

BRANDchild

By Martin Lindstrom

Kids Relationship With Brands.

You may be surprised to learn that close to 80 per cent of all brands purchased by parents is controlled by their offspring. But what will undoubtedly startle you are the figures that show a whopping 67 per cent of all car purchases is also determined by the children of the home – and not by the parents. Tweens (8- 14 year olds) are an increasingly powerful and smart consumer group, which in 2002 alone, spent and influenced an astounding €1.88 trillion.

Did you know that an average British kid between 8 and 13 years of age is exposed to 22,000 television commercials a year? In fact these kids are exposed to more than 300,000 commercial messages each year if we include radio, television, print ads, billboards, and the Internet.

These figures are from project BRANDchild – the worlds largest study on tweens and their relationship with brands.

So it's not surprising that research from the BRANDchild study indicates that on average, kids are 40 per cent more difficult to communicate with than adults. The challenge then becomes how to cut through the clutter in order to gain the attention of this generation, while at the same time ensuring that your message is perceived as relevant, honest and on the right side of the law.

1. For you and me, there are three communication channels: offline, online and wireless. For kids there is only one – a combination of all. Kids don't distinguish between chatting online, text messaging on the phone or watching television – it's one and the same thing. It is important to bear this in mind when you develop your direct strategy Direct shouldn't be seen as classic direct mail or just magazines, it should include every channel

which creates a direct relationship with kids – covering everything from chat rooms to product placement in computer games.

2. Why? Because today's kids expect to see a integrated flow across all channels. The BRANDchild study clearly shows that brands which only use one channel – or maybe use several channels but don't create a synergy in the message between the multiple channels will lose. I call this Domino Branding. If all the bricks are correctly in place, they will lead to a chain effect of events. Each one an independent entity although totally dependent on the whole. Leaving out one brick may destroy the total outcome. So forget a strategy which repeats the same story over and over across various channels. This form of communication is no longer relevant. However, in order to create a meaningful synergy, you need to tell a story that takes on a new dimension with each new communication channel. The story that is told on television will take on a different form when being relayed on the Internet, and is again retold in a different form on an SMS message on the mobile phone.
3. When the concept is there, and relayed across the many channels that have been created it's vital that it passes the legal test. Quite understandably regulations that exist on children's programming are very tough – at least compared to traditional messages aimed at adults. But this is only one side of the story. Another equally important aspect of this is to involve parents while at the same time including kids. Statistics from the BRANDchild survey reveals that privacy is one of the biggest concerns kids have today – in fact they are more concerned about privacy than their parents. Your message runs the risk of turning into a full-scale disaster if you fail to test the waters and determine whether your message has been understood. You cannot be seen to be breaking the "unwritten" laws of privacy required by parents and children alike.

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4. Direct means instant – at least according to kids. Instant means immediate access to brands – day and night, – 24 hours a day and seven days a weeks. Forget the good old days where brands were only available from nine to five. These days, if a brand closes down at five, it's rendered non-existent in the world of kids. This is the first generation born and raised with a mouse in their hands. They are in fact the world's first truly interactive generation. They expect every brand to have an online presence at a minimum – with a preference for wireless access. What this means for your brand is that in theory, you cannot close down while you're running a campaign. For example, when the US election was reaching its peak, there was a bus that drove across the country 24/7 and perpetually adjusted its target message to cater for each region. A similar strategy should be adopted by your marketing department when running a campaign. The reality of this would be to monitor chat rooms, Internet Web sites and constantly keep an eye on the competitor's move – prepared to change or adjust the strategy if it looks like its reaching a blind end.
5. As stated earlier on in this article – this is a multiple channel exercise. Don't think one dimensional – think multi dimensional. Each channel needs to work together to form a synergy, and most importantly, create a viral effect. Today's kids act in groups. In fact the BRANDchild study shows that more than 90 per cent of all kids across the globe prefer to be in a group. These days, there is not just one decision maker rather each group has many decision makers, establishing what we call the peer-to-peer effect. Therefore your campaign should take the focus off marketing a product, and emphasise every aspect that will create a dialogue between kids, making them curious enough to purchase your brand.

Recently Coca-Cola ran their Heatwave campaign in Australia. If the temperature rose above 25 degrees, kids passing a selected shop would receive an SMS message offering them a special two-for-the-price-of-one discount on Coke. Upon entering the store they were asked to sign up giving their details to an online terminal, allowing for an ongoing dialogue via email. All this was supported with POS materials in the stores, and

television and radio messages. The campaign worked because it managed to combine all channels in a seamlessly – creating a sound domino effect without repeating the same message. They added a new dimension to the Coke story, and needless to say the tweens loved it!

It is clear that the way we build brands and communicate with future generations is dramatically different from what has been currently practiced. The main reason for this success can be boiled down to a single element – interactivity. Monologues as a form of communication is dead, and now every aspect of communication needs to be based on dialogue. Brands have to become interactive. If they fail this crucial test, your brand will not be able to interact with any kids in the future.

About the author.



Martin Lindstrom is recognized as one of the world's primary branding experts. A leading thinker in his field, a visionary and an educator in the rapidly growing field of wireless, on- and offline branding, Lindstrom has authored several best-selling books in partnership with industry icons such as Don Peppers, Martha Rogers and Patricia B. Seybold on the use of emerging techniques for building strong, international brands.

Lindstrom is sought after as an advisor and speaker by companies and organizations throughout the world advising brands such as Yellow Pages, Nokia, LEGO, American Express, Mercedes-Benz, Pepsi and Mars. He energizes audiences with his creative genius and dynamic, unpredictable style. In addition, his acute insights have been featured in The Times, Fortune, BBC Radio, BBC World, BBC 1, The Daily Telegraph, The Observer, USA Today, The Australian and The Independent.

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