



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on February 17, 2011

TV Advertisers Targeted for Values They Promote

The most recent target of these organizations has been a particularly insidious weekly teen drama on MTV known as *Skins*. As reported on [TheNewAmerican.com](#), the one-hour show, that does little more than promote sex, drugs, and dangerous behavior to a 15-to-20-something demographic, has drawn the attention of a slew of decency groups, Congress, the FCC, and advertisers for the blatant way it has crossed into territory some critics have argued is nothing less than child pornography.



The pro-family campaign against *Skins* has provided a case study for how activist engagement can help turn the tide of cultural filth bearing down on younger generations. The simple act of concerned parents, grandparents, and others contacting advertisers to express dismay over the promotion of their products and services on a show that attacks society's moral foundations has resulted in billion-dollar companies waking up and taking notice of who their customers really are.

Since PTC launched its grass-roots call-in and e-mail campaign against *Skins* several weeks ago, sponsors like Taco Bell, General Motors, Subway, Foot Locker, H&R Block, Schick, and L'Oreal have all canceled their advertising on the show.

Of course, not all advertisers have bowed to parental concerns, with at least one company actually using the controversial program to advertise its supposed concern for tough issues faced by today's teens. According to [Reuters](#) news service, Clearasil, an over-the-counter acne medicine, is standing in solidarity with MTV and the producers of *Skins*, announcing a new public-service partnership with the network called "Make the Clear Choice," that will allegedly promote "awareness and education about drug and alcohol abuse, sexual health and self esteem."

If nothing else, the latest campaign against prime-time smut has highlighted the fact that all television programming — whether squeaky clean or morally rotten to the core — is dependent upon advertiser dollars for staying on the air. And while some companies are willing to advertise on any program as long as it helps them sell their wares, others have demonstrated at least some concern for steering their ad dollars away from objectionable shows and toward programs that are more family friendly.

For example, each year PTC publishes a list of what its researchers have determined are the most family-friendly sponsors on television, as well as those that have, unfortunately, shown a willingness to compromise on values. The group ranks advertisers based on the television shows they pay to sponsor, with "Best" companies by and large sponsoring programs with positive, family-friendly themes, and advertisers earning a "Worst" designation for sponsoring shows that feature objectionable language, violence, and sexual content.

In PTC's latest survey, published last November, advertisers earning a "Best" ranking included the J.I. Smucker Company (which includes Smucker's, Pillsbury, Folgers, Crisco), Kraft Foods (Oscar Mayer,



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Philadelphia Cream Cheese, Maxwell House, Nabisco, Oreo), the Coca Cola Company (Fuze, Minute Maid, Powerade), General Mills (Betty Crocker, Bisquick, Cheerios, Haagen-Dazs, Hamburger Helper), State Farm Insurance, Ford Motor Company, Proctor and Gamble (Gillette, Olay, Old Spice, Ivory, Cover Girl, Febreze, Swiffer, Pampers), the Clorox Company (Armor All, Fresh Step, Pine-Sol, Kingsford, Hidden Valley), Wal-Mart, and Sears Holding Corporation (Sears, K-Mart, Craftsman, and Land's End).

By contrast, companies earning a "Worst" rating for their willingness to sponsor objectionable programming included YUM! Brands (KFC, Pizza Hut, Taco Bell, Long John Silvers), Unilever USA (Bertolli, Hellmann's, Lipton, Slim-Fast, Axe, Dove), CKE Restaurants (Hardees, Carl's Jr.); Combe Incorporated (Just for Men, Aqua Velva, Cepacol, Odor Eaters); AAMCO Transmissions, Verizon, AT&T, General Motors (Chevrolet, Buick, GMC, Cadillac), Burger King, and Macy's.

Four years ago, the Hallmark company, which produces Hallmark greeting cards and for nearly 60 years has sponsored its own program (as well as a cable network) of wholesome and inspirational dramas and TV movies, began partnering with PTC to present the Crown Award, an honor given annually to the television advertiser that most embodies a commitment to family-friendly TV programming.

While yes, the award presentation may itself appear to be an advertising opportunity for Hallmark, along with a chance for PTC to sidle up to the billion-dollar corporations it showcases, the presentation nonetheless highlights the undeniable fact that not all advertisers are equal in their commitment to values that strengthen families and society.

Kraft Foods, this year's recipient of the "Crown Award for Responsible TV Advertising," joins past honorees General Mills, Wal-Mart, and Proctor & Gamble. In announcing the award, PTC president Tim Winter highlighted the food processing giant's "unwavering commitment to positive entertainment programming through its media buying standards," and noted that like past recipients, the company had demonstrated that "corporations of all sizes can adopt and adhere to family-friendly standards."

Winter emphasized that as cultural dynamics press for increasingly sleazy TV programs, advertisers are key players in what makes it into millions of American homes. "At the end of the day," he said, "TV sponsors can make the difference between positive, family-friendly programming reaching American viewers or being squeezed out of TV lineups by graphic content."

While organizations like PTC are effective at highlighting both those advertisers that uphold traditional values as well as those that underwrite the cultural sewage gracing much of prime-time network programming, ultimately it is concerned citizens who provide the muscle for needed change.

[Focus on the Family](#) highlighted one such individual, Fort Worth dentist Fr. Richard Neill, who several years ago "became upset with the kind of filthy programming aired regularly on the *Phil Donahue* show during hours when children could have been watching." Neill took the initiative to begin writing letters to the advertisers sponsoring the program, describing exactly what their ad dollars were paying for. The result? "One after another, more than 100 of these advertisers began dropping the show," recalled FOTF. "By 1996, the *Donahue* program was no longer viable, and it went off the air."

Noting that Neill's single-handed efforts were the deciding factor in making the change, Focus emphasized that similar efforts "can and should be duplicated all over the country. It is the only way we will clean up the tube."

Concluded the pro-family group, "Advertisers are very responsive to the opinions of viewers because



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they are spending millions of dollars to promote their products. We can bring pressure on them by letting them know how we feel — positively and negatively.”

Photo of actors from *Skins*: AP Images



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