

The Real Decision Makers

I have some figures at my fingertips I think will astound you.

Did you know a full 67 per cent of families buying a new car base their purchasing decision on advice given by their children -- who are too young to drive? That 62 percent of mobile phones and 65 percent of clothing brands are bought by parents under the influence of their kids' opinions?

We're not talking only about American kids, but kids across the globe, in countries as diverse as India, Japan, Brazil, Spain, Turkey, Germany, Thailand and Denmark. The power this young generation wields over their parents has been shown to be nothing less than mind blowing.

The data comes from the world's largest study on kids and their relationship with brands. It was conducted for BRANDchild, the book I just co-authored with Patricia Seybold. I call this emerging generation the tweens. They fall, roughly, between the ages of 8 and 14.

Research institute Millward Brown interviewed thousands of kids in 14 countries and 70 cities for the study. Among many startling findings that emerged, overwhelming evidence shows brand purchase decisions are increasingly being made by the children of the household. This is true across the board, in almost every product category from

snacks and soft drinks to cosmetics and house wares.

In light of these findings, every message targeting the adult market must be reconceived and reframed. Marketers will increasingly have to consider how to capture the attention of two very distinct audiences in one message. They must appeal to the adult purchaser, as well as to the kid who influences them.

What does all this mean for your online strategy? As it's becoming increasingly clear you ignore this young audience at your peril, it's vital you structure your message to appeal to both markets. This will be challenging, but it must be part of your site. Obviously, some features appeal more to parents, others to their kids. The challenge is to determine what appeals to each age group, then let your site reflect this something-for-everyone. At the same time, maintain the integrity of your core message.

One method would be to build in a separate section where kids can explore your products in a more dynamic way. Language would be kid-friendly and graphically appropriate to secure their full attention.

The BRANDchild survey shows that combining a structured product presentation appeals to the adult segment, whereas a product presented in its environment appeals more to tweens. If your brand belongs

the 80 per cent of all product categories heavily influenced by tweens, your site should combine both product presentations. If you sell cars, you'll need to place the car in its 'natural' environment, as well as in a more 'clinical' space where you can demonstrate the technical facts and features. The same applies to selling home decorations.

Use of color is critical. The BRANDchild study found some colors are more appealing than others. This is dependent on what product category is offered, as well as the context in which the brand is presented. Colors you select should appeal to both audiences. It would be a mistake to think in greys.

This dual marketing is breaking through. Year after year, Toyota in Australia has maintained a top-selling position using chicks, puppies and kittens in commercials. Strange as it may sound, it works. Remember bunches of balloons waving in front of car dealerships? A small example, but fairly obvious once you're faced with the statistics of how children influence parents' purchase decisions.

Marketing to kids is so much more than simply



pestering them (and their parents). It's about achieving balance. Be totally honest. Completely fulfill whatever it is you promise to deliver. This generation can detect 'phony' from miles away. Youth deserves the highest ethical standards you can deliver. They're our future -- and your future brand customers!

Over the next three weeks I'll take you through some of the fascinating findings from the BRANDchild study -- stay tuned -- as it is far from child's play.

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