



School buses in 11 states tune in to radio programming aimed at kids

By Wendy Koch, USA TODAY 9/17/06

The latest effort by schools to boost tight budgets by hooking up with corporate sponsors gets going next month, when school buses in 11 states begin airing commercial radio with ads targeted at kids.

Bus Radio, a Massachusetts-based company, says 100,000 riders on 800 buses will hear music and commercials. The company says the broadcasts will entertain children and curb rowdiness.

"We want a safer ride. We don't approve of what's being played" now, says company CEO Michael Yanoff. He says more than half of school buses nationwide are equipped with FM radio that airs adult content, including commercials for beer and R-rated movies. Bus Radio will broadcast age-appropriate ads and music by pop singers such as Kelly Clarkson, Yanoff says. Content varies by riders' ages. He would not name participating schools or advertisers but says products will cover entertainment, apparel, electronics, education and health...

Radio on the bus helps keep students "focused," says Linda Farbry, director of transportation for Fairfax County Public Schools in Virginia, the nation's 13th-largest school system. She says most of the district's buses play radio from an approved list of stations, and because the ads aren't directed at students, kids easily ignore them. Farbry opposes Bus Radio because she says it would be harder for kids to tune out ads geared to their interests.

Bus Radio's one-hour broadcasts contain six minutes of public service ads and eight minutes of commercials. Yanoff expects the service to expand to 1 million students next year. Yanoff says schools will be paid based on number of students, length of contract and frequency of broadcasts. He wouldn't be more specific. The schools are in 11 states: California, Georgia, Indiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Washington.