

## Kids Getting Older Younger

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Gum Article

Kids are getting older younger. We've been hearing this in the kid market for the past several years. Yet, until now other than the declaration of this idea, we have seen little evidence of how or whether this phenomenon is truly at play. This article extends that dialogue and provides support that this dynamic is indeed at work in the social fabric of today's American families.

### Target Audiences?

Up until now, the world of kid targeting has been imprecise and unfocused. We have traditionally looked at the world of kids, based on a media buying model. We would buy media for kids 2-11 or, for a premium, we could focus on 6-11, still a rather maddeningly broad audience.

Imagine, putting a 2 year old and an 11 year old in a room and inviting them to have a discussion...about any subject. They have so little in common cognitively, developmentally, linguistically and physically. Perhaps the 11 year old vaguely remembers some experience from his 2 year old toddler days. But, that's about it. The most appropriate interaction between the two might be for the 11 year old to baby-sit for the 2 year old.

### Market Segmentation: 5 Kid Groups

Today, the old media buying breaks are less a factor in our consideration of media planning. Today, we need to be far more concerned with some very real new segmentation among kids to deliver strong lifestyle and product fit in integrated communications plans.

There are now five different addressable targets in the kids' world. Over time, our thinking has expanded from targeting kids 2-11 as one segment to the five segments I offer for consideration now, outlined in the chart that follows. The newest of these segments is responsive to the idea that today, kids are growing older younger. This new Toddler segment, kids 3 and under, is a group that is influencing brand and purchase decisions like never before. Increasingly, they are a group who can be effectively targeted directly.

<u>Market Segment</u>	<u>Age Targeting Over Time</u>				
	<u>60's</u>	<u>70's</u>	<u>80's</u>	<u>90's</u>	<u>Now</u>
Toddlers					0-3
Preschoolers		2-5	2-5	2-5	2-5
Kids	2-11	6-11	6-8	6-8	6-8
Tweens			9-12	9-12	9-12
Teens					13-15
13-15					

### The Dynamic Duo

There are more dramatic changes in today's families than we have ever seen before. These changes are being fueled by kid power and kid influence over mom (and dad). Today's youngest kids are becoming today's newest targeted markets. Toddlers and mom are a truly dynamic duo as kids are more brand aware and mom increasingly accepts, permits and fulfills the brand demands that come out of this heightened awareness.

### KGOY LiveWire Research

Recently we set out to understand the validity, power and implications of the KGOY (Kids Getting Older Younger) proposition by conducting a piece of research via LiveWire: Today's Families Online®. LiveWire is Griffin Bacal's proprietary online research panel/methodology of 1,600

families offering direct access to 5,000+ people. The panel is geographically dispersed, balanced and matched to US demographics.

### Research Objective, Sample, Methodology and Content

*Objective:* To assess moms' opinions about the role their 2-5 year old children play in their household.

*Sample:* 62 mothers with at least one child between the ages of 2 and 5.

*Methodology:* E-mail fielded questionnaire: February 24-28, 1999

*Content: Our Questionnaire Probed*

- Perception of kids getting older younger
- Children's television viewing habits
- Role the computer plays in young children's lives
- Level of familiarity of specific brand names
- Categories where influence is demonstrated
- Influence children have on household purchases

### Key Findings

The research turned up interesting insights in five behavioral areas:

1. Kids Getting Older Younger
2. Television Viewing Habits and Preferences
3. Computers Usage and Merit
4. Brand Awareness/Recognition
5. Kid Influence on the Family Dynamic

#### 1. Kids Getting Older Younger

The majority of the sample agrees that their children are growing up faster than ever before. They acknowledge that their 2-5 year olds demonstrate brand knowledge and influence, on an increasingly advanced level.

This is not surprising relative to the preschool toy business today, a shrunken market where preschool isn't preschool as we once knew it. Today's 3-5's behave like 5+ kids did ten years ago. Preschoolers today play with action figures and dolls rather than classic preschool products. There are new programming and technology targeted directly to preschoolers and new parent attitudes and ideologies that empower today's youngest kids.

We asked our sample to react to the following statement:

**“Marketers say that kids today are growing up faster than ever before. Some even say that kids between the ages of 3 and 5 today, are more like 8 and 9 year olds from decades past in terms of their brand knowledge and influence, as well as play patterns and relationships with toys, etc.”**

There was overall mom agreement to the statement. A majority of the moms indicated that this statement is true as a result of the combined effect of technological opportunities, abundance of branding messages children learn from television and advertising and new trends in parenting.

Mom agreement was expressed in a number of ways:

Marlene from Pennsylvania said:

*“I would say kids are growing up faster in some areas, but not in others. On one hand they are made aware of more than we were (i.e., technology, violence, sex, drugs). On the other hand, to me growing up is related to the amount of responsibility a person can and is expected to handle. A majority of children today are not held accountable for their actions and are not expected to be responsible until later in life.”*

Susan from Massachusetts reflected:

*“Parenting today is very different than decades past. We are more empowering, thereby teaching our children that they have a right to participate in decisions that*

*affect them...Our lives are so busy that shopping is a chore, one that is made easier by giving in to the whine so that we may check yet another item off our list."*

Lisa, from Georgia, added:

*"I do believe that kids today grow up faster. For their own safety, we had to give them information that normally we would wait until they are older to know. People put Nike shoes on newborns and dress them up in GAP clothes. Since some kids are babysat by TVs, it stands to reason that they will become more familiar with name brands at an earlier age."*

From Julianne, in Ohio:

*"My first brand recognition was at age 12, when I discovered Levis. Today, with children's programming and commercials, they start asking for specific things at around my daughter's age (age 3), because they have seen the commercial. Also, the computer has really influenced the type of play at this young age. Where my generation played with blocks, dolls or toy cars, the kids today want to play with computers and video games."*

And, Heather, from Florida agreed with the statement by saying:

*"I had no idea what brand of shoes I had on my feet until I was in at least the 4th grade or so. I probably never knew the difference between generic and name brands until I was at least 6 or 7. My son wore his first pair of Nike sneakers when he was 2 weeks old, so I guess parents have to take some of the blame for children being so knowledgeable of name brand items."*

## 2. Television Habits

Our mom panel said their kids spend 10-20 hours each week watching television. While 20 hours is right in line with average kid viewing, 10 hours is only half of the national average. It may be that younger kids are watching less television and their viewing habits do not yet equal the 20 hour level of older kids. Or, it may be that moms may be under estimating the real viewing that's happening.

### What Kids Watch

The moms told us that their kids tend to watch the newer shows the most. Key among the newer shows were two from Nickelodeon (Blue's Clues and Little Bear) and one from PBS (Arthur).

Preschool programming, of course, is not new news. Sesame Street, Mr. Rogers and Captain Kangaroo have been evergreen properties in children's developmental programming for preschoolers for over a generation. The differences today are:

1. Significant new target segmentation in programming,
2. More programming
3. More channels
4. More times of day with programming to reach young kids

Two examples from PBS and Nickelodeon indicate the vastness of preschool child offerings:

PBS

Nickelodeon/Nick Jr.

Teletubbies

Gullah Gullah Island

Barney

Kipper

Arthur

Little Bear

Big Comfy Couch

Franklin

Noddy

Richard Scarry

Theo the Tugboat

Maisy

Sesame Street

Blue's Clues

Shining Time Station

(Thomas The Tank)

Micro Segmentation

Contributing to the difference today, is that programming design and appeal are not targeting mainstream preschoolers but fine tuning segmentation, creating micro segments. These micro segments are as follows:

<u>Program</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Content</u>
Teletubbies	for 1's	= preverbal
Blues Clues	for 2's	= my mysteries
Barney	for 3's	= sing with me
Sesame Street	for 3+	= kid development

### Favorite TV Programs

We asked our mom panel what they believe their kids' favorite television programs were. Blue's Clues was once again chosen as number one, followed by Little Bear and Teletubbies. Rugrats and Scooby Doo were also mentioned as favorites. In general, moms' television favorites for their kids paralleled their kids' picks with one exception...Teletubbies. While Teletubbies has been a smash hit among the youngest kid set, parents are still not comfortable with this new toddler invasion appealing to their 12 month olds. Blue's Clues and Little Bear are the programs the parents most like their kids to watch.

Shannon from New York said:

*"Blue's Clues is my favorite because he learns about different situations, learns songs and dances, learns to draw, and he is beginning to learn to put the clues together and figure out the answer."*

Laura from California added:

*"I like Blue's Clues for the same reasons she does. It's very positive programming that helps stimulate young children to think."*

Susan from Massachusetts offered:

*"Little Bear [is my favorite]. The characters are so sweet and their personalities reflect the different kinds of children with whom my son interacts. The parents in these shows genuinely like their children and enjoy their various escapades. There is always a lesson to learn."*

And, Susan from Idaho said:

*“Little Bear because the lead character is shown interacting with a wide variety of characters. I think it shows children that they can have a wide variety of friends of either sex, size and/or nationality.”*

### 3. Kids on Computers

Computers are widely in use from the earliest ages. Our moms told us that nearly all their kids use a computer and most started at the age of 2. They spend between one and three hours a week on computer activities.

#### Mom Computer Approval

Moms unanimously agree that what they like best about their child’s computer interaction is the educational benefit their kids derive from it. The most common software titles mentioned were the Fisher Price JumpStart series, Blues Clue’s, Reader Rabbit, Disney and Humongous.

Angela from Oregon said:

*“I like that he is able to learn concepts that I might not know or forget to teach him. It is hard to teach someone from scratch and computer games act as a guidebook to help me help him learn.”*

Michele from New Jersey added:

*“I like that Jeremy can play on the computer without help. I like that he’s thinking and reacting.”*

Melinda from Florida agreed:

*“I like that fact that in a world where things are centered more on reality, with the computer, he can focus on his imagination more and learn new things.”*

The dynamic of the computer also enjoys a special halo because it is seen as an educational tool that replaces the television.

Susan from Idaho offered:

*“It is educational, entertaining and gets her away from the TV.”*

And, Shelly from Texas focused on the fun of learning:

*“[I like that] she’s not watching TV! I like educational software because she thinks she’s just having fun, but she’s actually learning.”*

Computers are definitely a key element in contributing to kids growing older younger. It gives them access to learning and experiences that previously would have occurred much later in life with significant parent supervision. As the internet rapidly becomes more international in penetration pervasive in use, young kids access to the world will continue to grow.

#### 4. Brand Awareness

Brand awareness starts early. Two thirds of our sample said their kids are brand aware. Most agreed that brand awareness begins around age 2-3. About one quarter of those who said their kids are brand aware, claimed their children began to recognize brands as early as age 12-18 months.

##### Kids are Brand Aware

Nearly one hundred different brand names were mentioned among the brand aware portion of our sample. The most noted brands were Cheerios, Disney, McDonald’s, Pop Tarts, Coke, Barbie, Rice Krispies and (Pepperidge Farm) Goldfish. Interestingly, it wasn’t until a few years ago that Goldfish started doing kid embracing marketing and advertising. That brand’s presence on the list is confirmation that targeting kids can lead to dividends in kid brand awareness and requests.

Margaret from California said:

*“...brand names are everywhere. If a child watches TV then they are exposed to the brands because of the commercials during the shows. Also, if a child is in*

*school, then they hear all the other kids talking about the brands, along with older brothers and sisters, who are saying they need the brand name clothes, shoes, etc.”*

### Characters Fuel Brand Awareness

Another key and interesting finding brought out in our research is that brand awareness is often rooted in the recognition of a licensed character.

Susan from Massachusetts said:

*“They know the pictures on the boxes more than the brands. They wanted the Oral B toothpaste because Barney was on it. They wanted the Frosted Cheerios when the Rugrats were on the box. They are very familiar with the cartoon stuff. For example, when Burger King had Rugrats watches and toys in the kids meals, they wanted to go there on a daily basis.”*

### 5. Child’s Role in Purchasing Decisions

Our key finding in the area of young children’s influence on parent purchasing decisions was that kids exercise strong influence over mom. Three quarters of the moms indicated that their 2-5 year olds have either “some” or “a lot” of influence on their purchasing decisions. Our entire sample agrees that their child effects food and snack purchases. Books, TV, video and movies were also mentioned as categories that were strongly influenced by kids.

### Growing Kid Influence?

Half the sample said their kids have decision power in choosing restaurants, clothes and health and beauty products. They offered that, as of yet, their kids had little influence in more major purchases like vacations, new homes or the family car. This will bear watching as we are increasingly seeing major influence over these larger ticket family purchases from older kids. As part of the kids getting older younger phenomenon, can this added influence be far behind?

### Reality of Kid Influence

There was widespread endorsement among moms that whether they like it or not, kids play a major role in influencing and getting the products they request.

Jean from Pennsylvania said:

*“It is important to have her opinion when purchasing certain items such as what she wants to eat, videos to buy, software for the computer, clothes. Her wishes weigh greatly to some extent. I always have the last say, but by letting her make decisions helps me to learn about her and lets her show her own personality.”*

### Kids Come First

There was also a body of evidence that parents view kid power in a primal way. “Kids come first” is a very different ideology than the idea that “children should be seen and not heard” from previous generations.

Melinda from Florida said:

*“I always take his wishes into account when buying something for him specifically. I also try to take his wishes into account when buying software for the computer or buying food for the family. Although he does not always get what he wishes for, we try very hard to make sure he’s happy.”*

Valerie from Pennsylvania agreed:

*“I make every effort to please her if possible. If I feel what she wants is reasonable, she usually gets it.”*

Tonya from Georgia underscored the idea that her son comes first:

*“He plays a large role in my purchasing decisions. I usually purchase around his needs first then mine second.”*

Andrea from Washington confirmed she buys what her son asks for:

*“Sometimes I buy things I don’t really want because he wants them.”*

### Kid Power

The growing theme of Kid Power is endorsed by our sample as stated by Gina from Texas in recognizing her daughter's power over her:

*"Jessica has a great deal of influence in decisions. She is very headstrong, and knows what she likes. When she makes her mind up about something, it's sometimes impossible to change her mind/sway her in another direction."*

Carol from Missouri offered up the power of her child's opinion:

*"My child's opinion has a great deal of influence on what I purchase for my home. Especially when it comes to things that might add to her enjoyment, comfort, and learning and make her feel more involved."*

And, Angee from Louisiana almost bemoaned the power of her child:

*"My child's influence on purchases weighs a lot. He gets almost everything he wants unfortunately."*

Kerry from Oklahoma sees it as all pervasive:

*"Having children makes a tremendous impact on everything we do and they influence all purchases in one way or another."*

### For the Youngest Kids

It may still be early days for the recognition of toddler power as a targeted market segment for advertising. But, can it be far behind if the fact that kid cognition and preference is being so neatly positioned in new TV programming aimed at the very young?

At Griffin Bacal, we pioneered marketing to this very young segment well over ten years ago. We've played out our recognition of preschool power in several product categories in different ways.

? My Buddy - Nearly 15 years ago, working with Playskool, we targeted the first doll for boys, My Buddy, directly to preschool boys. It's a continuing hit today.

? Zips - Twelve years ago, we convinced the Stride Rite corporation to target their Zips sneaker brand directly to preschool kids. The theory was that this young audience was not yet into Nike/Reebok fever. It proved correct as sales per store increased from 1.1 pairs per visit to 1.9, as kids agreed to school shoes in exchange for the cool styles and premiums they received with the purchase of a pair of Zips.

? Scoots - Also for Playskool, the idea of My First Scooter became the kid friendly brand name, Scoots, in a commercial targeted directly to the preschool set.

? Lucky Ducks - This Toy Fair, for a very successful parent targeted preschool game, Lucky Ducks, we revised the commercial to offer up an animated duck as singing spokesman in a spot now targeted directly to the young consumer audience.

? Tonka Workshop - And, in the technology arena, a computer key top product we launched a year ago to adults offering computer workshop fun has now been revised to appeal directly to young kids, aged two and up.

### Implications

Kids 0-3 are a more informed, influential and compelling audience than ever before. Computer interaction and television viewing make this kid segment very savvy, and have led to dramatic changes in today's American families.

Kids as young as age 1 year old, make brand associations and purchase requests of their parents. They are strongly influenced by advertising and marketing appeals. Parents are very willing to satisfy the brand requests of their children. And, marketers can capitalize on the growing cognitive, emotional and persuasive strengths of younger segment by targeting these

kid consumers directly. What we are seeing is a new kid market with built-in parent approval.

### Futures

Success breeds success. In the near future we should look for more:

- ? New programming for 1-3's
- ? Segmentation focus among the 1-3's
- ? New and different products for 1-3's
- ? Targeting directly to these youngest consumers

### Preschool Power Summary

We are facing new and compelling marketing opportunities for the under 5 group. What was once a quiet segment involving parent targeting, today represents two distinct segments of toddlers 1-3 and preschoolers 4 and 5.

With programming now for 1 year olds, technology and brand awareness before the age of 2 and today's 3 year olds behaving like yesterday's 5 year olds, the opportunity to target preschoolers directly and create new markets is at hand for the taking. Our challenge, as in all things is to make relevant products, be responsible in our marketing initiatives and programs, address this new market on their terms and Brand for the long term.

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