

## Tweens Today: It's Elementary

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August, 1999

We've come a long way in the kids marketing market. From the once upon a time media demos of kids 2-11 and 6-11, today we focus on multiple targets in the kid domain. We tailor our media planning and buying to a plethora of media choices that didn't even exist ten years ago.

There are at least five different addressable kid target segments today, ranging from babies, preschoolers, kids, tweens and teens.

<u>Segment</u>	<u>Age range</u>
Babies	0-2
Preschoolers	3-5
Kids	6-8
<b>Tweens</b>	<b>9-12</b>
Teens	13-17

The focus of this piece is on tweens, a demographic group that has emerged in the past ten years and one that is increasingly important and powerful in kid marketing. Why?

### **The New Tween Psyche**

Tweens today are financially powerful. They are culturally and brand aware. They define themselves by the company they keep, friends as support systems. They are increasingly independent, making more trips to stores and the mall. They have more of their own money to spend and exert more purchase influence in the family than ever before.

Today's tweens are kids, for sure, but they don't see themselves as children. They are aspirational teen wannabes. And, their behavior in school, at home and in the marketplace runs the gamut from childish immaturity to teen sophistication.

Tween boys and girls are far more comfortable with one another than ever before. No longer is the “boys are icky, girls are stupid” mandatory gender rejection playing into the tween years. This new acceptance is fueled by **KGOY** (Kids Getting Older Younger), **Sports** and the **Information** age.

### **Tweens Coming of Age**

There has been much said about kids getting older younger today. A proprietary study conducted by LiveWire: Today's Families Online™ corroborated among mothers that today's 2 year olds are brand aware and demanding. The mothers indicated that the entire fabric of kid influence on family behavior and brand activity has shifted younger.

Tweens are a group “coming of age” in sports interest, activity and accomplishments. Growing gender receptivity among boys is fueled by females who excel in sports at school in women's soccer and the WNBA. Ideas, computers, the internet and the information age also transcend past gender stereotypes.

Today's kids are increasingly getting into classic toy play as preschoolers and “graduating” from traditional toys by age eight. So, Barbie for girls and action figures for boys basically tops out before the tween years. They move on to music, movies, videogames, computers, online chat, fashion, sports and hanging out as tween entertainment and lifestyle.

Girls today, on average, are entering puberty a full two years earlier than ten years ago, a staggering fact and one that is not even remotely understood yet. But, it means that kids 9-12 are moving into cognitive, biological and play space that is far different from their tween aged cohorts of the Eighties.

## **Tweens and Brands**

Tweens have very clear attitudes about brands. They like advertising, but are far more savvy and far more suspect about hollow or heavy sell about products that don't deliver. Word of mouth and in school "hall talk" are powerful makers and breakers of new fads, trends and brands. Brand behavior gets adopted by the group as kids express independence (as defined by their group), "the freedom to look and be different, *just like everybody else.*"

Tweens are experimenters. They are happy to try new things and adopt new behaviors, fads and trends. Yes, they are fickle and changeable. But, they're happy to try new things that connect with their lives and stay relevant for them. So, without ongoing refreshment, today's great idea may become "so five minutes ago" as these kids search for what's new, what's cool, what's happening.

## **It's Elementary**

And, all this is happening in elementary school. The tween heartland is kids in 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grades. They are the senior class of the elementary school. They've got the "drill". They understand the ropes and they are not yet in the very uncertain world of middle school.

Perhaps what's most elementary is the idea that this unique group is eminently addressable. They are active consumers of all traditional kid media. Yet, we mustn't talk down to them. We better not promise them the ultimate freedom of late teen fulfillment – car keys and the real independence driving brings. They're long on desire for freedom in their lives, but short on freedom in fact.

Marketers need to create brand connections with tweens by embracing and delivering what they care about -- fun, friends and brand fulfillment. The winners position products clearly and distinctly, making it apparent that these kids are "invited" to the brand party. They find strategic partners

who also connect with tween lifestyle and share brand space in ways that mutually enhance the partners' brand power.

These new developments in tween power are here to stay. Today's tweens are a vital, vibrant target. They are growing into new independence of thought and action. They eagerly anticipate and are receptive to new ideas, brands and activities that will fulfill their new and evolving tween space.