

## **T.O.O. Cool**

### **Selling to Kids**

**by Paul Kurnit, President, Griffin Bacal Inc.**

**December 1997**

T.O.O. Cool! What's that? Well, it's our acronym for Teens Opinions on Cool. This is the first Selling to Kids installment of T.O.O. Cool. From time to time, we'll dwell on different topics of interest. And, we encourage readers to ask questions which we can answer or even focus on in future T.O.O. Cool columns.

How are we defining teens? Well, loosely between kid and car keys...What's that demographically? The core is 13-16. But, the wannabees and wanna acts spans junior high school through high schools, so add 11's, 12's, 17's and 18's.

What's going on with teens today is just about everything. They're busier than ever, programmed and on the go. They're watching less television to the tune of about an hour a week less than five years ago because they simply don't have the time. They're playing music and videogames, watching videos, using computers (most often to play games), getting on line, talking on the phone and playing lots of sports. That's where a lot of the lost TV time has gone. And, they're sleeping less because they've got so much to do.

The group defines the teen scene. There are more unique groups of teen style today than ever before. They all look different and act different. Independence of thought, look and action is set by the group or clique with whom today's teens associate. So, each group effects a style that provides the "freedom" to look and act totally independent -- just like everyone else in their social set.

Fashion is more diverse and more defining than ever before. Teen life is branded life. And, the big brands are Nike, Tommy Hilfiger, Old Navy, Airwalk, Skechers, M.A.C, Hard Candy, Snickers, J. Crew. It's about stuff on the edge, brands that embrace teen lifestyle often to the exclusion of adult fashion or lifestyle.

Body expression of style is also more in evidence than ever before and most often defined by “places” parents won’t go. So, we have teens wearing multiple earrings (and very much a boy thing, too), baggy jeans, hats and caps, exposed midriffs, cutoffs and in some of the more out there teen lifestyle -- nose, lip, tongue or eye rings. Rock ‘n roll lifestyle neither endorsed by nor acceptable to mom and dad.

School rules. Teens may complain about school, but they actually like it as the social center of their universe. Keep in mind, there are more only children teens than ever before, so school is the place where everyone meets. School today is far more relaxed than in generations past. Jeans are the uniform and hallways, cafeterias and outside are social centers.

Teens have lots of money. They say they save it, but they spend it big time. The average teen is pulling in in the neighborhood of \$25 a week. Money comes from allowance, odd jobs (i.e. chores), real jobs and gifts. Teens maximize money by hoarding lunch money and by using family money for personal indulgences. Teens are increasingly controlling major family money. With more and more dual working parents, teens contribute to family chores by grocery shopping. They work from a list but deviate freely to select the brands of their choice, as long as it fulfills the category that mom said to cover.

Teenspeak today is getting more creative than ever before. With a growing sophistication among teens, language has cyber, retail, food and brand roots. Today’s teens are very much a product of advertising and programming. They live the commercial life and reflect it in their sentiments and slang. Consider these:

<u>Teen Word</u>	<u>Translation</u>
Boo	Boyfriend or girlfriend
Terminal	Cute
All that and a bag of Skittles	Cool, hot
Blue M&M	Cute guy
Addi-paddi	Attitude
Shell	Crazy

Gap-ish	Preppy
Delete yourself	Go away
Capitalize	Make out
Marinating	Chilling out
Junk in the trunk	Nice butt
Charmin Girl	Girls who stuffs her bra

The key in the lingo is once the adult world gets with the program it's time for the slang to move on. So, "awesome", "totally" and "duh" among many others have become yesterday's news and decidedly uncool today. "Cool", however, seems to be a unique evergreen word that all of us use and it still means what we think it means. Cool

Teens in '98? Well, there's a new optimism among today's teens. They are definitely not Generation X. They do not believe the world is a failed place in which they won't be able to make their way. They recognize that life is complex, that there are big issues with the environment, disease, politics and such. But, they're for getting on with it, being cool, having good friends and fulfilling their teen lifestyle.

Freedom and responsibility is the duality of teen lifestyle. They want more freedom. They get more responsibility. The ultimate freedom is car keys and, for most teens, that's not yet in reach. Car keys give teens the opportunity to go, to travel, to be where they'd like to be, when they'd like to be there. Responsibility is about family and school and expectations. After all, they're growing up so they can do more things and be more productive citizens at home and school. With it comes work and chores and tougher tasks from school. Teen dreams are not far reaching. The most important aspiration is to drive. Second most important -- to graduate from high school. Their bar gets set higher only after the close in tasks and goals are achieved. So, teen time is time to be cool in school, to have friends and fun, spend money to get neat stuff and stake a growing claim to learning who they are and what fulfills them.