

Corporate Influence
in Schools

No Hidden Agenda: A Response to Rudinow

It's fine for Rudinow to criticize schools' use of the Whittle Educational Network but *not* to misrepresent the facts and make false presumptions about our motives.

Apparently Joel Rudinow does not favor schools' use of the Whittle Educational Network, of which Channel One is a part. That is, of course, his right. He has no right, however, to misrepresent the facts about the Network. Moreover, his presumptions about our motives are inaccurate and offensive.

First, the Facts

In cautioning educators not to be "bowled over by the promise of thousands of dollars worth of high technology," Rudinow misrepresents virtually every aspect of the Educational Network:

- He says the offer is unavailable to schools with fewer than 500 students. *Fact:* In school districts where at least

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one high school has 500 or more students, we will offer the Network, with all its equipment, without charge to every high school that wants it—and, if the district requests it, to junior high schools as well.

- He says participating schools will have "only very limited discretion" in deciding whether or not to show the program. *Fact:* When signing up, schools can specify which classrooms they wish to have wired for Channel One. Further, the principal can preview each day's program and decline to show it if it contains objectionable material. Students who do not wish to watch are not required to do so.

- He says participating schools will be obligated not to show any other broadcast news service. *Fact:* Schools may use the satellite dish, VCRs, and classroom TV sets provided by Whittle to show *every* existing news service.

- He implies that, because the Channel One satellite dish is fixed on one communications satellite, the sys-

tem is inflexible. *Fact:* Jacks are provided on the "head-end" equipment in each school to receive cable TV and signals from an additional "steerable" dish, if the school elects to install one. Each classroom TV set has a jack into which a VCR can be plugged.

• "It is scarcely an exaggeration," writes Rudinow, "to say that each commercial makes a heavier, and at 30 seconds a longer, demand on the viewer's attention than any of the 'news and information' items . . ." *Fact:* It is an exaggeration, all right. Channel One presents serious-minded news and information designed to relate the news to the concerns and studies of teenagers and paced to hold the attention of a generation that has demonstrated an aversion to the news, whether on TV or in print. Items range from 10-second transitional elements (usually related to other items on the same program) to weekly series that add up, over five days, to between 15 and 20 minutes on a single subject (for example, teenage life in the Soviet Union or careers of the '90s).

Further, Rudinow minimizes the results of the Channel One educational assessment tests, but these results may help to explain why, in every school that participated in last spring's five-week pilot test, strong majorities of both teachers and students praised the program's educational efficacy.

We believe we have created an especially powerful tool to help teachers remedy the woeful ignorance of American teenagers about current events, geography, and related subjects.

A Few More Points

Space limitations preclude detailed rejoinders to Rudinow's many other allegations and insinuations. But I am not tongue-tied by his suggestions that, for example, advertising "degrades whatever it touches" (Ted Koppel? Texaco's opera broadcasts? The *New York Times*?); that advertisers will dictate Channel One's content (they won't, just as they didn't in our pilot test and don't in any major broadcast-news program known to me); or, inexplicably, that our effort to provide straightforward daily news in a form that engages students and helps teachers spark discussion amounts to a sinister maneuver by some international media cartel.

He is especially far off base in his gratuitous slap at *GO! (Girls Only!)*. Like all 40 of our publications, *GO!* is the opposite of "advertorial": the products of the advertiser are never discussed in the editorial pages.

A Powerful Tool

The predominant theme of Rudinow's article is the gleeful unmasking of what he supposes to be my company's unspoken purposes: "the real Whittle agenda." One of the things that makes me so proud to be in charge of the program is that Channel One has no hidden agenda. We believe we have created an especially powerful tool to help teachers remedy the woeful ignorance of American teenagers about current events, geography, and related subjects. If we can provide such a tool—and only if we can—we will have a profitable business. □

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