



FCC COMMISSIONER DECRIES 'COMMERCIALIZATION OF MEDIA' Rails Against 'Fake News' and 'Relentless Marketing'

May 25, 2005

By [Ira Teinowitz](#)

WASHINGTON (AdAge.com) -- A member of the Federal Communications Commission, Jonathan S. Adelstein, today warned about the "increasing commercialization of American media" and called on his agency to toughen its requirements and expand its investigations into the practice of product placement.



FCC commissioner Jonathan S. Adelstein called for stricter product placement disclosure rules.

"People out there are frustrated by what they see as fake news and relentless marketing," Mr. Adelstein told the Media Institute, a nonprofit agency specializing in communications policy and the First Amendment. "The use of covert commercial pitches is penetrating deeper and deeper into our media."

Product-placement disclosure

Mr. Adelstein said he would like the FCC to mandate a clearer placement format that assures increased screen time at the end of TV shows to list product placements. He drew an analogy to political ads, which the FCC require carry sponsorship information on-screen for at

least four seconds. He also said the FCC should step up its investigations into failures to disclose placements.

Normally, the FCC requirements covering product integration and placement are handled during a show's closing credits, for instance, when producers acknowledge that a host's clothing or a car has been furnished by a retailer or marketer. But those disclosures can flash by in fractions of a second, and local stations can cut into the credits, splitting the screen in half and rendering the type all but unreadable. Mr. Adelstein called for greater prominence of the disclosures and that the disclosures are being made.

Some advertising critics have called for even bolder measures, requiring some kind of on-screen alert whenever a product appears in programming, instead of a listing at the end of the show.

Paid 'experts'

Mr. Adelstein was especially critical of video news releases and so-called experts, from chefs to celebrities, who appear on news shows to endorse particular products without disclosing they are being paid by marketers for their efforts.

Mr. Adelstein referred to recent examples of government video news releases running without disclosure and to two April *Wall Street Journal* reports. In one, a former *Child* magazine technology editor, James Oppenheim, appeared on local stations to review educational toys and electronics without any disclosure he was being paid to tout a particular toy. In the second, the paper raised questions as to whether chefs on cooking shows adequately disclosed their sponsorships.

He called for the FCC to launch investigations into the practice of undisclosed paid endorsers.

Interactive marketing to children

He also called for a ban on "t-commerce," or television-commerce, aimed at children. He said the term refers to interactive electronic links that allow children to jump from TV shows to purchasing products.

"Given that children do not always understand a division between advertising and programming -- let alone product placement that seamlessly weaves the two together -- I believe that now is the time to stop the development of t-commerce directed to children dead in its tracks. Digital TV ... should not provide wealth to advertisers at the expense of children and their parents."

Adonis Hoffman, senior vice president and general counsel for the Association of American Advertising Agencies, said the group supports reasonable disclosure of product placement but only in instances where shows feature product claims and said there needs to be "a healthy discussion" about t-commerce and children. He said he believed older children understand the difference between advertising and programming.