



Give Me Something to Believe In

10 Emerging Best Practices For
Marketing To Teen Girls



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Marketing to teenage girls has always been a challenge because this age group is a bundle of contradictions and expressions, a fickle lot with evolving tastes and preferences influenced by friends, popular culture, and brands.

What's different about today's teenage girls are their sources of influence through social networks, their desire to stand for something and have a say, their skepticism about advertising, and their multiple selves. Access to a literal world of information on the Internet and social networks has nurtured a hipper, wiser and more knowledgeable teenager who can't be easily "targeted" and labeled.

"Kids today are many people bundled into one," explains Dr. Grant McCracken in his book *Chief Cultural Officer*. "These kids are distributed across social worlds and cultural worlds. The days of a defining social group are gone. Indeed the very idea of a generation may well be over."

While teens can't be easily categorized, there are still moments of convergence when consensus around clothing, music, language, and "cool brands" arises. These "magical moments" last shorter than previous trends or fads, yet they are the opportunities for marketers to connect with teens. The relative brevity of the convergence moments makes the job of marketing more challenging, requiring an ongoing tracking of shifting cultural trends and pinpointing convergence points.

Current convergence points for teens: think cause vs. campaign

Teens today are more attracted to causes than campaigns. They want to stand for something and have

a say. However, they rarely want to be the first, and are instead fast followers, motivated to campaign for change and happily use the Internet as a megaphone to voice their opinions. They believe in causes and participate in movements.

From Habbo's widely-acclaimed campaign against bullying called "Erase Hate," to virtual world Ekoloko's 'green' campaign to save the world, teenage girls respond to aspirational brands that offer them the ability to make their own choices and express, or try out, new views.

Teens today are also less passive and less impressionable by simple images of who they should aspire to be. They are optimistic and aspire to be many things, refuse to be defined narrowly, and demand transparency and straight talk -- particularly from marketers.

"Transparency is the key. Teens state they want honesty, humor and good music for a marketing campaign to have the strongest relevance and spark interest," according to a YPulse Research Study on teens media habits.

Consider this year's "It's time to Break the Cycle" campaign for Kimberly Clark's new UbyKotex product line, targeted to teen girls. More a cause for vaginal health than a campaign, the program gives teens a platform to talk about the fears and concerns about their periods, makes fun of previous tampon advertisements and provides straight-talking advice about tampons and vaginal care, including all the once taboo topics like, "Do tampons hurt?" (Definitely not your mother's campaign.)



With honest, authentic and educational dialogue about teen girls' health, the UbyKotex campaign has resulted in tremendous passion among young females within a product category that up until now has been largely scorned and ignored.

Surprising shift in influencers

Though they spend several hours a day mostly communicating with their friends through digital channels like Facebook and texting, these girls connect with a whole host of people and a vast digital ecosystem to learn about products and form preferences for brands.

A surprising shift in influence: the most influential person for today's teen is her mother. More than 80 percent of teens say their mother is the most trusted advisor in their lives, according to last year's TRU Study of nearly 16,000 12- to 19-year-olds from around the world. The personal and brand ecosystems of the modern teen girl are complicated and ever-changing – but in some ways, today's teen is not that much different than her forebears. Our research into this fickle communications target challenges some common perceptions of today's teen girls by unveiling what is beneath certain behaviors and attributes:

A teen girl is ...

Hyper-Connected Teens today are always on and they are always talking — about everything. That includes the good, the bad and the ugly about your company and its products and services

Experiential Teens are often natural early adopters of the latest technology tools — both when it comes to new websites and the latest gadgets like camera phones or mp3 players.

Attention-deficient Teens have a short attention span and want to be stimulated. They are almost all doing something else while they browse and they leave sites that are too difficult to figure out.

Socially Concerned Teens today are a diverse, educated, and caring generation that's ready to get involved and put the greater good ahead of individual rewards. They want to take action on big issues.

Information Hungry Teens go online for information about mental, sexual or general health issues. They are not satisfied with reading information. They're likely to also talk about their concerns with others.

Selfish Spenders Teens are prone to taking advantage of their busy, overworked, guilt-ridden parents and demanding high-price brands.

Or she is just...

Completely Normal Samantha doesn't feel any different. She posts to her blog almost every day, the way her mom kept a diary. She texts her friends about the boys she likes; her mom passed notes in class.

Insecure Samantha spent an hour in the Verizon store before deciding on a pink Razr instead of the W580i. She trusts the Razr and she doesn't want people to think she's trying to hard to look cool.

Feeling Busy Madison is having a hard time balancing homework and her social life. She gets depressed easily, and doing five things at once and being impatient makes her feel back in control.

Socially Posturing Madison didn't really think about environmental issues until she met Justin a vegan. She's joined him in some demonstrations, wrote a few posts, but is not ready to abandon her fast food lifestyle.

Information Filtering They might end up on Yahoo! Answers or WebMD, but both Samantha and Madison are guilty of Googling their health questions and finding the answers they want to hear.

Cost-conscious Deal Finders Friends Samantha and Madison are super savvy shoppers who don't like to waste money, and instead, compare and contrast and click endlessly in search of the item they want and at a price they (or mom) is willing pay.



10 ways to market to teen girls

Given the realities, here are 10 emerging best practices for marketers to consider in connecting with teenagers.

1. Unless you're Coach, Apple or Juicy, understand that as a brand, you're mostly irrelevant:

When it comes to fashion, teen girls are conscious of wanting to associate themselves with a limited number of brands but have little time for anyone else. As a brand, if you're not in the business of helping to create a girl's personal image, then what are you doing for her?

2. Plan to lose them and have a strategy to reclaim:

Teens try on brands like they do identities. Rarely will you find loyalty with this target. You will lose them – probably more than once. The trick is to find new strategies to bring them back. Which is why #3 below becomes so important.

3. Enable multiple personalities: We call this the “thousand points of light” approach to marketing. Choice leads to fragmentation and teenage girls love to try new things (though not necessarily purchase them). The best marketers help facilitate this rapid form of marketing prototyping by offering free samples and online demonstrations to help them envision how the product fits into their lives

4. Give them places to talk and ways to share:

Social networking sites are the glue that keeps teens bonded together. Compared with total mobile Internet population, teens are biggest consumers of social media, music, games, videos/movies and technology/science. So what does it take to influence teen girls and get them to take action and light up their own network? Increasingly, innovative brands are giving teens opportunities to share, discover, mix and communicate.

5. See them as social entrepreneurs and create a cause:

While parents may no longer be the targets of teen rebellion, harmfully perceived ideas/organizations/brands are. Teens want to make a difference and are susceptible to cause marketing because of their generation's innate altruistic sensibilities. The

key is to incorporate charitable campaigns within the context of their day-to-day lives.

Case Example: In 2008, fashion retailer *Aéropostale*, along with not-for-profit youth organization *Do Something*, launched “Teens for Jeans”, a campaign to raise awareness of teen homelessness. Stores collected lightly used jeans and donate them to local charities. In return, donators received a 20% (2008) or 25% (2009) discount on a new pair of *Aéropostale* jeans. In 2009, the campaign raised over 200,000 pairs of jeans. This year, the company announced it would match the first 100,000 pairs donated with brand new jeans to be delivered to the victims of the Haiti earthquake.

6. Don't undervalue TV (programming that is):

Use it to support online experiences and build brand platforms. TV viewing is on the rise among children and teens. The biggest media gainer is video viewing on the Internet, where Hulu and YouTube helped spike time by 66%. Teens also use their mobile phones to watch tons of videos – spending 6:30 hours with mobile video streams – a 20% year-over-year increase.

Lisa Hsia, senior vice president of New Media at Bravo, says her number one goal is to figure out how to interact and engage with viewers “before the program, during the program, after the program and always.” From voting to polling to live chats, to experimental commercials to mobile fan clubs and mobile series, Hsia is a master experimenter creating cross-platform engagement.

7. Find the influencers and let teens be your marketing department:

In asking teens why they started to use specific genres of social media, Harvard Berkman Center researcher Danah Boyd heard a common refrain: “That's where my friends are.” Teens adopt the tools that their friends use and, in doing so, they influence those around them. Savvy marketers find and leverage teen influencers and trend leaders and let them act as brand activists.

8. Give them the tools: If given the choice between A and B, often teens will create their own C. Teens are THE media and content creators of the web. There's a



reason why the Jonas Brothers and Taylor Swift and Justin Bieber are teen phenoms. And it's not because they are made up inventions by a really good marketing team. Instead, these teens write, create and do their own stuff. They are agents of their own exploration and experimentation. Increasingly, innovative brands are giving teens the tools they need to help them discover, express themselves, and create new things.

9. Don't forget about Mom – because sometimes she's your real target audience. Ask a teen girl who her BFF is and 86 percent of American teens will say their mother, according to the TRU Study on Global Teens. This new bond is upending the clichéd point of view that mothers and daughters don't get along. Today, Moms are teen girls confidants; together they dress, communicate, consume and act more like friends. Not only do Moms serve as curators of their teens' purchasing habits, they are often the primary drivers of purchase intent. For instance, according to a new study on Teen Health Perceptions, parents are the leading sources for health advice. According to the study, 63% of teens say that when they have questions about health and nutrition, they go to their parents/guardians for information. One half turns to the Internet. (Scarborough Kids Internet Panel, 8/09)

10. Some old rules still apply (maybe more so): Because they're still teenagers, these girls haven't learned how to fake authenticity. Instead, this group is as genuine as it gets. (Even when they wear multiple and opposing personas.) So the need for transparency and trustworthiness is vital to building brand preference.

The same but different

Teenagers have always been optimistic, pushing boundaries, asserting independence and adventurous in figuring out which brands to make their own. Today, however, teens have access to much more information and expect honesty, humor and a way to be heard. And while they may scorn traditional advertising, they embrace cause marketing. Brands that can meet teens on their own turf – and market with them in a way that will make a difference in their lives - have an opportunity to form a lasting brand relationship.

Community Building: Places to Talk and Ways to Share

Teenagers rarely visit bookshops or libraries. When Penguin commissioned a study on the reading habits of teens, they found they needed to keep up with all the other forms of entertainment that provided online venues.

Penguin launched Spinebreakers an online community developed for teens by teens. Their twitter bio says it all: "Any story-surfing, web-exploring, word-loving, day-dreaming, reader/ writer/ artist/ thinker aged 13-18."

Editorial control of the site is in the hands of a core editorial team of nine teenagers, supported by a large network of contributing teen editors from across the UK. In true DIY fashion, the teen team produce a wide variety of multi-media content for the website including video and audio reviews, alternative book jackets and endings, soundtracks, author interviews, podcasts, blogs and short stories.