



## Cybercitizen Challenge

### The Money Trail

**Guiding Level:** Pathfinders / Rangers

**Topic:** Online marketing

**This activity requires an Internet connection.**

This activity helps girls understand the subtle and not-so-subtle ways that marketers engage young people with their products on the Internet.

#### Preparation

- Print off copies of the Free to Pay: How Online Marketing Works backgrounder and The Money Trail worksheet for your unit.

#### At your meeting:

1. Ask the girls to read the Free to Pay: How Online Marketing Works. Ask them to look for these gimmicks as they visit various websites.
2. Have the girls log on in pairs (or larger groups depending on how many computers you have) to one of the following popular commercial websites:
  - [Barbie.com](http://Barbie.com)
  - [Seventeen.com](http://Seventeen.com)
  - [Captain Crunch](http://CaptainCrunch.com)
3. Have the girls register with the site, which will give them access to all the features available. Starting at the home page of a site ask the girls to record on their *The Money Trail* worksheets as many marketing gimmicks as possible within a specific time frame. Make sure they note which part of the site they are on.

Note to Guiders: to avoid girls using their main email addresses to register on these sites, have them use a secondary account (many will have an address that they use just for filling out forms online – if they don't, they should have one, so you can ask them to set it up the week before you do this activity).



Sell	Immerse	Spread the word
Have the girls write a \$ sign each time the site takes them to a place where they can buy a product or service. For example, they should write a \$ when they are prompted to subscribe to VIP membership, a catalogue of toys, etc.	Have the girls write a \$ sign each time the site is displaying a product, or showing the name of a brand or product. For example, on the Barbie site, they may see ads for Polly Pocket or High School Musical.	Have the girls write a \$ sign each time they are asked to enter a friends' email address, or talk to a friend about a product-related event (a DVD premiere, a contest, etc.)





## Free to Pay: How Online Marketing Works

Websites that are built around a brand or a product are often the best online playgrounds for kids – and for marketers! Unlike television, where there are guidelines for marketing to kids, the Internet is a lot like the Wild West because there are no rules. Online marketers are free to invent new, and sometimes sneaky, ways to target kids. So you may not always feel you're being marketed to – but you are.

### Building brand recognition

It's easy to recognize clickable banners on websites as advertising, but what about games, clubs, contests and other activities? Being able to customize an avatar of Barbie, race your Hot Wheels cars, play online with your favourite Bratz figure, or even download free branded wallpaper for your desktop not only develops recognition of the products, it also builds a relationship with the characters.

### Selling products

One of the primary goals of commercial websites is to directly engage girls with brands and products in the hopes of getting them to bond with merchandise. Although girls are not allowed to make purchases online, their parents are, and marketers are counting on “pester power” to get mom and dad to purchase their products.

Commercial sites like these will often use “VIP membership” as a way to make kids feel they are getting something special. In addition to games and activities that anyone can access, sites will provide VIP membership that gives members access to special activities, products and promotions. And they generally make sure “basic members” know all the “fun” they are missing by not having VIP status!

Relationship with the characters: when you go on the Barbie website, Barbie is much more than a doll, she talks and moves; she is your friend. You can even *be* Barbie, through your avatar. With such a strong relationship developing between a girl and a toy, it's very likely that she would then want to buy the “real” thing.

### Spread the word

Marketers are experts in getting *you* to do their job by promoting their products to your friends. When you're invited to send a friend an e-card, or a challenge for a game – anything, really, that can make a friend want to come to the site – you're actually marketing that brand to them. This technique is called “viral marketing.”

Now that you're up to date with online marketing techniques, let's see how well you can spot them: go to the Barbie website, and follow the money trail.



## The Money Trail Worksheet

Where are you?	\$ell	Immerse	\$pread the word
Home page			



Girl Guides  
of Canada  
Guides  
du Canada

