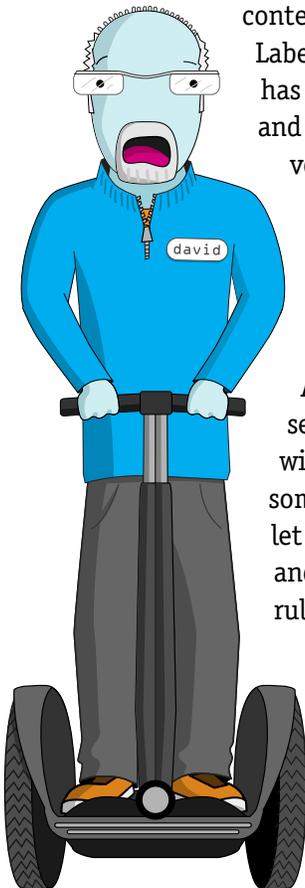


While advertising seems to be everywhere, there are some limits on what can be advertised to kids—including products with content or language that may be age-inappropriate, and products that people under 18 can't legally buy.

Movies: The Motion Picture Industry of America has a ratings system for movies released in theaters: G, PG, PG-13, R, NC-17. The industry has a standard that says studios can't advertise R-rated movies on TV programs, for example, if 35 percent or more of the audience is made up of kids under age 17. This isn't a law; it's a standard that the industry established to try to avoid targeting kids with ads for movies meant for adults.

Music: The Recording Industry Association of America also has a labeling system that identifies albums with explicit content. Parental Advisory Labels on CDs warn that music has explicit lyrics. Companies and artists use these labels voluntarily, and different stores have different rules about labeled music. For example, some stores don't sell CDs that have a Parental Advisory Label (but might sell a version of the CD without the explicit lyrics); some carry the CDs but won't let kids under 18 buy them; and some stores have no rules at all about these CDs.



Video games: The Entertainment Software Rating Board has ratings to let kids and parents

know if games include violent or sexually graphic content. These types of games are rated M for Mature (the content might be “inappropriate” for anyone under 17) and AO (Adults Only: which means the game should only be played by those over 18). Many companies agree not to advertise M-rated games in media—websites, magazines, TV shows, etc.—where 35 percent or more of the audience is under 17. The industry also has agreed that M-rated games shouldn't be sold to kids under 17.

Hidden Video

Have you heard about the maker of a video game that hid sexually graphic content in their game? They didn't tell the people who set the game's rating, and they didn't tell the people who bought the game. But once the game was on the market, word spread online about how to get the hidden content. While the game was first rated M for Mature, the reviewers re-rated it as AO when they learned about the hidden content.

The FTC sued the makers of the game for allegedly deceiving people about what was in the video. The makers of the game settled the suit and then:

- released a patch that disabled the program that ran sexually-explicit content;
- recalled the game from stores—or relabeled it; and
- released a second version of the game without the sexually-explicit content.

The company said it cost them almost \$25 million to accept returns once people learned about the hidden content.

Alcohol: Alcohol advertisers have promised to comply with standards they've adopted that are designed to limit targeting of teens. No more than 30 percent of the audience for an ad can be under 21, the legal drinking age, and the ad content should not appeal mainly to people under 21.

Cigarettes: It's against the law for the tobacco industry to advertise on television, and to target people under 18, who are not legally allowed to buy cigarettes.

Cartoons & Cigarettes

The FTC accused a cigarette company of using a cartoon character in its advertising to illegally promote its cigarettes to kids under 18. The FTC also charged the company with encouraging young people to start smoking, or to continue smoking, and as a result, harmed their health and safety. Eventually, the company settled similar cases with some state governments and agreed never to use cartoon characters in cigarette advertising again.

Things to Talk About and Do

- Think about where movies, video games, and alcohol, and cigarettes can and cannot be advertised. What are the TV shows, magazines, and websites they should avoid to make sure that people who are too young don't see the ads? Where might it be OK for them to advertise?

Want to Find Out More?

Federal Trade Commission

- Alcohol Advertising, www.dontserveteens.gov
- Entertainment Ratings, www.ftc.gov/bcp/conline/edcams/ratings/index.html
- Video Games: Reading the Ratings on the Games People Play, www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/alerts/alt154.pdf