

G & MEDIA

Channel One Aims To Involve Teachers In Marketing Push

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Channel One pioneered commercial television in the schools. Now it may be setting another controversial precedent—paying public-school teachers to recruit new customers.

In a back-to-school push to increase market share, the **Primedia Inc.** unit is offering \$500 to any of its “key operators”—teachers or administrators overseeing its daily news broadcast in their schools—who sign up a neighboring school for the service. Channel One, which hopes to add 300 schools to its 12,000-school network, promotes the offer on its Web site and also sent a mailing to school personnel.

Nonprofit groups opposed to commercialization in schools yesterday asked officials in all 50 states to investigate the \$500 offer, contending that it poses a potential conflict of interest for school employees.

“It is not the proper role of public-school employees to be a roving sales team for Channel One,” said the letter from the groups, **Obligation Inc.** and **Commercial Alert**. The groups are long-time critics of Channel One.

According to Channel One, which provides free television equipment to schools in return for students’ viewing its ad-supported newscast, nobody has yet been paid the reward, one of several new promotions featured on the Web site. For instance, Channel One also is running a \$10,000 sweepstakes drawing, with the money going to a school rather than individual personnel. For their schools to qualify, teachers must view a 10-minute video urging that student-

watch the entire broadcast on 90% of school days.

Ethics officials in several states said the offer could run afoul of statutes prohibiting public employees from using their positions to make paid endorsements and from representing private third parties on issues—such as whether to hire Channel One—in which their school districts are involved.

Michael Carr, spokesman for the **National Association of Secondary School Principals**, said the offer sets a dubious precedent for software companies and other for-profit entities seeking to reach the captive student audience.

“A lot of companies hire educators to be consultants, but usually they’ve stepped away from the job or taken a break,” said Mr. Carr, warning teachers to check their local district policies before accepting the Channel One offer. “It’s not usual to hire an in-building person.”

Sonya McNair, a Channel One spokeswoman, said the company notified school principals in advance of the offer to teachers and administrators. She said Channel One expects that recipients will turn the bonus over to their schools if that is required by local policy, rather than keep it themselves.