

# Empowering Imagination

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A Primer on the  
Ethical Imperative  
in Children's  
Marketing &  
Entertainment

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# 1. Introduction

## ALWAYS A REFRESHING AUDIENCE

Kids are fun and entertaining.

They don't readily conform to societal norms, get bogged down with existential questions, or eat their broccoli. Their rich imaginative life lies close to the surface, unfettered, ready to make unbound leaps of connection and (il)logic.

Creating entertainment for an audience with these endearing qualities translates into a bonanza of wonderful occasions. In making things that kids like to watch, do and play, we get to tap our inner "Peter Pan." When we do it right, we rediscover a freer and more playful approach to thinking and problem-solving. In teaching and entertaining our kids, it is often we who are the ones that learn and are entertained the most.

## THE PROMISE OF INTERACTIVE FOR ENTERTAINMENT, BRANDS AND EDUCATION

Entertainers and marketers love the interactive platform because its reach is inexpensive, supports rich and immersive experiences, and has an unparalleled ability to be a truly integrative platform<sup>1</sup>. It allows various brand-building programs to work together where the result is greater than the sum of their individual effects and capabilities.

Interactive platforms are also inherently a social and symbiotic framework where brand engagement is at its highest. One must purposefully "do" something to use an interactive platform. This two-way communication results in a powerful reinforcement loop between the audience and the content. Brand managers love that.

Interactive platforms also have a barely-tapped potential to educate in new and exciting ways. DVDs help kids with autism<sup>2</sup>, and research shows that playing video games builds life long learning skills<sup>3</sup>.

## SAME APPROACH TO INTERACTIVE, BUT NEW DIMENSIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY

mod7's approach to interactivity has been developed over years of experience. Our process is a useful general framework for developing compelling and award-win-

ning experiences that don't sacrifice function. A great interactive solution:

- understands the audience and centers on the user,
- doesn't compromise on function or usability,
- uses the most relevant technology,
- tells a compelling story,
- starts an important conversation,
- creates delight in the audience, while amplifying and clarifying the content.

Regardless of the application, channel, or audience, we strive to do these things in all our interactive properties.

However, when it comes to creating interactive platforms where children are the primary audience, we employ an additional layer of responsible awareness. Kids are not just another audience. They are uniquely vulnerable to certain messages and don't always have the emotional and cognitive tools needed to process marketing language.

## SURE, IT'S A PARENT'S JOB TO FILTER, BUT...

Do you remember why you got into children's entertainment? Perhaps you're an artist at heart, wanting to tell interesting stories. Maybe you love making new kinds of toys and games. Perhaps you're an educator, and want to have a part in shaping future generations. Or perhaps you've just stumbled into it, but have grown to love this unique and special industry.

Whatever the reason, you have motivation, and you have a job to do. It is difficult to make a living in this industry without feeling like you have to sacrifice artistic expression and business needs to social responsibility. The cumulative effect of the complex systems of children's entertainment and marketing often feels too big to address as one person or one company. So it's easier to push the responsibility for our audience's well-being on their parents. After all, it's not our job to moderate children's habits, right?

If that's the case, does this help establish a place as a trusted brand or entertainment property? How do the gatekeepers of your audience perceive your brand? Are you to be trusted with the welfare of their child? Does it seem like you are proactively seeking their child's well-being, even before your own bottom-line?

**"Kids are not just another audience."**

## IT TAKES A VILLAGE

By now, thanks in part to a controversial 1996 book<sup>4</sup>, most of us have heard the proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child.” Whether you believe that statement or not, it’s undeniable that we are all intricately impacted by the people in our lives and our communities. While the concept of the “village” in 21st century life merits much debate, it’s not a great leap to accept the assumption that our modern-day village is composed of those people and groups who influence us the most—regardless of geographic proximity. In this context it is implied that we—as purveyors of culture and entertainment—have as much responsibility in the well-being and nurturing of our child audience as do their parents and family.

With this extraordinary influence, a wedge has been driven between parent and child for the sake of consumerism and profit. We take advantage of kids’ ability to influence their parent’s purchasing decisions<sup>5</sup>. We often create experiences that pull children away from meaningful interactions with their families and friends.

## AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

In 2004, the American Psychological Association’s Task Force on Advertising and Children stated that “...young children inherently lack the cognitive capability to effectively recognize and defend against televised commercial persuasion”<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore, the Task Force delineated an age threshold: “Research establishes clearly that most children under the age of approximately 8 years do not comprehend the persuasive intent of advertising.”

Children under 8 are a vulnerable group. It is simply unethical to target this group with persuasive commercial exposure of any kind. Let’s proceed on this basis as a fundamental starting point.

There are other observed dangers of advertising to children that are more controversial and they will not be discussed at length in this document. They are important to acknowledge nonetheless. For more information there are additional resources in the references of this document that we encourage you to review<sup>7</sup>.

**“How do the gatekeepers of your audience perceive your brand? Are you to be trusted with the welfare of their child? Does it seem like you are proactively seeking their child’s well-being, even before your own bottom-line?”**

## 2. Current Legislation and Guidelines for Children’s Advertising

For your convenience, we summarize and itemize the legislative and self-regulatory guidelines at the end of this document.

## COPPA (LEGISLATED)

In 1998, the Federal Trade Commission released the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998 (COPPA)<sup>8</sup>. This document defines a child as an individual under the age of 13. In the interest of child safety, it prohibits certain acts on the part of website operators. It covers essentials like: the protection of personal information, clearly identifying privacy practices, transparency, parental consent requirements, and other important guidelines that most reputable child-targeted websites comply with. Please see the references section of this document for more information.

## CARU (SELF-REGULATORY)

The Children’s Advertising Review Unit (CARU) “evaluates child-directed advertising and promotional material in all media to advance truthfulness, accuracy and consistency...”<sup>9</sup>. They also define a child as anyone under 13. CARU’s subjective principles are intended to protect children with guidelines that go beyond legal requirements. The high standards set by CARU are intended to promote responsible children’s advertising<sup>10</sup>. A current weakness of the CARU guidelines is that it’s still influenced by older television and media models. They do not exhaustively consider the many ambiguities in the still-formative online environment.

Even so, it is an extremely effective document with important principles to strive for when dealing with children's advertising, such as: recognizing that children have a limited capacity to process credibility, mandating that advertising be fair and truthful, not advertising inappropriate products or content to children, presenting positive role models, avoiding social stereotyping, the use of advertising as an educational opportunity, contributing to the child-parent relationship in a responsible manner.

CANADIAN MARKETING ASSOCIATION CODE OF ETHICS (SELF-REGULATORY)

The Canadian Marketing Association includes "Special Considerations" for marketing to children in its Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice<sup>11</sup>. The considerations are similar to those outlined in the COPPA regulations, covering areas like: consent, contests, credulity, age-appropriate language and e-commerce.

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION (RECOMMENDATIONS)

Referenced earlier in this document, the American Psychological Association's Task Force on Advertising and Children released a set of recommendations for advertising to children<sup>6</sup>. It essentially states that more research is required in this area and it makes recommendations on where psychologists should next direct their research efforts. The document addresses "interactive media environments" and acknowledges that little is understood in how "branded environments" influence children. Even so, several actionable recommendations can be gleaned from the document.

**"This our primary goal: To proactively nurture children's overall well-being by exceeding their basic developmental needs."**

In addition to its recommendation that advertising to children under 8 be restricted, it sets forth a few other important guidelines such as: clearly identifying advertising content to children, providing public education on the effects of advertising to children, teaching kids critical viewing skills, and restricting school-based advertising to kids 8 and under.

COPPA AND CARU COMPLIANCY IS IMPORTANT, BUT IS IT ENOUGH?

Meeting existing legislative rules and self-regulatory guidelines can effectively ensure our audience's safety and well-being to a large degree. It should be the minimum standard. We aim to set the bar higher.

In the following pages, we are establishing aspirations and hope to contribute to a continuing dialogue on the ethical imperative in children's marketing and entertainment. Like a child's imagination, we choose to be unbounded by convention, rules and dogma: we seek to proactively create a vision where children are not just safely entertained, but also nourished and nurtured into responsible social citizens.

### 3. Positive Strategies for Children's Entertainment and Marketing

STEP ONE

Let's examine our priorities. Yes—we are in business to make money. Yes—we are creating entertainment in order to meet our own needs for artistic self-expression. Yes—we are telling compelling stories to delight children. And, yes—we are making product and brand extensions so we can increase our reach and expand our company's bottom line.

But let's also take a step back and establish an overriding goal for our work as children's entertainers and marketers. This is a goal that should come before any of our other motivations. From the outset of any project or campaign where children are part of the audience, this is our primary goal: **To proactively nurture children's overall well-being by exceeding their basic developmental needs.** We will put children first. Period. We are talking to kids and that is the number one priority.

We are the village. We are responsible to our kids. A less virtuous (but still valid) way of looking at it is: flourishing kids grow up to be savvy and responsible adults. Savvy and responsible adults make better drivers of long-term economic stimulus, helping our bottom line as well as our relationship with our audience. Our authentically positive actions also help build trust with our audience gatekeepers (parents, teachers), increasing interactions with our audience, helping the bottom-line again.

Our goal is to proactively nurture children's overall well-being, so our next question will be: "How does my [brand/property/company] meet this goal?" Or, "What attributes can we amplify in our brands that achieve this goal in an authentic way?"

More importantly: exactly what do children need for their "overall well-being"? In a world where opposing viewpoints on the practice of parenting and the needs of children clash with conflicting philosophies of intervention and responsibility, what common ground can possibly be found in answering these questions?

#### WHAT DO CHILDREN NEED?

mod7 has formulated some principal guidelines that shape our approach to children's entertainment properties. These are by no means exhaustive or definitive, but through research and industry experience (with a dash of conviction and common-sense), we present this ever-evolving set of recommendations. These guide our own practice and we hope they will influence our industry and our clients' industries. More importantly, we hope to start a constructive dialogue on this topic free from finger-pointing while keeping our audience's best interests in mind.

## 4. Children Need to Play

OK, this seems to be an easy one. Whether you're a toy manufacturer or a comic book publisher, it's clear that the games and worlds you create are the ones in which children can play and exercise their imagination. Your properties engage children and provide them with a shared cultural context in which to imaginatively inhabit

with their friends. Yet the concept of play includes a much broader scope of critical features.

#### WHAT IS PLAY AND WHY DO KIDS NEED IT?

Play "paves the way for learning."<sup>12</sup> Rich symbolic play can have a positive influence on literacy development.<sup>13</sup> In pretend play, children are able to simultaneously take on multiple roles: narrator, protagonist, antagonist, actor, object, director, audience. They hone their conversational, improvisational and performance abilities<sup>14</sup>. They simulate the possible and impossible in order to learn more about their world and make new lateral connections between seemingly unconnected ideas. As such, play encourages flexibility and creativity in thinking and problem-solving.

**"Play encourages flexibility and creativity in thinking and problem-solving."**

#### PLAY USING THE IMAGINATION

Play consists of more than video games and Internet browsing. Children need access to nature, physicality, and open-ended play for physical and mental well-being<sup>15</sup>. Children need free, open-ended play away from the computer or video game screen for the following reasons:

- Greater choice and opportunities for play
- Possibility to construct and re-organize settings
- Play is more vigorous
- Increases coordination and awareness of physical limitations
- Rich, diverse, multi-sensory experiences<sup>16</sup>

#### INSPIRING A CHILD'S IMAGINATION WITH YOUR BRAND

All this certainly raises some important implications for those of us who define a successful entertainment experience as being the one that sucks the most time from our audience. Indeed, the holy grail of online experience-building is to increase your website's "stickiness" in order to increase your audience's interaction with your brand or property<sup>17</sup>. But maybe this criteria should be rethought when it comes to a younger audience.

We believe it's possible to entertain kids while encouraging them to play in ways that are balanced and healthy. Here are some ideas:

- **Creatively build elements into your entertainment experience that require the child to do physical activities with their bodies or hands, preferably away from the screen or television.** This need not be arbitrary or forced. You can do this in a way that's true to your brand and message and won't compromise the integrity of your property.
- **Periodically remind the kids in your audience that it's fun to play outside with others.** This is particularly effective in sports-based games and simulations. Give them ideas for role-playing using your entertainment property's characters and situations. But don't get too specific with your brand rules—play should spontaneously progress into constructions of their own invention.

Please refer to our case studies for examples of ways we've executed some of these ideas.

## 5. Children Need Role Models

Role models and heroes inspire children to grow in positive directions. The task of the role model is quickly becoming subsumed by pop culture images. Our goal is to ensure those images reinforce affirmative values and challenge our kids to find the best within themselves.

### WHY?

Role models are critical in imparting important skills, values and beliefs to the next generation.

Kids identify with those that are most like themselves, and choose role models that they find to be most relevant<sup>18</sup>. It's very important that the range of potential role models to choose from is broad and varied. Unfortunately, this isn't always the case with popular media.

In television and film, gender-stereotyped behaviours continue to be the norm. As an example, "male characters are more commonly portrayed as independent, assertive, athletic, important, attractive, technical,

and responsible than female characters"<sup>19</sup>. Portrayals like this lead to a restricted range of role models and to the reinforcement of limiting generalizations.

The reality of life on our planet today also underscores the need for a new kind of role model. John Hoyt of The Humane Society writes: "People are often heard to say they are concerned about the kind of world we will leave to our grandchildren, but equally critical is the kind of grandchildren we shall leave to the earth. The values and attitudes imparted to the children and youth of today are crucial in building the political will for sustainable societies in the next century."<sup>20</sup>

**"Role models are critical in imparting important skills, values and beliefs to the next generation."**

### WHO ARE CHILDREN'S ROLE MODELS?

Surveys and focus groups reveal who children identify as their role models: parents (highest percentage), entertainers (second-highest percentage), friends, professional athletes, and lowest is usually historical figures. The qualities that children admire in their role models include: helpfulness, understanding, generosity, skill, and sense of humour<sup>18</sup>.

### HOW DOES YOUR BRAND OR ENTERTAINMENT PROPERTY INSPIRE BY EXAMPLE?

With entertainers ranking so high in children's estimation of heroes, we have the obligation to make sure they are being reinforced with positive values. Here are some ideas:

- **Expose children to a wide variety of potential role models.** Be alert for gender- and ethnic-stereotyped images and seek balance in the portrayal of genders and ethnicities. Exercise commonsense in balancing this against the truth in your property and audience expectations.
- **Avoid using violence as the solution to narrative conflict and motivational objectives.** The jury is still "out" on how much the portrayal of violence in video games and media affects the behaviour of children. In any case, it's a positive message when one seeks solutions that are alternatives to violence whenever possible. Doing so not only lays the founda-



tion for positive action through dialogue and discourse, it also forces storytellers and children alike to be creative in seeking thrilling and intelligent resolutions to problems.

- **Be a role model. Venerate positive and humane behaviours not only through character and story, but also through your brand's or company's actions and dialogue with the child.** Consider reinforcing positive behaviours like: willingness to choose and change, kindness, compassion, honesty, generosity, courage, perseverance, humour, wisdom, and integrity<sup>21</sup>.
- **Demonstrate the wide variety of typical body types as acceptable and beautiful.** Children, particularly young girls, are conditioned to unrealistic aspirations of beauty. This needs to stop.

Please refer to our case studies for examples of ways we've executed some of these ideas.

## 6. Children Need Positive Relationships

To flourish, children need positive relationships with each other, their family, their school environments and their communities<sup>22</sup>. The state of these relationships affect their perception of self, their ability to work within a team, the ability to build friendships, their development of social skills, and establishes the pattern for future interpersonal relationships.

Developing positive relationships with their school and community increases tolerance and acceptance among children, as well as fosters empathy. "Children who are empathic tend to do better in school, in social situations, and in their adult careers. Children and teenagers who have the greatest amount of skill at empathy are viewed as leaders by their peers"<sup>23</sup>.

HOW DOES YOUR BRAND OR ENTERTAINMENT PROPERTY FOSTER COMMUNITY AND FAMILY TIES?

Many brand and entertainment interactions are social in nature (going to watch a film, shopping for clothes, going to a restaurant). However, too often we rely on solitary activities (video games, website browsing) to entertain and engage children in a brand dialogue.

Even if the activities have a type of social interaction (multi-player games, virtual worlds), they tend to pull the child away from positive real-world interactions with the people that are important in their lives (family members, friends). The technology is often used to replace important interpersonal relationships with an over-mediated simplification that affords avoidance.

Here are some ideas for increasing children's positive relationships while interacting with your brand or entertainment property:

- **Develop activities that require cognitive and strategic interaction outside of the digital space between two or more people.** This goes beyond adding a multi-player component and live chat so kids can coordinate dungeon-storming attacks. Encourage children to actively dialogue with their peers or siblings to solve problems in ways that they couldn't have on their own. Encourage true conversation and relationship-building.
- **Create opportunities for children to involve their parents in their activities and in broader discussions.** Beyond getting a parent's permission for their child to log on to your branded entertainment site, get their parents involved in the interactions either directly or indirectly. Encourage the child to engage their parents in a brand dialogue: What is a brand? What is an ad? What is a consumer? These questions can start discussions which help to deepen trust between parent and child.
- **Educate children that pressuring their parents to buy a service or product isn't acceptable.**

Please refer to our case studies for examples of ways we've executed a few of these ideas.

**“Encourage the child to engage their parents in a brand dialogue.”**



## 7. Children Need to Think

The ability to understand, to problem-solve, to adapt and to learn are all good examples of critical thinking skills. Beyond the obvious utility of such skills, their deeper impact lies in their link to increased overall well-being for a child.

The critical tool children need to combat the threats and challenges that they face today is the ability to think for themselves and not be driven solely by external directions. Children that are self-directed don't need to look to outside sources for approval and are less likely to fall into destructive activities later in life. Dr. Elisa Medhus identifies "five essential qualities of self-directed children"<sup>24</sup>:

1. High self-esteem and self confidence that comes from the ability to rebound from defeat and view failure as a learning experience,
2. Competence that comes from a keen awareness of their potential,
3. Independence that comes from confidence in their ability to make decisions and solve problems,
4. Character that comes from good role modeling of moral principles and values by parents,
5. Being an asset within a group because they have a strong sense of purpose and appreciation of their own uniqueness.

HOW DOES YOUR BRAND OR ENTERTAINMENT PROPERTY ENGAGE YOUNG MINDS?

You can't make kids think independently. But you can create situations where the tools are in place for the development of independent thought. Engage young minds in your brand or entertainment property by:

- **Reward failure as a valuable learning experience.** The freedom to fail is critical to learning. This is not to say that there should be no consequences for failure. Rather, it is about

conveying an attitude that the long-term educational value of failure can sometimes outweigh the short-term of inconvenient consequences. We must also be careful not to create a sense of inadequacy when failure occurs. Failure, especially in games and chemistry, can be quite fun and isn't something to be embarrassed about.

- **Respect the intelligence of children by not making things too easy. But also make sure it's not too hard. Plan for dynamic, skill-based and context-sensitive assistance.** Striking the right balance between someone's sense of challenge and their level of skill—or "flow"—is notoriously difficult. In an interactive setting it is becoming more and more feasible to detect when someone is starting to have trouble, and to give them the help they need when they need it. This ensures that people are stimulated and challenged, but are not so challenged that they feel stupid or frustrated.
- **Build confidence in children by not over-controlling their experience. Don't prescribe solutions—allow them to use their own judgement.** This can be as simple as a language adjustment. For example, in a driving game, you might say, "it's snowing on this level," rather than, "it's snowing, so don't forget to equip your all-season tires." State the facts and allow kids to make their own judgement calls.

Please refer to our case studies for examples of ways we've executed some of these ideas.

**"The critical tool children need to combat the threats and challenges that they face today is the ability to think for themselves."**

## 8. Children Need Healthy Habits

Children need healthy habits and behaviours to develop positively. Healthy habits range from personal nutrition needs to attitudes to time-management. Unhealthy habits contribute to a wide range of serious problems in our children's lives: tooth decay, obesity, bullying, diabetes, violence, disenfranchisement, apathy, and problems with drugs, sex and alcohol<sup>22</sup>.

HOW DOES YOUR BRAND OR ENTERTAINMENT PROPERTY PROMOTE BALANCE AND WHOLE-LIFE WELL-BEING?

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Habits are adopted through repetition. They can provide comfort and stability through periods of change. They are modelled by role models. Good habits need to be integrated into the fabric of life in order to be effective. Encourage positive habits in the lives of children through interaction with your property by:

- **Identify potential for positive habit-building activities that exist within your brand or property and leverage them into an authentic experience.** Do this creatively and without compromising the integrity of your entertainment experience. Is your brand about food? Build in models of family mealtime benefits. Are you telling stories about everyday kids' challenges? Explore ways to address personal hygiene habits or issues of empathy. Is there an economic facet to your virtual world? Teach and reward good saving habits.
- **Consider marketing partnerships that not only increase your audience exposure and excitement, but also reinforce or augment healthy habits associated with both brands.** For example, if you market software or video games, consider a cross-promotion with an outdoor sports or healthy beverage product. Work together to create habits of balance that incorporate the best of both experiences.

Please refer to our case studies for examples of ways we've executed some of these ideas.

## 9. Case Study: SpaceStation 5-5-3-2

### PROJECT TYPE

Children's Entertainment & Education

### CLIENT AND PROJECT BACKGROUND

The BC Dairy Foundation (BCDF) is a not-for-profit organization with the mandate of increasing milk consumption in British Columbia, Canada. The Foundation is a recognized leader in nutrition education, delivering nutrition education programs for thousands of school children. BCDF approached mod7 to develop a digitally-based software application to teach Canada's Food Guide to 6th, 7th and 8th graders.

### PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Develop a curriculum-based application that teachers can use in schools.
- Teach the content in Canada's Food Guide.
- Give children the tools they need to develop self-evaluation skills regarding their daily life and nutrition needs.

### PROJECT SOLUTION

Our solution, developed through extensive audience testing and research, was the development of a PC and Mac-based application that could be distributed to schools using a broad range of computer platform variations.

Working closely with the nutrition educators at BCDF, our in-house team created the concept and story, and went on to develop all aspects of the project, from 3D modelling and animation, sound, programming and final authoring.

This project demonstrates the following tactics:

- Learning through play.
- Extending the entertainment experience

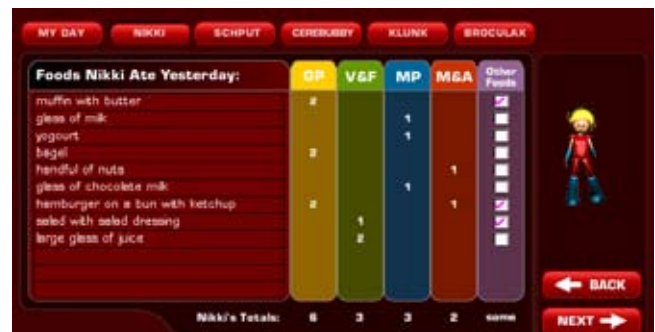
beyond the screen, by allowing kids to print out their own daily food plans and other motivational nutrition materials to reference throughout the day.

- Create positive role models through a variety of archetypes and heroes.
- Reinforce positive relationships through the involvement of students' teachers in the program.
- Build confidence by allowing children to evaluate their own daily food intake and to make realistic changes, if needed.
- Encourage and reward healthy habits through understanding the benefits of proper nutrition.

### RESULTS

- Longevity/value: Used in British Columbian and Canadian schools for over 4 years.
- Estimated reach of program as of December 2006: 150,000 students.
- Extremely positive feedback from teachers and students.
- Winner of several awards.

### SCREENSHOTS



# 10. Case Study: Pinhole Spy Camera

## PROJECT TYPE

Children's Entertainment & Education

## CLIENT AND PROJECT BACKGROUND

Pinhole Spy Camera is an award-winning example of interactive learning. Combining equal parts instruction and adventure, visitors become a top-secret agent while learning how to make their own pinhole camera!

## PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Create interest in the science of photography.
- Introduce kids to the fun and satisfaction of making things.

## PROJECT SOLUTION

Our award-winning solution incorporated custom sound and photography, how-to content, and technique, wrapped-up in a cool and fun "spy" package.

Pinhole Spy Camera demonstrates the following tactics:

- Give kids inspiration to leave the screen and get active with their hands as they use detailed instructions and printable templates to construct a working pinhole camera.
- Give kids loose role-playing characters and scenarios that they can enact outside.
- Promotes balance by encouraging kids to get outdoors (where pinhole photography works best).
- Promote positive relationships by encouraging young children to get their parents involved in the camera construction.
- Respect kids' intelligence by using consistent "spy themed" language that didn't dumb-down or compromise the experience.

- Engage the child's curiosity by providing more information on how cameras work, as well as the photographic process.

## RESULTS

- Winner of over 20 prestigious awards and accolades.
- Viral: with no marketing effort, still generates an average of 15,000 unique visits monthly.
- Used as a resource in classrooms around the world.

## SCREENSHOTS



# 11. Case Study: Titanium Chef

## PROJECT TYPE

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Children's Entertainment & Education

## CLIENT AND PROJECT BACKGROUND

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The BC Dairy Foundation (BCDF) is a not-for-profit organization with the mandate of increasing milk consumption in British Columbia, Canada. The Foundation is a recognized leader in nutrition education, delivering nutrition education programs for thousands of school children. In 2007, the guidelines in Canada's Food Guide for Healthy Eating were rewritten, so BCDF approached mod7 to update the already-successful SpaceStation 5-5-3-2 program.

## PROJECT OBJECTIVES

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- Develop a curriculum-based application that teachers can use in schools.
- Teach the revised Canada's Food Guide.
- Give children the tools they need to develop self-evaluation skills regarding their daily life and nutrition needs.
- Expand the distribution of the program by making it a fully online experience.

## PROJECT SOLUTION

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This program is scheduled to be launched mid-2009 (TBD). From the outset, we recognized the unique opportunity to learn from the SpaceStation 5-5-3-2 program (which mod7 also developed) and update it for a new generation of students. Both online and in-school testing of the project has informed nearly every educational and design decision. Interesting features of this project include:

- It is a rich and deep Role Playing Game (RPG) that incorporates virtual worlds and multiplayer elements.
- It includes mini-games to periodically test learning and provide recognizable

benchmarks.

- It is using innovative teaching techniques (including repetition, discovery, application, synthesis) to facilitate retention and internalization of learned information.
- It is a technical achievement, using advanced Flash™ programming to generate real-time 3-dimensional and immersive worlds.
- The use of user accounts allow students to play in school and also extend their learning experience to home use.
- It's actually fun!

## TACTICS

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- Learning through play.
- Presents a variety of candidates for positive, ethnically and gender-balanced role models.
- Avoids using violence as the solution to narrative conflict. Does not promote guns or weaponry as primary story drivers, but is still compelling and exciting.
- Encourages children to think about their eating habits offline.
- Rewards failure as a valuable learning experience by linking success with knowledge, especially through problem-solving and mini-games.
- Balances challenge with reward to help kids feel good about their accomplishments. Challenges are tough, but not too tough, and logical.
- Builds confidence in kids by allowing for a more exploratory approach to interaction. Objectives and methods aren't always made explicit and multiple paths can lead to the same result, allowing for exploration and judgement to be used in solving problems.
- Builds good habits by making children repetitively employ nutrition strategies for a variety of life scenarios in order to progress, each time adding new and more complex considerations to the cycle.

## RESULTS

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- Initial audience testing is very positive. Many students were excited to find out that they would be able to actually play the game in school.
- During testing, children's comments included: "Really cool!" "The story is great! I want to see what happens next!" "Sweet!"



SCREENSHOTS



## 12. Summary

Thank you for your interest. For your convenience, we provide a recap of important recommendations and ideas below.

### IMPORTANT LEGISLATED AND SELF-REGULATED RECOMMENDATIONS (THIS IS THE MINIMUM)

From COPPA, CARA, CMA and APA recommendations.

1. Advertising to kids under age 8 should be restricted (this is an APA recommendation for television).
2. Clearly identify privacy practices.
3. Ensure transparency regarding who is running the property and provide direct contact information.
4. Parental consent is always required if children are providing personal information.
5. Recognize that children have a limited capacity to process credibility.
6. Advertising must be fair and truthful, and not misleading in any way.
7. Do not advertise inappropriate products or content to children.
8. Present positive role models.
9. Avoid social stereotyping.
10. Use advertising as an educational opportunity where possible.
11. Contribute to the child-parent relationship in a responsible manner.
12. Do not exploit children's credulity, lack of experience or sense of loyalty.
13. Do not knowingly accept an order from a child without a parent's consent.
14. Do not pressure children to urge their parents to purchase a product or service.
15. Clearly identify advertising content to children.
16. Teach kids critical viewing skills
17. Restrict school-based advertising to kids 8 and under.

### RECAP OF MOD7 IDEAS AND TACTICS

1. Our primary goal is to proactively nurture children's overall well-being by exceeding their basic developmental needs. All other goals flow out of this.
2. Build options that require the child to do physical activities with their bodies or hands as part of your entertainment experience (preferably away from the screen or television).
3. Periodically remind the kids in your audience that it's fun to play outside with others.
4. Expose children to a wide variety of relevant potential role models.
5. Avoid using violence as the solution to narrative conflict and motivational objectives.
6. Be a role model. Venerate positive and humane behaviours not only through character and story, but also through your brand's or company's actions and dialogue with the child.
7. Demonstrate the wide variety of typical body types as acceptable and beautiful.
8. Develop activities that require cognitive and strategic interaction outside of the digital space between two or more people.
9. Create opportunities for children to involve their parents in their activities and in broader discussions.
10. Educate children that pressuring their parents to buy a service or product isn't acceptable.
11. Reward failure as a valuable learning experience.
12. Respect the intelligence of children by not making things too easy. But also make sure it's not too hard. Plan for dynamic, skill-based and context-sensitive assistance.
13. Build confidence in children by not overcontrolling their experience. Don't prescribe solutions—allow them to use their own judgement.
14. Identify potential for positive habit-building activities that exist within your brand or property and leverage them into an authentic experience extension.
15. Consider marketing partnerships that not only increase your audience exposure and excitement, but also reinforce or augment healthy habits associated with both brands.



## NEXT STEPS

We are an interactive studio with experience in developing children's entertainment platforms online.

You are a brand and/or entertainment property that is taking a leadership role in socially-conscious children's media and marketing. You want to position your brand and children's entertainment property as a trusted experience that puts the well-being of children above marketing objectives. You think about profit sustainably, with the long-view in mind. What next?

We're here to help. It's not easy, but it is incredibly rewarding. We have creative ideas and we're fun to work with. Let's get started.

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