

Mining for Kid Gold in Europe

**A Report from the Kid Power Europe Conference
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This in from the first ever Kid Power Europe Conference. Here I sit winging my way back to the States with reflections of the conference. As a speaking veteran of many kid conferences in the US, this provides my perspective on what this European venue was and how it “behaved” similarly and differently from like conferences in the States.

Attendance and Attendees

The conference was very well attended, with about 150 people in all. Some expected players were there representing some of the biggest players in the kid business -- TV programmers, marketing companies, researchers and agency people. But, the balance of participation was different from similar conferences in the States. Attendees were more senior members of their respective organizations than in like US conferences, where often attendance is assignment and reward for young assistant brand managers charged with bringing back knowledge to their companies. Here, there was more of a research bent, bias and representation. There was great curiosity to see what people know about kids and kid initiatives in Europe. Attendees were on a quest to find tools to mine kid gold in their markets and to make sure that no other kid expedition was too far ahead of them in their pursuit.

The Program

The business of the conference seemed similar to many that have come before in the US. Seven presentations were focused on research and child behavior. Seven presentations related marketing case studies. Three presentations were dedicated to programming successes in Europe. And, seven presentations focused on communications principles and tools targeted to kids (i.e. advertising, media, promotion, sampling etc.).

In the research area, presentations included the following:

- Findings from the Just Kid/Nickelodeon’s Global Kids Study

- a school curriculum based research design for the UK, from the Children's Research Unit
- Qualitative techniques from Millward Brown, Italy
- Kid Character development and evaluation from Youth Market Systems
- a new 35 country Global teen study from Roper Starch
- a teen creative research study from Pegram Walters and
- Formative research for the development of new media products from Arc Consulting

The seven case studies presented were from the following companies

- Burger King in Europe
- Rowntree's Fruit Pastilles from Ammirati Puris Lintas
- Hasbro's Creative Play brand and merchandising initiatives
- General Mills' Fruit Snacks
- Cadbury's Developing new Products for Kids
- Mattel's Barbie
- World Wide Fund for Nature's Cause related marketing efforts in France

The three programming presentations were from

- Fox Kids Europe
- Nickelodeon
- GMTV in the UK

The seven marketing related presentations included the following title and topics:

- "Crossing the Great Divide: US Kids Marketing vs. Kids in Europe" from the Gepetto Group
- "Promotions for Children and Their Families" from Frankel and Company
- "Sampling: The Faster Way to Gain Trial and Increase Sales" KV Promotion Partners (Netherlands) and Co-op Promotions (US)
- "Reaching Kids Around the World Through Advertising" by Griffin Bacal
- "Responsible Marketing to Kids" from Ogilvy & Mather
- "Kids Marketing in an Adults World" by Kids Connections (UK)
- "Effective Media Strategies to Reach Kids" from Leo Burnett

The conference was rounded out with two half day workshops on Friday.

- "What Works with Kids and Why" by Youth Market Systems and The Center for Innertainment

- “Think Like a Kid - This Product is for Me!!!! by Small Talk and Q1 Research

Quality of Presenters

As with all conferences, some presentations were better than others. But, the speakers represented a quality line up of practitioners in the kids business. On balance, the level of presentations and participation was quite high. There were numerous informed questions of all speakers from the audience. People were very curious about understanding others experience and learning in order that they might apply the knowledge to their own businesses.

The State of Kid Accomplishments in Europe

Overall, the state of kid accomplishments in Europe is quite like the state of the kid business in Europe -- spotty. Many of the cases and presentations were country specific. There appeared to be a real UK bias in participation and results. Many of the people in attendance spoke of European objectives, but most of the initiatives reported outlined scope and results limited in geography. For many companies, it is still early days for global initiatives and they are trying to figure out how they might take their businesses across Europe. There is gold in the hills, but many need to find the tools to dig it out.

Mining for International Gold

There are a number of big players who are aggressively and successful extending their brand reach globally (e.g. Fox Kids, Nickelodeon, Burger King, Hasbro, Mattel). They are doing it in different ways, but in general are getting smarter in activating the classic “Think Global, Act Local” mantra. International kid managers are of higher quality than ever before. Increasingly, companies are exchanging US talent with international personnel to enhance communication and broaden mindsets to extend smart marketing programs efficiently to multiple markets. They are developing corporate methodologies and practices to best mine kid gold in various countries.

Yet, even with many of the smart initiatives, local market conditions continue to be real deterrents to business success. Cultural differences, media limitations, regulatory issues and market size are some of the variables that constrain broader implementation of branded business efforts. In time, most of this will be figured out and kid brands will resonate across the world. The players who stake their claims now are likely to be the big winners of the future. Programming, toys and fast food are leading the way. And, research is improving in providing better illumination for the international kid gold mines being explored.

More European Kid Conferences

The future of such conferences in Europe appears bright. It is likely that the word of mouth from this conference will be extremely positive. Most people got something out of it, some nugget of learning, some opportunity to apply to their businesses. Already, there are plans forming to have a follow up conference this Fall in London.

Futures for a Global Kids Business

The kid opportunities in Europe are huge. There is gold to be mined and people know it. The big marketing players have their people and machinery in place. They will make some mistakes in blasting the way. But they will mine untold riches around the world as they put their marketing and branding models in place.

Other players will find ways into the markets and will prosper if they learn the lessons of the early players in these markets. There are far more smaller brands with kid appeal than the mega brands who are already taking the world stage by storm. The challenge is not only to drive today's huge global brands. It is to create new branded opportunities that will tap into kid lifestyle across multiple countries. There are new products, categories and businesses that have not even yet been conceived that will capture the hearts, minds and purse strings of tomorrow's global kids. Today's kid gold is just the beginning of the mine stream of riches for savvy marketers.

What to Take Away

Here are some observations from across the three days that can serve all of in developing global kid opportunities

1. Make great, fun, compelling, clearly positioned kid products
2. Use good, innovative research to light the way
3. Know thy competition and the barriers to success
4. Develop integrated marketing plans that place your product into kid consciousness and lifestyle.
5. Develop global brand plans that take into account all local needs
6. Select markets carefully. Launch locally when market conditions and the local market plan provides the best opportunity for success
7. Evolve products, packaging, promotions and brand communication to keep the product proposition fresh
8. Look for strategic partners who can extend your brand imagery, value and visibility
9. Stay in touch with your kid market. They will be changing faster than ever.
10. Brand for the long term