

USA TODAY  
WASHINGTON, DC  
FRI/SAT/SUN 2,635,412  
AUG 27 2007



B BurrellesLuce

35 .103585  
.ya.a.

8 XX...n

## Some marketers stretch with school pitches

By Bruce Horowitz  
USA TODAY

Some unlikely marketers are trying to hitch a ride on the \$18 billion back-to-school gravy train.

Besides necessities such as pencils, paper and spiffy new jeans, this season's back-to-school marketing mayhem also comes crammed with pitches for such unlikely items as cell-phones, ice cream and hand sanitizers. Even pro football gets involved.

Who's buying this stuff? Not George Whalin, president of Retail Management Consultants. "They're grasping at anything to get noticed," he says. "It's not easy to get the attention of the consumer who sees 5,000 ads every day."

Since back-to-school is top of mind for so many parents and students, marketers hope that even if it's a real stretch to tie in with the new school year, the possible payback makes it worth a shot. But Whalin warns, "There's a real question if it's not a waste of money."

Some back-to-school stretches:

► **Cellphones.** Disney Mobile is hawking a back-to-school cellphone — it can

locate kids on a map — with print ads saying: Your kids are going back to school. Keep up with where else they are going. "Back-to-school is a watershed moment in terms of parents' decision to get a kid a phone," says Mark Cregar, vice president of marketing.

► **Ice cream.** Baskin-Robbins is pitching new Oreo items to "lick away the back-to-school blues."

"It's a great way to reward yourself for all the hard work of going back to school," says Scott Colwell, vice president of marketing.

► **Hand sanitizers.** Vicks dubs its new Early Defense hand sanitizer a "back-to-school essential." One ad shows a bottle inside a kid's zippered pencil pouch. Some schools require kids to bring hand sanitizers, says spokeswoman Suzette Middleton of Procter & Gamble, the product's maker.

► **Raisins.** What do raisins have to do with school? "Maybe Mom will toss a



Print ad: Disney Mobile's back-to-school cellphone pitch.

handful in a plastic bag for school snacks," says Michele Meisch, marketing manager of California Raisin Marketing Board. To cement the idea, the group is sponsoring a back-to-school sweepstakes. The winning family gets a trip to Disney World or Disneyland.

► **Bread.** Breadmaker Sara Lee has named Sept. 5 "Take Your Whole Grain Sandwich to School Day."

"It may not pop to mind like pencil or paper," says Peter Reiner, vice president of Sara Lee Brands. But thanks to bagged lunches, bread sales surge this time of year, he says.

► **NFL.** The National Football League, whose season coincides with back-to-school, offers all kinds of stuff, even sets of team book covers for \$17.95. The NFL will sell 30% of its consumer products in July and August, says Lisa Baird, marketing chief. Its top-selling back-to-school item: \$33 Crocs featuring team logos.