

Kid Brand Push Back

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There is so much focus today on new savvy and sophistication in the kids market. We recognize kid power in their spending and influence. We talk about kids getting older younger. We study the new tween audience. The implications of these developments are critical to understanding today's kids and in marketing to them.

Successful marketing to kids is about establishing a brand relationship, not a one shot purchase occasion. We build products and messages that are intended to connect with their lifestyles. In turn they'll connect with our brand. Or will they?

Commercial Push Back

Today, kids are pushing back about advertising, commercialism and brands. Increasingly, kids want to express who they are rather than wear a brand badge that advertises who a company is.

The old adage was kids love advertising -- kids advertising is about things that are fun for them. After all, the only stuff that is marketed to kids are items they can purchase themselves -- or those whose purchase they exuberantly influence -- toys, food, drinks, clothes, videogames, entertainment, vacations etc. We don't market stomach remedies or toilet tissue to kids.

Advertising is About Fun, Right?

So, if advertising to kids is all about fun, obviously, kids will love it and look forward to it. Right? Not so fast. Along with new kid savvy has come new kid distrust. Today's kids are bombarded with commercial

messages. They see advertising for all kinds of products, not just the spots for stuff intended for them.

In fact, it's a continuing dilemma that some of kids' favorite spots are for forbidden fruit -- adult products like cars and beer. In many cases they don't even remember kid commercials. They cite the brand because it's one they use. But, too many commercials have the lasting impression of wallpaper.

Hip is Not Hype

I've heard this new commercial distrust in countless kids recently, in interviews, in casual conversation and in fashion statements. There are new and negative reactions to wearing brand labels on the outside. And, in one recent interview a young teen said to me "if they want me to wear their label, let them pay me to advertise for them."

So, I took it a step further. We went online to our LiveWire panel and asked questions of 80 kids ages 8-18 about how they feel about advertising, about being "sold" in advertising and their attitudes about "wearing" brands. This qualitative exploration confirmed a lot of what I've been hearing from kids. The healthy distrust of advertising, marketing and brands is real. It is a dynamic marketers must heed or they'll get left behind on a brand heap of hype.

What Kids are Saying

To the question "do you like advertising" some of the kids said:

"No advertising is a nuisance. Only the super bowl commercials are entertaining." Mark, age 15, NY

"No. I don't like it because I don't want people to tell me what to buy."
Cole, age 12, OK

"...for the most part I think advertising is annoying . It interrupts you when watching tv, and if you are reading a magazine, more than half of it is just ads." Ashley, age 16, IL

When we asked kids if they know that they are being “sold” in advertising here are the kinds of responses we got:

“Yes because there are logos ALL OVER THE PLACE and the product claims to increase your skills at something. There is WAY too much sales pressure on advertising.” Michael, age 13, NJ

“Always too much pressure. Kids compete for wearing certain brands, but I can’t always afford it. If you don’t wear the brands you are singled out, so I feel forced to having wear certain kind of things, or buy certain brands when another brand for the same quality is cheaper.” Jennifer, age 15, LA.

We also asked kids about “wearing” brands relative to seeking comfort in clothes:

“I go for style and comfort. I usually don’t really care what ‘name’ the clothes have as long as they look like what all my friend wear.” Miranda, age 8, NY

“Comfort. We don’t usually pay attention to brands at our house.” Amanda, age 9, CT

“I wear what I like no matter who made it.” Hannah, age 10, PA

“No I don’t wear any particular brand and comfort is much more important to me.” Justin, age 14, WI

“Comfort. I don’t want to look like a walking advertisement.” Robin, age 15, MN

From Brand Push Back to Brand Relationship

Comments like the preceding are relatively new in the kid marketplace. Today’s kid marketplace is more crowded than ever with products and advertising, media vehicles and places to reach them. Today’s kids still love advertising that entertains and enriches. And, they want products

that enhance their lives. But, they are savvier than ever and more discriminating both in the pitches and products that will connect with them.

So, seller beware! Today's kids can reject your brand just as readily as they might embrace it. Now more than ever we need products and promotion that respect the new kid audience and connect with their lives in meaningful ways. Relationships in branding – as in life – demand hard work, compelling communication and exciting new experiences to remain vibrant and enduring in kids' lives.