presently regulates alcohol advertising.

That view was supported by the Australasian Associated Brewers’ submission, which says ABAC has been tested by three government review processes in the past five years.

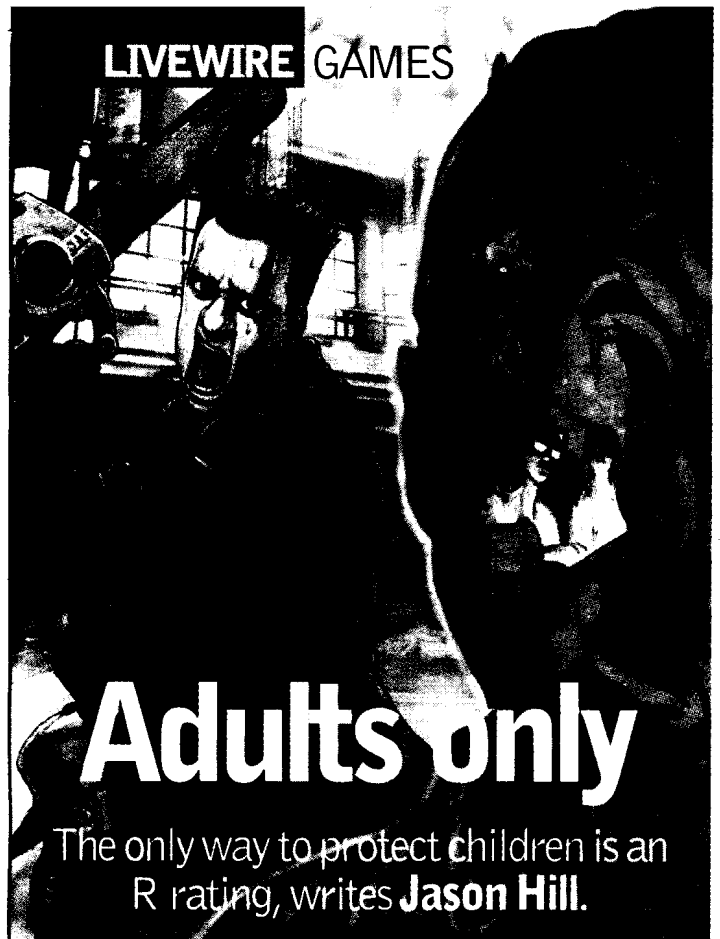
“If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it,” the AAB writes.

But Family Drug Support called for restrictions on alcohol marketing to mirror those on cigarette advertising by including a ban on all TV and radio ads, as well as promotion of sporting and recreational events by liquor companies.

Making a hash Brown

THE NSW Government, already up to its ears in muck, has unveiled a new fast-food deal guaranteed to outrage medical authorities fighting childhood obesity. NSW Tourism Minister **Matt Brown** yesterday announced McDonald’s would hand out cards, offering free entry to more than 80 tourist attractions, to children who buy Happy Meals. Brown says more than 1.2 million cards are expected to be distributed during the promotion.

The Australian, 3 March 2008



AUSTRALIAN censorship ministers discuss an R18+ rating for games tomorrow but South Australian Attorney-General Michael Atkinson has vowed to block its introduction. Changes to Australia’s censorship laws must be agreed by all attorneys-general.

Mr Atkinson’s long-standing opposition to an R18+ rating stems from concern over harm to children from high-impact material. The minister argues adult freedoms should not be placed ahead of protecting children, but the two are **not mutually exclusive**.

The introduction of R18+, revised classification guidelines, stricter enforcement of ratings and education for parents on the importance of classification would all help protect children far better than current laws and give adults the right to choose the products they wish.

Australia has a reputation for strictness because of the few games refused classification each year but many stamped MA15+ in Australia (a rating many Australians do not understand) are rated R18+ in places such as Britain. Examples include *God of War*, *Army of Two*, *Dead Rising*, *BioShock*, *Gears of War* and *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*.

Mr Atkinson told the South Australian Parliament the release of an edited version of 50 Cent *Bulletproof* was evidence “the current system does work” but

dozens of games designed for adults are every year shoehorned into an inappropriate category. A good example is *Manhunt*, which sold 18,000 copies in Australia before it was refused classification nearly a year after its original MA15+.

Parents would be far more vigilant about keeping inappropriate games away from minors if they were labelled with the highly recognised R18+. The lack of an adults-only classification sends the wrong message to the non-game playing community, perpetuating the dangerous myth that games are only played by children and all games are suitable for minors.

Mr Atkinson argues today’s children are more technologically savvy than their parents, but if children are as technologically literate and unsupervised as the minister fears, the absence of R18+ encourages them to delve beyond the safety of our classification system to download games illegally.

That’s reinforced by the British Board of Film Classification, which last year found that press coverage of controversial games (the type of attention typically generated by Australian bans) greatly increases children’s interest.

The introduction of R18+ would help efforts to protect Australia’s children from unsuitable content.

blogs.theage.com.au/screenplay
The Age Green Guide, 27 March 2008

Nazi mums and the stranger danger on the small screen

LAST weekend I made the mistake of telling another parent I'd put my toddler on a waiting list for crack cocaine and prostitute school.

Oh, all right. What I really said was "Alice has started watching television". But it might as well have been crack cocaine and prostitute school, given the reaction.

The parent — one of those designer mothers whose two-year-olds order oysters and take lute lessons — said it was an incontrovertible fact that television rotted children's brains.

She then warned, in the most quilted, four-ply toilet paper of tones, that even minimal exposure to the idiot box was setting my daughter up for a lifetime of underachievement, obesity and white trash-hood.

In other words, go directly to Britney Spears. Do not pass go, do not collect literacy, urbanity or tracky daks without drastically elasticised waistbands.

"Sorry," I said to Alice after the parenting

pedagogy, vulgar sideshows, bad acting, and layers of brain-clogging smoke and fog?"

"MELMO."

I'm sure you can appreciate the methodological challenges.

The other big problem with anti-television rhetoric is that TV is judged monolithically as being either all good or all bad. Correlation is confused with causation and inadequate attention is given to the types and quantity of shows kids watch, and the context in which they watch them.

Alice, for instance, can look a little zombie-like when bathing in the cathode rays, but she enters a similar state when she's being read to. And, as with books, she becomes wildly animated whenever she sees something she recognises. A ball. A hat. A shoe. Or, in the case of *Sesame Street*, Melmo.

Both television and reading usually take place with Alice seated on the lap of a beloved grown-up. Both involve the huge cognitive leap that the word dog can be used to refer to the farty lump lying in the corner of our

EMMA TOM THE WRY SIDE



Nazi left to read her loin fruit nursery rhymes in Latin (certainly no risk of a sedentary lifestyle there). "I'd hoped you'd have a range of life choices but it looks like we've already narrowed it down to just the one."

"Melmo," Alice replied, pointing up at the plasma screen where *Sesame Street* usually appears. "MELMO".

Oh yes, I am a very bad mother indeed. Or I would be if I subscribed to the ridiculous middle-class conviction that letting kids watch TV is akin to booking Little Red Riding Hood's cross-dressed wolf as a sitter.

Buy, Buy Baby: The Devastating Impact of Marketing to 0-3s by American journalist Susan Gregory Thomas is one of many voices

contributing to the deafening anti-TV discourse.

It argues that even leaving a boob tube running in the background can be disastrous for toddlers' development as it may interfere with their brain growth.

Thomas gravely quotes an anonymous health professional who has a hunch that babies riveted by toddler DVDs are slipping into "a low-level seizure state". She makes underhand digs at the selfishness and irresponsibility of parents who leave their children unchaperoned with televised strangers.

Yet research into how small humans perceive television continues to produce findings which are either neutral or ambivalent, chiefly because researchers struggle to work out what's going on in their subjects' heads.

"Good afternoon, Interviewee #3542. Could you tell us whether that short hand puppet presentation a) helped you learn the letter e or b) represented nothing but phony



info@emmatom.com.au

The Australian, 20 March 2008

Who's the bimbo?

BREAST implants, nightclubbing, diet pills, competing with others over who gets the most attention; this is "the real world", according to Nicolas Jacquart, creator of a game for children actually called Miss Bimbo (World, 26/3). Perhaps for a 23-year-old living in London; then again, perhaps not.

It would be good if the game had an option where the "bimbo" wakes up to herself, realises she's actually a person, gives the whole glamour world the finger and goes off to live an anonymous and blameless life.

Andrew McIntosh, Glenroy

The Age, 27 March 2008

Happy Meal toy maker celebrates a 38pc rise in revenue

Lara Sinclair
Growth

INDEPENDENT global network The Marketing Store, which creates toys that inspire children to demand McDonald's Happy Meals, is undergoing rapid growth as it turns 20 in Australia and is moving into new premises in Sydney's Ultimo.

The local promotional agency, which recently won the Canon consumer marketing account, increased its revenues 38 per cent last year, according to its chairman and Asian president, Doug Chapman.

In Australia, the ongoing Cannes Lion-winning Talkin' Boonie promotion for VB and a potential tightening of marketing budgets has arguably helped focus attention of advertising agencies and marketers on the benefits of effective promotions that can generate measurable sales.

Mr Chapman said traditionally, a downturn in the economy would stimulate the promotion marketing business.

"It tends to be more cost-effective," he said.

Advertisers were also looking for ways to offer consumers tangible experiences, rather than

building brand awareness, since the rise of the internet had made controlling the reputation of brands more difficult.

"We think the market is being driven far more by behavioural change, or sales, than by brand awareness, or attitudinal change," he said. "How can you change people's attitudes? You can't. You have to change behaviour first. A brand today is more about personal experience and validation."

Mr Chapman co-founded local promotion marketing agency Chapman & Lester and sold it to The Marketing Store in 1988.

The Marketing Store, which has 11 offices globally and is privately owned by the US-based Perlman family, produces 70 per cent of the world's Happy Meal toys in the world.

Mr Chapman would not comment on that side of the business, which is becoming increasingly politicised in Australia.

Marketing junk food to children is facing renewed calls in Australia that it be banned and the use of toys as incentives is a controversial issue.

He said McDonald's Australia sourced its Happy Meal incentives through The Marketing

Store's Hong Kong office.

Meanwhile, the local agency, which has grown from 17 staff three years ago to 60, has ditched an arrangement whereby it outsourced its brand planning work to communications planning agency Naked.

"We have gone back to our own planners," local managing director Brent Kennedy said.

He said although Naked provided a great service, the company missed the integration of planning into its business.

The agency's clients include Diageo, Nestle, Cereal Partners, Pepsi and The Nuance Group.

The Australian, 10 March 2008

Crying foul on swearing

CHRISTOPHER BANTICK
— The Courier-Mail

GORDON Ramsay's use of the F-word 80 times in less than an hour highlighted how problematic it was for parents to monitor what their kids were exposed to, columnist Christopher Bantick wrote. "Leaving aside that family viewing time is flexible, is it appropriate or desirable that swearing has become a feature of TV entertainment?"

According to the Nine Network, the use of coarse language must be "appropriate to the story-line or program context, infrequent and not very aggressive". Ramsay's frequent use of the F-word could therefore be justified as important to the story-line or program context. If context made swearing OK, then the power was being taken away from parents. "Familiarity or commonality does not exonerate Gordon Ramsay or excuse, let alone justify, the use of swearing on TV. Common usage is one thing, context another. And perhaps prime-time TV is not a context appropriate for families to blanch at, if not blush. After all, and let's be fair dinkum about this, the F-word... is not just another word."

The Weekend Australian, 29-30 March 2008

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