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# THE BOTTOM LINE

## Aim

- ◆ To evaluate the pros and cons of commercial involvement in education.

## Outcome

- ◆ Participants produce 'good practice' recommendations for commercial sponsorship which are submitted to governing body for consideration.

## What you need

Photocopies of **Actionpage: The bottom line** flip chart paper.

## What you do

- ▷ Divide participants into small groups.
- ▷ Explain that recent governments have encouraged greater links between business and schools. This ranges from production of teaching resources to management support.
- ▷ Brainstorm: *Can you think of any ways in which businesses are involved in your school or education in general?* Make a list.

## Whole group discussion

- ◆ What do businesses gain from putting in time, energy and resources into local schools or education in general?
- ◆ Do you have positive or negative attitudes towards well known companies who are involved in education, eg Tesco computers in schools, Shell educational posters? Why?
- ▷ Hand out the **Actionpage: The bottom line** Explain that groups will assume the role of governors of a large secondary school who are trying to decide what kind of commercial involvement, if any, is acceptable in the school.

## Whole group discussion

- ▷ Point out that these are real examples from Britain or the USA.
- ◆ Which forms of sponsorship were definitely unacceptable? Why?
- ◆ Which were acceptable? Why?
- ◆ What factors affected your decisions?
- ◆ Does your school have a policy on commercial sponsorship?
- ◆ What are the advantages to schools of business and industry involvement in education?
- ◆ What are the drawbacks (if any) of this kind of partnership?
- ◆ Does it matter what the motives behind sponsorship are, so long as the school benefits?
- ◆ Is marketing and PR appropriate in school? Why/why not? Should it be banned?
- ◆ Should schools be dependent on corporate marketing budgets rather than more government spending on education paid for by higher taxes?
- ◆ Who should decide whether there should be commercial involvement in schools (pupils, parents, teachers, head teacher, governors, local Chamber of Commerce, local authority, government, consumer organisations)?
- ◆ How much are your attitudes and behaviour affected by advertising and public relations?

“**Sponsorship has been defined by the UK government as, “a payment by a business firm... for the purpose of promoting its name, products or services”. It is a commercial deal, not a philanthropic gift.**”

from Sir Roy Shaw *The Spread of Sponsorship* 1993

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## Key ideas

- ◆ Commercial involvement in schools falls into four main categories: ‘educational’ materials, eg posters, teaching packs; sponsoring teams, events or outings; advertising, eg vouchers; patronage, eg paying for equipment, seconding staff, mentoring.
- ◆ Supporters of commercial involvement in schools see it as an opportunity for both sides to benefit – businesses: can enhance their public image if they are seen to put something back into the community, students better prepared for the work place, employees involved in schools outreach can increase confidence and broaden their view of the world; schools: access resources and thus reduce their costs, develop management skills, education relates more closely to ‘real’ world, work experience opportunities.
- ◆ Critics point to the important role of schools in the community and the danger that sponsorship might be seen as endorsement of products or services. Schools may become so dependent on sponsorship that they avoid criticism of business practices which harm the environment or human rights. The education system may be tailored to fit business interests, rather than young people themselves or society in general.
- ◆ Critics also argue that sponsorship is driven by corporate marketing strategies, and is no substitute for adequate government funding of education, paid for by taxation.
- ◆ *Marketing Week* has shown that business involvement in schools is an effective means of influencing a captive audience of young consumers – increasing awareness of their company and its brands. It estimated that ‘pester power’ over parents generated about £8.4bn in UK sales in 1997.
- ◆ In Britain there is a long tradition of commercial sponsorship of educational resources – science films produced by ICI, geography posters by Shell. Some resources are high quality – produced by teachers to fit the curriculum, and carry minimal ‘branding’. Others are primarily a marketing tool and have very little educational value.
- ◆ Companies are very strategic in the resources they produce. They hope to increase knowledge about their field of operations and create positive attitudes, eg classroom activities which draw attention to scientific or technological achievements. Some also produce resources on issues they have been criticised about, eg British Nuclear Fuels and Shell have sponsored teaching packs on the environment.
- ◆ In the US, product placement in teaching materials is common. Claiming they are making maths more ‘relevant’ one major publisher uses calculations based on Nikes and Nintendo.
- ◆ Among European countries, Britain has one of the highest levels of education and business partnership. In Belgium, France and Greece, any kind of commercially sponsored material or activity is banned in schools.
- ◆ Opponents of regulation assert that guidelines or an official seal of approval for sponsored resources is patronising to teachers and parents, who should decide for themselves what is appropriate for their school. They also argue that children are already surrounded by advertising, and can make their own judgements on what they consume.
- ◆ Concern about the amount and nature of business involvement has led to the formulation of good practice guidelines published by the National Consumer Council. However, these guidelines are voluntary and are not formally monitored by any agency.

## Follow-up

- ◆ Draw up guidelines for good practice based on discussions of the case studies.
- ◆ Make a survey of the school to assess the level of commercial involvement.
- ◆ *A message from...* assesses sponsored teaching resources used in the school. Research findings can be submitted to the governing body.

“ **Will is saving his allowance to buy a pair of Nike shoes that cost \$68.25. If Will earns \$3.25 a week, how many weeks will Will need to save?**

**Max wants to spend his allowance on Nintendo games. He has saved \$55.00. About how many games can Max buy if each game costs \$19.99?** ”

from *Mathematics: Applications and Connections* McGraw-Hill

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# Actionpage: The bottom line

You are a group of governors in a large urban secondary school with 2000 pupils and 75 staff. You manage an annual budget of £2 million. Your members are drawn from the community – some are parents, others are professionals or run their own businesses.

Your budget is tight – you have to make difficult choices:

- ◆ employing less experienced teachers on short term contracts because they are on lower salaries
- ◆ tight government controls over local authority spending has meant that spending on maintenance has been insufficient for many years and many buildings are in need of major repairs
- ◆ how much of the budget you should spend on expensive equipment – you wish to provide all your pupils with a high level of Information Technology skills.

A number of businesses based in the area have made offers of sponsorship which will help reduce pressure on your budgets. However, some teachers and governors are highly concerned about commercial sponsorship in schools. They fear that some companies are mainly interested in the marketing opportunities presented by young people and gaining a good image, rather than adding value to their education.

A special meeting has been called to look at these offers of sponsorship and attempt to establish some future guidelines for good practice in the partnership between schools and business or industry.

- ▷ Consider each offer in detail and consider the following questions (where relevant):
    - What is the financial value of the sponsorship?
    - What is the educational value of the sponsorship? Does it outweigh the marketing message?
    - What does the company gain?
    - Does the sponsorship give you a different image of the company?
    - Does the sponsorship explicitly encourage students to buy branded products or services?
    - Does the sponsorship encourage children to pester parents to buy specific products?
    - Does the sponsorship encourage children to eat an unhealthy diet or take part in unsafe activities?
    - How could you find out more about the company's activities?
  - ▷ Write down relevant points and make a decision based on balancing the pros and cons of each offer.
- 1** A food and beverage company will give the school 2% of takings if they are allowed exclusive rights to operate vending machines in the school canteen. They will sell a range of drinks, popular sweets and snacks, such as crisps.
  - 2** An international software company is offering to fit out a new Information Technology classroom with the latest equipment. This will be a national pilot project to develop internet skills – every pupil will have their own email address. The company will also provide a senior member of staff to help get the project up and running in its first year. The school should only use software provided by the sponsors. In return they will feature the school in its public relations materials. This will include national media coverage. The classroom will be named after the company and the logo will appear at the main school entrance.
  - 3** A large retailer of designer sportswear wishes to rent advertising space in the school. They are proposing to display wall posters around the building, featuring famous sportsmen and women as well as logos and slogans from well known brands. They will install special ads on the steps of the main staircases. The fee is negotiable but would probably cover 25% of the cost of new sports equipment for one year.

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- 4 A large food company has a scheme to raise money for schools by offering tokens on some of its products. The products are mostly high in sugar, salt and saturated fats. Students will post the tokens in containers placed around the school. These will display the company logo.
  - 5 Some departments want to save money by using free teaching packs sponsored by a large food company facing criticism for marketing unhealthy foods. The pack looks at the food processing industry from the sponsor's perspective – from agriculture to marketing, using case studies and illustrations drawn from its own products and international operations, including a large section on cocoa and confectionery. It has been written by a freelance education writer with advice from teachers. It has the company logo on every page.
  - 6 A large company has offered to provide free exercise books. These use recycled paper and have advertisements for its products on the back cover. For example an advertisement for a large food company will encourage children to care about the environment and pick up litter. The advert promotes a packet soup but does not mention the impact of packing on the environment.
  - 7 An international engineering firm based in the area, has offered to pay the salary of a teacher in the design and technology department for three years. In return the company will display publicity about its operations in the department and an acknowledgement will appear in small type at the bottom of school stationery.
  - 8 A local fast-food outlet wants to support the school's anti-truancy drive. As part of a programme agreed with each offender, persistent truants will be offered vouchers at a well-known fast-food outlet in return for better attendance. The partnership will be publicised in the company's newsletter.
  - 9 A local clothes store has offered to produce a school sweatshirt at an attractive price. This would have an advertising slogan on the back. The school would publicise the offer among parents and receive £1 for every shirt sold.
  - 10 A large insurance company has offered to support the school's literacy campaign. Young company executives will be mentors to pupils with reading difficulties. They will give one-to-two tuition and get involved in out-of-school activities such as adventure weekends.
  - 11 A firm of management consultants has offered to lend one of its senior managers to the school for three months. The manager would work with senior members of staff to review management of finance, human resources and facilities, such as buildings and playing fields. The report would highlight ways of maximising use of existing resources and increasing school income from business sponsorship.
  - 12 A large local car dealer has offered the school £500 to store 250 new registration cars on the school playing fields during the summer holidays.
  - 13 Two daily newspapers are offering a scheme for children to collect tokens which can be exchanged for books for the school library. All the books available are published by a branch of the same international media company that publishes the newspapers.
  - 14 The government is offering funds for a new literacy programme, but these must be matched by local business sponsorship. The local branch of an international fast-food chain is offering both cash to the school, and lunches for children taking part. This would be publicised in the local media.
  - 15 The school is situated on a main road leading to an out-of-town supermarket. The supermarket has offered an annual rental fee of £2000 to put up a large advertising hoarding on the wall of one of the school buildings facing the road.
  - 16 A snack food manufacturer is offering the school £2000 as a fee for filming a TV advertisement for its products. A whole class of children is involved.