

Sellers, P. (1989, May 8). The ABCs of Marketing the Kids. Fortune Magazine.

OVERVIEW

Patricia Sellers writes an intriguing article about direct marketing to youth. Advertisers realize the strong "influence" that kids have upon their parents. They are in tune with the media and aware of the latest trends. Parents often struggle with guilt due to busier schedules and, therefore, more readily submit to the consumptive desires of their children.

The teenage population has been declining for the past ten years; yet, total spending rose from 32.2 billion dollars in 1978 to some 55 billion in 1988, an amount similar to the gross national product of Turkey. Lester Rand, a New York consultant observing trends in teenage wealth says, "the total impact on the U.S. economy is approximately 248.7 billion—in addition to the 55 billion that comes from kids' allowances and after tax earnings and 11.2 billion that they saved for future purchases, there's another 33.5 billion that busy moms and dads gave their offspring for family grocery shopping last year." Rand calculates that American youth "influenced" almost 150 billion dollars in family purchases ranging from pizza to stereos.

The youth market is attractive because the money flows and advertisers find access in gaining lifelong loyalty from teenage consumers. A study of 40,000 college students by New York-based Decisions Center, Inc. and Market Source of Cranbury, New Jersey, reveals that "...56% of seniors buy the same brand of toothpaste that they used in high school. Therefore, smart advertisers are targeting at younger ages to gain this loyal following."

The article also shares how kids want to be addressed. They do not like to be talked down to. Marvin Schoenward, president of Manhattan-based M/E Marketing Research, advises clients to "populate their commercials with children about two years older than they are trying to reach." Creating a "cool" image is essential in selling a product to youth. Research indicates that kids like the commercials in which they aspire to be teenagers and adults like kids in the commercials because they are reminded of moments from youth.

Kids are exposed to one hundred minutes of advertising a day. Forty percent of all U.S. youth between the ages of six and seventeen have his or her own television. Tom Freston, president of MTV Network, says "youth culture in just about every nation revolves around music, fashion, and humor." Throughout the world, children are quickly changing from kids to consumers. Sharp marketers capitalize on and advance the trend.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. There is great influence that youth have in directing parents on consumer choices. Are parents losing their influence to their children?
2. Is society victimized by media assaults and clever temptations? Is society helpless in fighting for objective consumer evaluations based on quality price? What steps can be taken to guard from being influenced by clever advertising that creates a perceived need?

IMPLICATIONS

1. It is well-proven and stated that advertisers comprise a powerful institution. The fact that they compete with each other makes it more difficult to be judicious about their messages communicated.
2. In order to raise discernment, one needs to pay attention to advertising methods.
3. Advertisers are great educators for youth professionals. Advertisers know how to capture the dreams, desires, and respect of teenagers enough to entice them to spend money on their product. Youth workers need to learn how advertisers perceive and address teenagers, and apply those lessons when interacting with kids.
4. It is only after understanding and gaining the respect of teenagers that youth workers can help them understand their world. It is then that they give a trusted mentor permission to share important, life-changing values.

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