

# TORONTO STAR

## It's a Geek's World

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Some companies market their products toward sophisticated clientele with expensive lifestyles. Others try to appeal to your average Joe. The problem these days is, advertisers think the average Joe is a total and irrevocable geek. Hence, the television advertising trend today is what I like to call GMS: Geek Marketing Syndrome.

While beer companies have favored GMS for years (and old rock classics mixed with an appropriate dose of T and A, which the geeks who drink beer always lust after but never get), the syndrome has now spread uncontrollably.

It seems that you need to be a geek if you want to play video games, buy soft drinks or orange juice, eat chocolate bars, potato chips, burgers, tacos, nachos or cheese. You even need to be a geek to do banking, drive low-end sports cars and mini-vans, vacation in Florida or at local theme parks.

Take, for example, the new campaign for mbanx, a grammatically challenged division of the Bank of Montreal. Internally, their slogan is "mbanx rocks." Both Canadian brewing giants have slogans stating that their top-selling brands of beer also "rock." Is mbanx a bank or a brewery? Buying a Bob Dylan song amid plenty of hype and cries of "sell-out" added to this confusion, as beer companies have been convincing musicians to "sell out" their songs for years.

Another large corporation currently capitalizing on beer marketing trends is the omnipresent McDonald's. The new campaign, featuring lines like, "I'm Steve, and this is *my* McDonald's" recalls the old "I'm Joel, and this is *my* beer commercial!" Joel was the beer geek who was a TV fixture until people started pointing out that he looked underage and was perhaps selling his wares to a demographic much younger than anticipated.

Speaking of young, hasn't McDonald's always marketed itself as a family restaurant? Just what is it trying to say by aligning itself, however subliminally, with a beer company?

Of course, computer companies also had to get into the GMS trend, because their most loyal customer has always been dubbed by society as a "computer geek." But now they're trying to sell to the "non-computer-geek geek"; the "average Joel geek." Hence the guy who can't program his own VCR, but suddenly discovers that the internet is a breeze. And the one who tries AOL Canada (as if the name "America On-Line Canada" makes any sense at all) even after stating, "but I already have a computer!" Ever try getting on-line without one?

When will advertisers start giving consumers credibility for having some intelligence? They just might find a wider audience for the products they're trying to sell. Translation for advertising firms: "Yo, wuzzup, ad boy? I'm Heather and this is *my* article . . ."

*Heather Vale is a Toronto TV producer.*

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