

## **Kids and Anti-brand**

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There is so much focus and attention being dedicated today to the 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 brand relationships, not about one shot purchase occasions. We build products and messages that are intended to connect with kid lifestyle. In turn, we believe they'll connect with our brands. 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 promotes who a company is.

The old adage was kids love advertising. Kids advertising is about things that are fun for them. The stuff we market to kids are items they can purchase themselves, or those whose purchase they exuberantly influence, such as toys, food, drinks, clothes, videogames, entertainment, vacations or even the family car. After all, we don't market stomach remedies or dishwasher detergent 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 it for them."

So, I took it a step further. I went online to an online panel (LiveWire: Today's Families Online™) 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

Comments like the preceding are relatively new in the kid marketplace. Today's marketplace is more crowded than ever with products and advertising, media vehicles and pitches to kids designed to "sell" products, brands, services and ideas.

### **From Anti-Brand to Brand Relationship**

Today's kids do love advertising that provides news about products and services that enrich their lives. They respond to creative approaches that entertain and inform in relevant ways. But, they are savvier than ever and more discriminating both in the pitches and products that attempt to 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, promotions and advertising messages that respect the new kid audience and connect with their lives in meaningful ways. To that end, here are ten basic kid marketing principles that can help keep you from the perils of the new kid anti-brand scrap heap.

#### **1. Let kids be kids**

Respect the joy of youth and the exuberance that comes with it.

#### **2. Have a reason for being**

If there's no unique reason to capture the hearts and minds of today's kids, don't launch or market your product.

#### **3. Make great products**

It's a competitive marketplace out there. Me too products or inferior entries may get trial, but they'll die a quick death as kid word of mouth passes the word.

#### **4. Create relevant promotions must be relevant**

Of you're going to promote, make sure the promotion extends the benefit of the product, not borrowed interest.

#### **5. Find new ideas in old favorites**

Increasingly, the classics are offering new opportunities for kid excitement. New spins on old ideas (e.g. Razor Scooters, or electronic plush) can bring wonderful new business opportunities.

**6. Look for the new paradigm**

The truly new idea is all about risk reward. After all, no one originally thought that Cabbage Patch Kids or Teenage Mutant Turtles could amount to anything. Kids did!

**7. Be trend aware. Look everywhere.**

New ideas can come from anywhere. Today's kid marketers need to attuned to what's going on – in kid culture and in popular culture.

**8. Sell differentiated fun**

There's a reason the word "fun" is outlawed at Nickelodeon. To kids, it's commodity. What kind of unique fun does your product or service offer to kids?

**9. Partners add power.**

Today more than ever marketers recognize that the company you keep can extend the caché of your product. Sharing brand space enables brand messages to permeate kid lifestyle at various times of day with increasing and compelling power.

**10. Build brand relationships**

The goal in the kid marketing game is not one-time sales, but an ongoing relationship that depending on the product, service or brand can extend all the way into adulthood if the product and messaging equation connects.

Relationships in branding – as in life – demand hard work, compelling communication and exciting new experiences to remain vibrant and enduring in kids' lives. Brand relationships are the key to combat anti brand. Kids want connections in their lives that are meaningful and fun. Their suspicions are fueled when the product or message shamelessly sells rather than meaningfully embraces who they are and who they are striving

to be. So, respect kids. Give them products and messages that enrich their lives...and the dividends will be rich and mutual.