

Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood
c/o Judge Bakege m9m,ood

Baby, BabyFirstTV is able to substantiate its educational claims—which does not seem to be the case. Since CCFC filed its Complaint against BabyFirstTV, the channel has been added to three major cable carriers, which means that millions more families will be able to subscribe.⁴ While Baby Einstein and Brainy Baby have significantly modified their websites as a result of CCFC’s Complaint,⁵ BabyFirstTV continues to make explicit educational claims about its programming. In addition, unlike Brainy Baby and Baby Einstein, which have “agreed to take steps to ensure that any claims of educational and/or developmental benefit for children under th

development experts. Give your baby the essential skills they need. BabyFirstTV. Watch your baby blossom.”¹²

BabyFirstTV has instituted a “unique color coded system,” which “helps inform parents about the educational value of each segment”¹³ and links the viewing of specific programs to the development of specific skills. For example, BabyFirstTV uses yellow to indicate “Thinking Journey” programming, which BabyFirstTV claims, “Engages children in identifying patterns of thinking and developing creative ways of viewing the world”; red to indicate “Language Playground,” which “[e]ncourages children to develop language through introduction to words, signs and languages from around the world”; pink to indicate “Imagination Lane,” which “[i]nspires creativity through cultural and multi-sensory experiences for children”; and green to indicate “Sensory Wonderland,” which “[d]evelops children’s ability to identify the five senses and the world around them.”¹⁴

as educational and engaging as reading a book.”¹⁷ This claim is particularly troubling since research does demonstrate the positive educational benefits of reading books to babies¹⁸ and parents may mistakenly infer that similar research exists for television. In any case, by the Commission’s own criteria, BabyFirstTV must provide substantiation for the claim “as educational . . . as reading a book” and should not imply that reading

conducted with only fifty-one children and no control group. The studies' own authors concluded that, "Research is still needed to determine both causality and whether the results hold outside such a homogeneous sample as the one reported in this article." Regardless of these shortcomings, BabyFirstTV was not a part of this study so in no way do the findings substantiate any of its claims about its programming. It is also worth noting that this study has never been replicated and more recent studies have found that screen media is not an effective means of promoting language acquisition.²⁵

BabyFirstTV also misleads potential consumers about the state of the research on screen media and babies. On the "Frequently Asked Questions" section of its website, BabyFirstTV responds to the question, "Can television be harmful to my baby or toddler?" with the following answer: "When used responsibly, age-appropriate, educational television programming has been associated with very positive results such as improvements in vocabulary."²⁶ For babies, this statement is false. Research shows that screen media is not an effective means of teaching babies and toddlers the meaning of new words or for promoting their phonetic learning.²⁷ In fact, one recent study found that watching baby videos is associated with slower language development.²⁸

Conclusion

In its response to CCFC's Complaint against Baby Einstein and Brainy Baby, the FTC offered clear criteria for substantiation of educational claims for screen media marketed for babies, noting that the considerations that it applied to Baby Einstein and Brainy Baby, "would apply to representations made by any marketer of products claimed to provide educational or developmental benefits to children under two."²⁹ We believe that the Commission should explicitly apply that standard to BabyFirstTV.

There is no credible scientific research to prove that babies gain educational or developmental benefits from watching television and BabyFirstTV's substantiation of its

viewing certain programs (such as Blue's Clues and Dora the Explorer) and vocabulary acquisition, a negative correlation between other programs (such as Barney & Friends and Teletubbies) and no correlation with other programs (such as Drav as c5(ogict 4.0001s(.00)TjEMC EMC EMntal b)5(r/)7(sam)12(e)1(Street, and videos.

product claims relies almost exclusively on research conducted with older children and entirely on children watching programming other than BabyFirstTV.

We believe that BabyFirstTV's marketing does not meet the FTC's criteria and that the company continues to make unsubstantiated claims about the educational benefits of its programs. Given that BabyFirstTV's reach has expanded significantly since our original Complaint, we believe that it is imperative that the FTC respond to the Complaint in order to hold BabyFirstTV to the same standards it set for Baby Einstein and Brainy Baby.

We also believe BabyFirstTV should not only be forced to remove from its website and advertisements any educational claims that it cannot substantiate, but should also be held accountable for violating Section 5 of the FTC Act and the ongoing deception of its customers. We therefore ask that the Commission require BabyFirstTV to offer refunds to its past and current subscribers and to notify them that BabyFirstTV cannot substantiate its claims that its programming is educational for babies.

We thank you for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Susan Linn
Director, Campaign for a Commercial-
Free Childhood

Coriell Wright, Esq.
Institute for Public Representation
600 New Jersey Ave NW
Washington D.C. 20001
(202) 662-9535
*Counsel for Campaign for a Commercial-
Free Childhood*

Cc:

Mary K. Engel
Alyssa Bernstein
Tom Paul