

# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Commercial Alert Urges Parents to Fight Market Spies in Schools**

Commercial Alert warned parents today about a new corporate predator, NetworkNext, which uses high schools to gather market research from teenagers, and pitch products to them, without parental consent.

The company boasts to advertisers of an “audience of one million teens in 1,000 schools,” and the ability to “test the impact of changes in online interactive marketing variables” on high school students which “puts business and marketing decision information at your fingertips.” With its mobile computer and projection equipment that it provides to schools, the company says it displays banner ads in classrooms “continuously...for the entire class to view.”

“NetworkNext wants to turn the schools into billboards, shopping malls and market research extractors,” said Gary Ruskin, executive director of Commercial Alert, a group that opposes commercialism. “This company shows how corporate America will stoop to anything to shake loose a few more dollars from the nation’s kids. Schools are for learning, not commercial bombardment or corporate spying.”

The company, which says it is “in the e-commerce and Internet advertising business,” tells advertisers that they can receive “Total online purchase behavior of teens,” including the ability to “track the dynamics of online consumer purchasing” by students. It boasts of a “unique viewing environment” – the schools – “that helps sponsors increase awareness, usage and purchase intent.”

“These invasive advertising and market research practices have no place in schools,” Ruskin said. “We urge parents to swiftly eject this company from the schools.”

The company features, among other things, an iCanCharge.com debit card. “It is not the proper role of the schools to promote charge cards and materialism to impressionable teenagers,” Ruskin said.

According to an article in today’s Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, the company plans its “national rollout” in September.

NetworkNext is following a string of failed high-tech strategies for commercial exploitation of schoolchildren. Commercial Alert, Obligation Inc. and Junkbusters ran a campaign that helped lead to the demise of the ZapMe! Corp., a similar company that advertised and gathered market research from schoolchildren. Similar public outrage forced another

company, N2H2 Inc., to announce that it would stop gathering market research from schoolchildren. A third company, HiFusion, stopped collecting market research from schoolchildren and was purchased by Mindsurf.

On June 14th, the U.S. Senate unanimously approved the “Student Privacy Protection Act,” sponsored by Senators Richard Shelby (R-AL) and Christopher Dodd (D-CT), that would require parental consent before a company could extract market research from a child in school. The measure is pending in a House-Senate conference committee.

NetworkNext says it has “participating schools” in Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Columbus, Dallas, Denver, Detroit, Houston, Indianapolis, Los Angeles, Miami, Minneapolis, New York, Philadelphia, Phoenix, Pittsburgh, Portland, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle, St. Louis, Tampa, and Washington DC.

Commercial Alert's mission is to keep the commercial culture within its proper sphere, and to prevent it from exploiting children and subverting the higher values of family, community, environmental integrity and democracy.

Commercial Alert’s website is at <<http://www.commercialalert.org>>.