

## The Advertising Issue Survey: Is advertising an intrusion?

by The Editors

The results are in on the g-Think Advertising Survey. Thanks to everyone who participated.

The survey sought to gain insight on a range of advertising-related topics from whether or not advertising is seen as an intrusion to what kind of responsibility (if any) advertising has in contributing to the advancement of society. We also asked our respondents to consider the issue of “greenwashing” and to list the companies they feel engage in this activity.

Here are the results.

### Is Advertising an Intrusion?

Just over half of the respondents feel that it is, but that it’s tolerable. Twenty-three percent feel is annoying to no end, yet the same number- say it doesn’t bother them at all. Most people, it seems, are willing to live with advertising, which is just as well as it’s not going away anytime soon.

When asked if the question “Have you ever decided NOT to buy a product because of an advertisement,” most people said “yes” (71%). When asked to add comments on this question, many people mentioned it was the content of the advertisements that put them off: “*I often don’t support advertisers because of poor quality ads or poor messages. When Saturn makes a commercial exaggerating how hybrids lack power, I swore I’d never buy from them.*”

Another respondent said “*I avoid products whose advertising is annoying, offensive, silly, or slick.*”

### Sources of Information on a Product or Service

When asked to identify the major sources of information on a product or service, the rankings were as follows:

1. Word of mouth
2. Internet
3. Radio
4. TV
5. Print
6. Outdoor (billboards etc)

The Internet has obviously grown enormously in its power as an advertising and information vehicle to the detriment of other, traditional sources. What’s perhaps surprising is that radio is ahead of TV. All those outdoor signs and billboards seem to have little effect at all.

### Corporations and Non-profits Advertising Together

On the question of the trend of corporations advertising with non-profits to convey their support for various social causes, just under half of the respondents feel this is a desirable trend (48 percent), only 6 percent feel is not, 15 percent feel this is nothing new and a large 30 percent are “neutral.”

### Responsible Advertising

When it comes to attributing responsibility to advertising for the advancement of society, most people feel advertising has “some” responsibility as it’s a public forum. Thirty-one percent think advertising has “plenty” of responsibility, 17 percent feel advertising has no responsibility at all while just 2 percent are not sure.

On the question of whether or not advertising has a responsibility to tell the truth, there was a pretty even split between those who feel “yes, the whole truth and nothing but the truth” (45 percent), and those who are willing to accept a little exaggeration or hyperbole (49 percent). It appears that many people are resigned to the fact that advertising stretches the truth somewhat.

Going a little deeper, **truthfulness** in advertising was rated by most as being very to critically important; being **ethical** was rated similarly; being **entertaining** was rated as generally important, though responses ranged along the spectrum; being **informative** was important to very important; being **provocative** was rated as somewhat important; being **funny** received a mixed rating; being **politically correct** received a large “not important at all” rating and a similarly large “somewhat important” rating; and finally, being **unique** was evenly spread along the spectrum. Clearly, truthfulness and being ethical attracted the strongest feeling among the respondents.

### Corporations and “Greenwashing”

Finally, the all-important question of greenwashing and linking companies to this activity. Responders were given a list of companies and asked to check them if they considered them to be engaged in this activity. The “greenwashing” rankings are as follows:

1. Wal-Mart
2. Exxon-Mobile
3. BP
4. McDonalds
5. Ford
6. Chevron
7. Starbucks
7. (equal) other
8. Toyota
8. (equal) Johnson & Johnson

When asked to list other companies involved in “greenwashing,” respondents identified: Monsanto, Nestlé, GM, GE, and “green hotels.”