

BUZZ

Cracking the Fickle Tween Code

Ever-changing tweens are moving targets, but they're open to the right approach **by Tina Wells**

"I'm just like Jessica Simpson — I'm a blonde at heart and in brain," remarked 12-year-old Audriana. Audri, as she likes to be called, was explaining over lunch the complications of using a tape deck from the 1990s. While I wasn't surprised to see this "ancient" technology perplex her, I couldn't help but notice that she admired and aspired to evoke the same spirit of stupidity her idol, Jessica Simpson, has milked for the past few years to achieve her

fame and fortune.

Audri's a smart, sophisticated girl, yet she seemed to have a case of Simpson-itis. I'm sure Jessica Simpson doesn't want to be responsible for creating a generation of women who idolize stupidity, Daisy Dukes, and cowboy boots. Yet that seems to be what she's done.

It's no secret that targeting tweens is difficult. They're smart, cynical, fickle, aspirational, emotional. Most importantly, they're evolving. Every day, all day, they're changing the way they think, feel, consume, and relate to the world. So how do marketers take all of this information and create viable and relatable campaigns and strategies for targeting them?

I recently sat down with some tweens to get the lowdown.

► **THEY LIKE ADS:** Contrary to conventional wisdom, tweens love advertising. In a recent survey

conducted by Buzz Marketing Group, 87 percent of tween respondents said that ads represent one of the top three ways they want to be introduced to a new product. Tweens expect ads to "take them to a different place" and show them things they aspire to see and become. So if you're spending money with *CosmoGIRL!* and *Teen People*, you're actually doing something right.

► **THEY LIKE PRODUCTS CELEBS USE, NOT ENDORSE:** The Google generation can see through paid endorsements. Which means that Jessica Simpson may now be selling more True Religion Jeans than Proactiv Acne Solution. From *US Weekly*, "Entertainment Tonight," and tons of online gossip sources, tweens know what celebs actually love and what they are paid the big bucks to pretend to love. For marketers, this is great news. Celebrity product placement has

become a very cost-efficient way to introduce products to tweens.

► **E-MAIL IS SACRED:** E-mail is reserved for friends, not marketers. If they don't know you, they don't want you e-mailing your specials of the week. In fact, 79 percent of our tween respondents prefer online ads to e-mails. The one exception is "chain e-mails" forwarded by friends. They consider their friends the keepers of cool, and if a message is coming from them, it's important. Here again, we see the power of word-of-mouth.

► **THEY LOVE SAMPLES:**

Tweens love to try before they buy. With the proper introduction through creative packaging, buzz surrounding how they receive the sample, and the true test, the product quality, tweens will return with cash in hand. And with easy purse-portability, samples can turn into a viral marketing campaign. Imagine how many conversations begin with, "Hey, do you have a lip gloss I can borrow?" and continue with, "Try this one — it's a sample I got and I love it."

Crafting campaigns so that tweens remember your brand by the time they log off for the night is key. If you give tweens fun and accessible communication, your product and brand will receive the same respect and attention. ◼

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