Two main principles to stick with in advertising are:

1. You’ve got to find a truth in the organization and bring that to life and ...

2. It’s got to be an emotional connection.

— Mark Sareff, guest on the Unsellable segment
Curriculum Relevance

Watching, talking about and taking part in this series via the program's website will give students the opportunity to learn about how advertising really works, all within a highly engaging format. It would be suitable for middle and senior secondary students as well as tertiary students studying marketing, advertising, public relations and media studies. For secondary students, the themes and issues explored have relevance to:

- Media Studies
- English
- Graphic Design
- Ethics and Philosophy
- Psychology
- Culture and Society

With a racy and often hilarious style and approach, great graphics and lighting, this series both entertains and informs. These guides take students through a number of the series' regular segments and encourage them to respond both critically and creatively to the material, using web resources wherever possible for both research and inspiration.

What is The Gruen Transfer?

It’s that split second when a shopping centre's intentionally confusing layout makes our eyes glaze and our jaws slacken, the moment when we forget what we came for and become impulse buyers; when you set out to buy running shoes but find yourself shelling out for two pairs of jeans, a sports bag and a Playstation instead. It's named after Victor Gruen who designed the very first shopping mall.

The Show

It’s a show about persuasion, about advertising, how it works and how it works on us. Every day we’re exposed to an average of 3,000 commercial messages on television, radio, in cinemas, on billboards, magazines, newspapers, T-shirts and shoes, and on the internet. Within a comic format and style the program tackles sensitive issues such as the objectification of women and the marketing of unethical products.

The Format

Each week Wil Anderson is joined by a panel of industry experts from a number of different advertising agencies. All have been involved in the creation of successful advertising campaigns and are able to provide insights and sometimes conflicting views about what they and their industry do. Apart from
revealing many of the secrets of the advertising industry, they also take part in weekly challenges, exercises, games and discussions and create ads for the unsellable. The program is taped in front of a live audience.

**The Program Makers**

This series has been devised and co-produced with the ABC by Zapruder’s other films, the production company of Andrew Denton, Anita Jacoby and Peter Thompson. Denton is the creator and star of *ENOUGH ROPE*, ABC television’s successful interview program on air since 2003, and a number of other documentary films, comedy shows and specials including *The Topic of Cancer* (1993) and *God on my Side* (2006). Denton and Jon Casimir created *The Gruen Transfer* for television.

- Who was Zapruder, the person the company is named after?

**Student Activity 1**

**Before watching questions**

1. Without using a dictionary, define advertising. Share your views.
2. Make a list of your favourite advertisements. Describe what you like about one of your choices.
3. Make a list of advertisements you really love to hate.
4. How many people do you think it takes to create a television advertisement? Name the different tasks each might have.
5. Would a program that takes a critical look at advertising be likely to be shown on commercial television?
6. What is ‘marketing’ and how is it related to advertising?
7. Collect three print ads from magazines or newspapers and bring them to your next class (not print classifieds but ads that feature a product or an idea) for analysis.
8. What do community service announcements, such as government campaigns about energy use and global warming, road safety and anti-smoking campaigns have in common with advertisements promoting products? E.g. the black balloons ads.
9. What do you think is the most important part of devising a successful advertising campaign? You might like to return to this question after watching some of the programs.
10. Before the development of mass communication media such as television and magazines, how do you think people promoted and increased sales of their products? Are some of these methods still used today?

**Episode 4**

Each episode of *The Gruen Transfer* packs a number of regular segments into the half-hour, linked through Anderson’s introductions and jokes.

**The regular panel includes:**

Russel Howcroft from George Patterson Y&R, and Todd Sampson from Leo Burnett.

One of Howcroft’s current clients is Cadbury chocolates whose ads are discussed in this episode.

Todd Sampson worked on the Mars ‘Earth’ campaign in 2002 for Mars chocolates.

Each week they are joined by others working in advertising. In Episode 4 it’s Jane Caro, freelance copywriter, who also appeared in Episode 2. She has worked for Procter and Gamble on Head and Shoulders anti-dandruff ads discussed in this episode, as well as for Lindt and Kit Kat chocolates. Dan Gregory, creative director from SMART (who appeared in Episode 1) also returns this week.

Episode 4 opens with a quirky example of opportunistic advertising where we witness the ingenious, though perhaps tacky, ways advertisers have sometimes chosen to sell their products.

**The BUMVERTISING Challenge**

An American entrepreneur once came up with the idea of using homeless people in Seattle as human billboards. Benjamin Rogovy paid beggars to carry advertising for a poker website on their cardboard signs. He dubbed his idea ‘bumvertising’. You may be familiar with people wandering the streets of our cities dressed as Koala Bears or other animals, or with a sandwich board slung across their body, promoting a product or a cause.

The panel is asked to come up with products and slogans suited to homeless people. This exercise is a bit like a brain warmer for the panel, the studio audience and the viewers – an essential way to develop lateral thinking skills.

Here are some of their ideas which the teams had to devise in twenty minutes before the program was taped.

Jane Caro and Todd Sampson came up with:

1. I buy my booze at Dan Murphy’s.
2. Income protection – you’ll never know when you need it.
3. I always choose Glad Bags.

Russel Howcroft and Dan Gregory considered ads for The Salvos, for Alcoholics Anonymous, for Centrelink and *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*. Finally they settled on:

1. Now complain about means testing
2. (from Missionbeat) The drivers that don’t look away
3. Extreme Makeover with a Before sign.
Wil Anderson, the front linkman for The Gruen Transfer, always the stand-up comic, throws in two of his thoughts:

1. Short people could wear signs for women’s jeans that said – Your bum won’t look big in these.
2. Big Brother – sometimes it’s better to be homeless.

• Which do you think are the best of these ideas, or can you come up with something stronger and funnier?
• How effective a form of advertising do you think moving billboards on people, cars, motorbikes, bikes, buses or hot air balloons and blimps are? Name two products you can remember seeing advertised using this method.

Student Activity 2
– HOW DO YOU SELL?

Chocolates, anti-dandruff shampoo and selling the unsellable.

In this episode the panel looks at how chocolates are advertised, how to sell an apparently unsellable struggling political party, The Australian Democrats, and the ‘scientific’ style of the ad of the week for an anti-dandruff shampoo. There is also the regular matching a celebrity to endorse a product challenge.

A. CHOCOLATES – how do you sell taste?

Chocolate Facts

• The average Australian eats five kilograms a year, less than half the eleven kilos per person the Belgians eat.
• Chocolate is a $1.4 billion, highly competitive industry
• The three major multinational companies – Cadbury, Nestle and Mars Kenman – account for more than seventy-five per cent of the Australian chocolate market, though Lindt has the fastest growing boxed chocolate sales. The three big companies make the following brands:
  2. Mars (Masterfoods) – Mars Bars, Snickers, M&Ms, Bounty, Twix, Maltesers and Dove.
  3. Nestle – Kit Kat, Smarties, Quality Street, Rolo, Rowntrees, Baci chocolate. Nestle also owns the Jenny Craig dieting brand!
• At the end of 2007, Cadbury topped a ‘Most Trusted Brand’ survey for the third consecutive year.
• A 2007 poll by Cadbury in the UK revealed that fifty-two per cent of women would prefer to eat chocolate than have sex, while men overwhelmingly chose sex over chocolate as a source of pleasure.
What are some of the key imperatives in advertising chocolates?

- Must show product
- Must show packaging
- Must show ingredients
- Must show enjoyment of the taste

Other mandatories of chocolate advertising include:

- The ‘way-too-perfect removal of a wrapper’.
- The product consumption shot (though as you may notice in some of the ads shown, advertisers are increasingly breaking away from this stereotype).

When you’ve watched the chocolate ads shown in this episode, respond to the following questions.

1. Is there a different approach to the way chocolates are advertised to men and women? What are the key differences in style of these ads?
2. Why does Todd think ‘stupid white males’ are often the butt of jokes in advertising such as the Mr T. Snickers ad?
3. Describe some of the key elements in the Cadbury ‘chocolate family’ series of ads. (‘Wouldn’t it be nice’)
4. What does Todd dislike about these ads?
5. Why does Russel consider these ads to be successful?
6. How do advertisers get ‘the money shot’, the gooey ingredient shot of the chocolate bar being pulled apart?
7. How effectively do some of the chocolate ads shown get around the problem Jane identifies as ‘communicating taste, the one sensation you can’t get across on television’?
8. Which chocolate ads are notorious for their emphasis on women’s sexual pleasure, particularly oral sex?

B. SELLING THE UNSELLABLE

– The Australian Democrats (original slogan was ‘Keep the Bastards Honest’)

The challenge this week is to make the Australian Democrats Political Party electable again.

The competing advertisers are Mark Sareff from The Campaign Palace and Rowan Dean from Euro RSCG.

Mark Sareff explains how he went about the task by focusing on two fundamental principles – Finding a truth in the organization (Keep the bastards honest) and making an emotional connection. He suggests that ‘if we had to let people respond logically, rationally, they’ll unpick the whole story, so you need some
very emotional advertising to elicit an emotional response’.

• How do the two teams rise to the challenge of restoring the Democrats to their former glory?
• Which ad did you respond to most strongly on an emotional level?
• Did the Panel award the Gruen Trophy to the best ad? What gave one the winning edge?

C. AD OF THE WEEK
– Head and Shoulders anti-dandruff shampoo
This week’s ad of the week takes us into a world of white coats, clipboards and scientific claims for the product.
• Do you agree with Russel that people with dandruff would be likely to know what the ZPT X 2 active ingredient in the shampoo refers to?
• Do you agree with Todd’s suggestion that the reason they use science in the ad is because most people think dandruff is a kind of disease, a medical condition as opposed to a beauty problem?
• What other ads for shampoo and other beauty products make scientific and other vague or exaggerated claims to sell a product?
• What sort of organization is The Australian Hair and Scalp Foundation? How is it funded? A list of products endorsed by the AHSF can be found at <http://ahsf.com.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=45&Itemid=54> The only product on this list is Head and Shoulders, sold by Procter and Gamble.
• Does the lab shown in the ad as the Foundation’s headquarters convince you that there is an organization behind the development of this product? Does it matter if the set is a construct, carefully planned and coloured to convey an impression of scientific seriousness?
• How does this visual promote the textual claims made in the ad?
• Why does Jane believe the ad fails to make an emotional connection with viewers?
• Will asks Russel to comment on whether this is a misleading ad. How does Russel respond?

Student Activity 3
CELEBRITY CHALLENGE – ENDORSE ME
David Hicks, recently released convicted Australian terrorist and prisoner for seven years at Guantanamo Bay, the US military prison in Cuba, is this week’s probably reluctant celebrity. Here are some things the panel think he could be the
face of:
Russel and Dan:
Fox IQ, because you’d never miss seven years of television again.
Qantas, I still call Australia infidel pigs.

King-gee overalls, so comfortable you could wear them every day for seven years.

Todd and Jane:
Mt. Franklin, it’s the water I choose to be tortured with.
Cuban Tourism, there’s more to Cuba than Guantanamo

Something on Father’s Day because I think he owes his dad a hell of a lot (a serious suggestion)

Will: Something for gardeners such as ‘has your life been ruined by an annoying Bush?’

- While famous faces are often used to endorse products, is the notoriety of people convicted of crimes ever likely to become a publicly acceptable way of advertising anything?

- What does Jane’s final response to this week’s task suggest how she feels about the implied suggestion that you can use anyone to sell anything?

Student Activity 4
The Ethics and Regulations of Advertising

The ACCC (Australian Competition and Consumer Commission) is mentioned in this episode in relation to the discussion about the Head and Shoulders anti-dandruff shampoo advertisement. Russel Howcroft points out that ‘you are unable to say anything in advertising which is incorrect. The ACCC will get you for false and deceptive misleading conduct if you cross this line’.

Part of the ACCC’s job is to promote competition and fair trade in the marketplace to benefit consumers, businesses and the community. Its primary responsibility is to ensure that individuals and businesses comply with the competition, fair trading and consumer protection laws. You can read more about the many arms of the ACCC on their website at [http://www.accc.gov.au].

Listed below are some excerpts from the section on misleading and deceptive conduct in advertising from their website:

- Some examples of misleading or deceptive conduct

Whether or not conduct is considered misleading or deceptive will depend on the particular circumstances of each case. Conduct that misleads one group of consumers will not necessarily mislead every consumer.

Some examples of conduct which may be misleading or deceptive include:

- a mobile phone provider signing you up to a contract without telling you that there is no coverage in your region

- a real estate agent misrepresenting the characteristics of a property, for example, advertising ‘beachfront lots’ that are not on the beach

- a jewellery store promoting that a watch ‘was’ $200 and is ‘now’ $100 when the store never sold the watch for $200

- a business predicting the health benefits of a therapeutic device or health product but having no proof that such benefits can be attained

- a transport company using pictures of aeroplanes to give you the impression that it takes freight by air, when it actually sends it by road

- a company misrepresenting the possible profits of a work-at-home scheme, or other business opportunity
failing to include in advertisements that sale stock is limited in number or available only for a limited time.

What is ‘puffery’? Is ‘puffery’ misleading?

Puffery is a term used to describe wildly exaggerated, fanciful or vague claims for a product or service that nobody could possibly treat seriously, and that nobody could reasonably be misled by. Examples of puffery include ‘best food in town’ or ‘freshest taste ever’.

Puffery in advertising is a practice that is generally not prohibited by the Trade Practices Act.

Did any of the examples described above surprise you?

Consider how some companies may be able to ‘push the envelope’ in claims they make without actually falling foul of the regulations. Does such advertising contravene the spirit, if not the law, of the regulations’ intentions?

Dan Gregory, a panel member in this episode, claims that the Head and Shoulders ad does not even need self-regulation, as ‘consumers will regulate it for us by turning off or changing the channel’.

What do you think ‘self-regulation’ means? Is trusting advertisers and the companies they work for to regulate their own conduct preferable to having rules imposed by the ACCC or other regulating bodies, or are independent external controls needed for such a free-wheeling and competitive industry like advertising?

While there are regulations governing what can and cannot be asserted and shown in advertisements (remember the restrictions on advertising alcoholic drinks explored in Episode 1) it may seem that some of these lines are blurred. Consider the following questions in relation to this complex question of what is ethical and what is not.

- When does exaggeration of a product’s effects become dishonest, misleading or simply incorrect?
- Who should determine what constitutes ‘bad taste’ in advertising? (think about the moving tongue ad seeking a drink)
- What might the term ‘acceptable community standards’ mean?
- What is meant by ‘subliminal’ advertising and is it allowed?

Todd Sampson talks about semiotics in relation to the images incorporated in the laboratory in the Head and Shoulders ad. Semiotics, as Todd points out, is the study of signs and symbols, what they mean and how they are used. It is visual shorthand commonly used as a research technique for designing advertisements. In the case of the Head and Shoulders ad, the white lab coats, the purity and sterility, the clipboards and the doctor’s title are all designed to immediately trigger credibility. What visual triggers used in some ads engage your attention and set up an immediate emotional response?

Make a list of five visual symbols that instantly create a particular response, e.g. the Olympic rings, the swastika, the Red Cross.
Some final product facts to contemplate

• Did the ten top selling supermarket products surprise you – Cadbury chocolates, Huggies nappies, Coca Cola, Tip Top white bread and six different types of cigarettes?

Next week on The Gruen Transfer, the panel will fight the good fight for plastic bags, show an ad that will make us cry and ponder the contradictions in advertising messages.

Before next week’s show you might like to devise a promotion for plastic bags or try your skills as an advertiser on The Gruen Transfer website at <http://www.abc.net.au/gruentransfer/> where you can also check out other people’s creative efforts and find out more about the ads.

Websites and References

http://www.abc.net.au/gruentransfer/

This website tells you many things you may not have known about advertising and gives you the chance to create your own ads for products. There are also links to websites where some of the ads shown in The Gruen Transfer can be investigated further.


Text of Sacha Molitorisz’ The Age newspaper Green Guide article, 22 May 2008, with interesting quotes from some of the people involved in the show about their intentions. See if you think they have succeeded with Episode 4.

Marguerite O’Hara is a Melbourne-based freelance writer.