

Marketing to Kids

Once upon a time kids were only a market through their parents, meaning that marketers believed that the only way to market to children was by getting their parents to sign off on a purchase. Some marketers used children to encourage or influence a buy, particularly in toys and kids fashion, by appealing to the kids and assuming they would ask their folks to buy the product. Those days are long gone.

Today kids are a buying force unto themselves. They have their own money (either from allowance or after school jobs) and they are making their own buying decisions. From a marketer's perspective, this is paradise. The trick is to get marketing to kids right. This article offers 10 ways how.

1. High Energy Communications – today's youth are inundated with messages and they tend to respond best to those with high levels of energy. The message is certainly important, but it might not get through if the energy level is not sufficient. Years of music videos, their comfort with the internet and banner ads, and the way video game images are thrown at them have conditioned kids to receive messages in what was once thought to be a manner far too busy for anyone to absorb. Somehow, they absorb it.

2. Demonstrate Innovation – nothing is as yesterday as yesterday's technology. In a world where the kids are extremely technologically savvy and have all the latest gadgets, you cannot market to them if you are trying to peddle an old or outdated object. This does not mean that your products need to be high tech – certainly fashion and foods are not – but they do need to show change, which kids understand to be an advance of some kind.

3. Upgrade Often – in the old days a product upgraded by announcing a “new and improved” version of its old self. These days upgrades need to have genuine added functionality and need to meet the demands of an audience that rapidly grows tired of their old “stuff”, seeking new stuff to replace it. By upgrading often you render your old product irrelevant before the kids do, and you refresh their interest with the new functions imbedded in your new version.

4. Introduce New Products – in addition to derivative products and demonstrations of innovation, you also need to introduce new products at a faster than typical pace so that today's kids come to see your company as a source of cool products. If you rest on one product – even if you upgrade it often – you will find that a multi-product competitor will come along and take your cool away.

5. Tie In – today's business culture is replete with tie ins and kids today grew up with them – so they are both natural and expected. The tie in gives the kids an added association and sometimes (depending on the tie in) added value too. By using tie ins you are able to “borrow” some of the cool and appeal of your tie in partner, making it a smart marketing move. But in today's environment it's more than smart, it's necessary.

6. Adapt to Consumer Impatience – kids today make up a highly demanding consumer base that is dreadfully low on patience. As marketers you have to adjust to this inability to wait and plan (and execute) your promotions so that they are timed to hit before the patience has worn out. This is not only a marketing imperative, it is a competitive one as well.

7. Don't Worry, Be Happy – even though that song is more than 20 years old, it has become a highly accurate description of the philosophy of today's youth. The need to be happy, perhaps an American compulsion in general, is an underlying necessity for kids and your marketing needs to make certain that happiness (in one of its variations) is somehow one of the messages communicated.

8. Brand – kids are highly brand aware and very brand affiliated. You need to make certain that your products are branded and properly injected with the proper dosages of the characteristics you wish to communicate. If you do not brand, or do not brand well, kids will shift to the competitor that is doing a better job. Kids will not associate with products that are not well branded.

9. Spread the Word – one of the most effective ways to market to kids is through word of mouth. All you need to do is light the fire and watch it spread. If your product and your brand are well constructed and meet the character needs and functional needs of the kids they will not only buy your product, they will shame their friends into buying it too. Your use of word of mouth should be one of the primary marketing tactics you deplore, once, of course, you have set up your brand and your attitude.

10. Use the Web – perhaps the most critical of marketing tools, the internet permits you to reach kids where they hang out – online. Websites have sprung up where kids explore and discuss products, brands, music, fashion and more. Advertising on the web is natural and obvious to kids. You need to establish and maintain a strong web presence, which beyond advertising and appearances on kid sites, also means having a killer website of your own.

Kids are a multi-billion dollar market and their ability to control and spend dollars is greater today than it has ever been. Tapping into this market requires an approach distinctive from the marketing you may be engaged in for the adult market. The rewards, however, are substantial, and the loyalty you build today could, with proper care, carry you through and allow you maintain them as customers as they grow older. This possible length of affiliation, while a minor benefit compared to the immediate gains to be had by marketing to kids, is but one more reason to consider the kid market. Between the opportunities of today and tomorrow, the potential is simply too great to ignore.