



Australian Company tackles Toddlers and Television

While experts and large industry players continue to battle overseas (current hot topic: University of Washington and Baby Einstein) Australian-based Minimedia® is building momentum in what has been approved by health and early education professionals as being a long overdue 'proactive' and beneficial approach to the early viewing debate.

Founder of The Minimedia Initiative, Francesca Beattie, says that Minimedia takes the sensible middle path in what has become a raging expert battlefield on the impact of TV on the very young.

This has so far involved:

- ◆ the provision of Australia's first (and the world's first) general public information website for parents and carers in the specific focus area of infants/toddlers and the television(see also About section at www.minimedia.com.au); and
- ◆ the set up of Minimedia Productions Pty Ltd and creation of an RVI-Free* educational DVD series specifically researched and designed to address expert concerns regarding the developmental impact of conventional television on infants and toddlers.

"More and more international studies are being released which indicate to parents that they should be carefully considering what they are putting their little ones in front of. Australian statistics, however, show that despite expert warnings, at just four months infants are watching/being exposed to an average of 44 minutes of television a day, building to two-and-a-half hours by the time they're four years old. This is a reflection of the realities of living in modern society" say Beattie. "No-tv-under-two recommendations made by the American Academy of Paediatrics and, it appears, Young Media Australia, is a rather head-in-sand approach, considering".

There is very little out there to help parents make their own choices and household rules in an informed manner. Making as much information as possible easily available for parents is the first step. Further, there is still very little choice of age-appropriate programming for this age-bracket for those parents who do choose (for a little sanity, for meal preparation time, or otherwise) to allow the television to go on from time to time.

Finally, there are still no known experts or studies coming from within Australia which delve into this specific area of health and educational concern, despite the recommendations to the government coming from bodies such as The Royal Australasian College of Physicians and The Smith Family.

"In 2005 I started the foundations of The Minimedia Initiative to encourage a greater

awareness of and interest in what we are putting our children in front of, in particular from a media *delivery* perspective" says Beattie. Overseas experts have been indicating the need for this more 'holistic' approach for sometime, whereas content has traditionally been the sole subject of parent and government concern and Classification.

In 2006 The Minimedia Initiative was able to set up a production wing, Minimedia Productions Pty Ltd, which led to the creation of the world's first RVI-Free® DVDs.

Significantly, the programs are free of Rapid Visual Imaging* and other sensory overload (RVI-Free) widely found in children's programs today.

The key underlying concern for experts is that RVI* creates unrealistic levels of stimulation for the very young. This can completely negate the potential benefits of educational content. More seriously, this has also been linked with attention problems showing up later on in school (Christakis et al, USA 2004).

Children under the age of 30 months are particularly vulnerable. According to experts, what might seem quite normal to an adult can easily pose the threat of sensory overload for a baby or toddler and a potential adverse impact on neural connections and developing attention systems in young brains.

The new DVD series, Bab-e-books®** (predominantly for ages 6 months - 3 years), was created to meet a blatant gap in the Australian market for age-appropriate 'Australian' educational DVDs (being 'Australian' is particularly relevant in terms of vocabulary and phonetics) and also world-wide, in terms of DVDs which are considered suitable in terms of both content *and* delivery of that content.

The programs, developed in line with international research, provide parents and carers with a new alternative to conventional television/video. 'Delivery' (including pace and sequencing of information, images, colours, and sounds) is tailored to meet the needs and limitations of an infant/toddler's brain and to eliminate those aspects of media delivery which are of concern to parents and health professionals. The results achieved through this new form of media delivery are also serving to highlight the significance of delivery when it comes to creating true educational value in on-screen programs for the very young.

Further information and trial footage of infant and toddler usage can also be found at www.minimedia.com.au.

The Minimedia Initiative is still in its infancy but is the first to take truly proactive steps to address the concerns experts have been expressing for many years.

The Minimedia Initiative has already won the approval and support of professionals within the health and education sectors; early literacy organisations; and international experts on point including Dr Dimitri Christakis and Dr Fred Zimmerman, Directors of the Child Health Institute at the University of Washington in the United States.

Finally, **early literacy organisations** are recognising that Minimedia, by its program development, offers the world of books and literacy an additional contribution as a learning aid, particularly for families in which parents are illiterate or where English is not the first-spoken language.

***Rapid Visual/Video Imaging (RVI)** is used to refer generally to the pace of changing images, colours, objects, movement, sound, voices and shifting scenes during programs. Research has shown that RVI in most programs is too fast for the developing brain of very young children.

**** The Bab-e-books DVD series** adopts the theme and style of a traditional baby/toddler books. The programs are narrated in a way which involves young viewers and encourages verbal responses. The titles also incorporate unique interactive virtual lift-the flap learning. Older toddler viewers also have the opportunity to turn pages and lift flaps themselves, which enables them to be more actively involved in their learning environment. Minimedia's most recently launched Bab-e-book in the series, 'My Little Choo Choo around the Zoo', provides two new delivery/viewing options 'Infant' and 'Standard'.

About Francesca Beattie: Francesca has a tertiary education in psychology, sociology and the law and is a qualified legal practitioner. She is the inventor of the new media delivery methodology and author of Bab-e-books®' first two titles. Francesca put her legal career on hold when she became a mother in 2004. She has been able to devote further time to studying, researching and writing in this area of passionate interest and concern for the past two years.

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