

NEWS RELEASE

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ZapMe!: A New Corporate Predator in the Schools

Ralph Nader is alerting parents that a new “corporate predator,” ZapMe! Corporation, has been established to carry out a new invasive strategy of bombarding children with advertisements in schools, and urged parents to “join together to keep ZapMe! and other advertisers out of your children’s schools.” On October 21, ZapMe! announced that “it had begun installing...networks of computer labs in schools across the country” as a vehicle to advertise at children.

On October 21, *The Hartford Courant* reported that ZapMe! President Frank Vigil “said the company earns money from corporate advertisers that have their logos and links posted on the ZapMe! browser.” *Wired News* described the ZapMe! computer screens as containing “banner ads built into the browser interface.”

“Parents send their kids to school to learn to read, write and add, not to learn how to whine and nag parents to buy products,” Nader said. “Corporate predators like ZapMe! should get out of schools and let children alone,” Nader said.

“ZapMe! wants to profit from making schoolchildren into captive ad watchers,” said Gary Ruskin, director of Commercial Alert. “ZapMe does not care about the health, development, or well-being of children or families. It is outrageous that parents should have this shoved down their children's throats.”

”ZapMe! is the latest example of how companies coerce children to watch ads in school,” Nader said. Nader noted that the similarly coercive Channel One program of direct advertising now reaches about eight million children each day in schools. Joel Babbit, then-president of Channel One explained why advertisers like it: “The biggest selling point to advertisers [is]...we are forcing kids to watch two minutes of commercials.”

The targeting of children with ads is booming because the children’s market is seen as an increasingly profitable one. James U. McNeal, an expert in marketing to children, wrote recently that “Virtually every consumer-goods industry, from airlines to zinnia-seed sellers, targets kids” because “children are the brightest star in the consumer constellation.”

“Corporations like ZapMe! are trying to take control away from parents over their own children’s experiences,” Nader said. “Parents, not corporations, should raise children.”

Ad agencies target children with an enormous number of commercials. For example, According to *Consumer Reports*, the average American child views more than 30,000 television commercials each year.

Commercial Alert is a new project to help parents, children, and communities defend themselves against harmful, immoral or intrusive advertising and marketing, and the excesses of commercialism. The web address for Commercial Alert is <<http://www.essential.org/alert/>>.-30-