



## Six strategies marketers use to get kids to want stuff *bad*

Updated 11/22/2006 12:07 AM ET

By Bruce Horovitz, USA TODAY

Every year at this time, visions of sugar plum profits dance through the heads of toymakers and retailers.

Many take aim at the most susceptible target: kids.

Almost half of all kid-targeted toys, games and gadgets sold this year will be bought in the final quarter. Kids through age 14 will influence \$160 billion in spending in November and December, says James McNeal, author of "The Kids Market: Myths and Realities."

That leaves marketers little time to make a Santa-size impression.

Meanwhile, slipping toy sales have raised the stakes. Last year, sales dipped 2% to \$21.9 billion, reports market researcher NPD Group. Some categories went down like a kid on a slide: plush toys by 14%, board games by 8%.

What's a toymaker to do? Advertise like mad.

Last year, marketers spent \$1.4 billion per month marketing to children — 15% more than the year before, McNeal says. Call it 'surround selling.' "

Mattel Brands President Neil Friedman says Mattel will spend half its ad budget — estimated at \$460 million by Advertising Age — in the fourth quarter.

Hasbro won't divulge its ad plans, but it is ramping up TV spots for hot toys such as its \$299 life-size, interactive miniature pony — Butterscotch My FurReal Friends Pony. When making and placing ads, however, Chief Operating Officer Brian Goldner says, "We apply judgment as parents, not just as business people."...

In the next few weeks, marketers will try to nudge, prod and cajole kids into buying their stuff. Some techniques that have worked for years are still effective — particularly, repetitive ads on kids shows. Among new ideas in 2006: a Wal-Mart website for toy picking that critics have panned for putting kids in control of e-mailed wish lists.

Holiday hype has reached a point where parents need a tip sheet to know what to watch for to shield their kids — if not themselves.

Here it is: A list of six of the most effective techniques marketers are using this season to snatch the attention of youngsters...

### 6. Bus Radio

For many kids riding in school buses, the background noise is more than the drivers' pleas for quiet.

It could be a piped-in commercial — perhaps even for a holiday gift. About a month ago, Bus Radio began rolling out its student-targeted programming of music, news and commercials to about 800 school buses in 12 cities. Roughly eight minutes each hour are devoted to commercials. Ad revenue is shared with school districts.