

Ethical marketing that's just for kids

By Catherine O'Mahony

Insight Consultants, a small Dublin-based PR agency, has become the first Irish PR firm to push into the youth and ethical marketing sector.

The firm has hired Sheena Horgan, a youth marketing specialist who ran a marketing firm in Britain called KidsInc, to take on a role in planning strategies for clients who wish to target children under the age of 16 – and specifically, their parents.

Insight sees this branch of PR as being especially relevant for food companies – which are facing extensive new labelling legislation next year from the EU – and telecommunications firms, given the fact that some 90 per cent of 11-year-olds now own mobile phones. At KidsInc, Horgan worked with the British Conservative Party and O2.

Horgan, who has coined the term “kids social responsibility”, draws a distinction between trendier commercially-driven marketing that targets 18 to 24-year-olds – what she calls “yoof” marketing – and the more ethically-focused PR she wished to practise.

She said the government contacts that Insight can pro-



Sheena Horgan

vide would be of huge benefit to this sort of business.

The marketing approaches to children that she advocates are typically managed through schools, with brands adopting a careful line so as not to alienate or offend principals, teachers or parents.

Telecommunications firms can engage with parents to give them useful information on how children manage mobile phones, she said, something parents would find genuinely helpful.

The Irish market is lagging well behind Britain in the attention it devotes to the ethics of marketing, Horgan says.

“In supermarkets, the healthy eating messages are

far less established here. And portion sizes are far larger here than in Britain.”

Some brands, notably McDonald's, which backs several sporting bodies, have engaged with Irish schoolchildren, but such activity is sporadic.

Michael Keane, Insight co-founder, said it was important for PR companies to explore environmental and ethical agendas on behalf of clients.

“It's not just useful, it's essential in my view,” he said.