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Whitepaper

**An introduction to using community and interactive advertising
to engage tweens / teens**

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The aim of this paper is to help brands who are marketing to teens or tweens – defined here as eight to 12 (tweens) and 13 to 17 (teens) – understand the 'rules of engagement' between themselves and their audiences. It examines how groups of teenagers interact with brands (and, importantly, when they reject interaction with brands); what motivates them and what turns them away; and the most important things brands should consider when creating online marketing campaigns aimed at them. We focus particularly on the principles applying to creating interactive brand advertising, and online communities. It is based on the experience of eModeration's team of moderators and community management, with additional sources that we admire and respect referenced throughout.

We realise that this is a huge topic. What we hope this paper will do is inspire thought at the very early planning stages of a campaign aimed at teens and tweens, as we have done on our blog for creating and managing online communities, with our guides '[Pitfalls of Community Management](#)' and '[Starting up your Online Community](#)' .

It is not designed to be a 'how-to' guide for creating a campaign to teenagers. We wouldn't dream of telling brands what their best campaigns should look like, or whether they should be reaching out to this audience. But what we can do is help brand ask themselves the right questions about style, tone, content and engagement, before developing these campaigns or communities.

As ever, we welcome your feedback. You can email us at info@emoderation.com or talk to us on our [blog](#) .

Teens and tweens: the hardest age group to reach for brands?

Teens and tweens – for the purposes of this paper, defined as 8 to 17 – are notoriously difficult for brands to reach out to. Brand fickle, but the most brand aware; influenced more by their peers than by advertising; relatively high spenders on themselves; and keen to see themselves as early adopters, but (for the most part) trend followers – they can be baffling to big brands. (Not least because often the people defining marketing strategies to reach this group are more than a little distanced in age terms).

It's not surprising, then, that social media, online communities and interactive advertising made possible by rich Internet applications, have been seen as a godsend by many marketers in reaching this group. Not only do these communities, visible to the outside world, let marketers establish the tone,

language and fast-moving trends developed and followed by this group – in a way they simply couldn't have done in the 'real' world - but they offer a way of communicating with them directly, and influencing their spending decisions.

The biggest challenge though, is how to engage with a younger audience who has less patience, lower tolerance levels and obscure loyalties, on their own turf, without being intrusive. Brands that do it reap high rewards: word-of-mouth recommendations between peers are rife, and immediate response and high interaction levels allow smart brands to create a dialogue that can influence sales.

But social media sites and online communities are where younger people hang out with each other, not with brands, or 30+ marketers. They expect to talk to their peers, and interact with their friends (although even the term 'friend' has been redefined by social media – many teens will have upwards of 500 or 1000 'friends' on Facebook, for example. The visible number of friends has become a badge of popularity).

Many brands took the approach of advertising where their audience were gathering in groups. Banner ads on Facebook, seen initially as the manna of brands targeting a young audience, yielded few returns. So the brands had to change their approach. The old ways just didn't work anymore.

The most successful campaigns sometimes come from the least expected source. President Obama's political campaign, much-documented, (for example [here](#) and [here](#)) as using social media, online communities and micro blogs (notably Twitter), motivated a pre-voting audience at a time when the accepted view was that young people were disenchanted with and distanced from politics. But what emerged was a young audience mobilised and engaged. The secret? The belief that they would be heard, could make a difference, and were empowered. They were motivated to campaign for two things all young people believe in: hope and change. This idea of teens campaigning for what they believe in is crucial to this group; and we'll come back to this later.

What do they expect from brands and how do they engage?

Carol Phillips, in her blog 'Millennial marketing' explains why '[brands make poor friends](#)'. Social media and online communities are all about people talking to each other; a brand encroaching on this territory can be viewed as out of place as a grandparent at a sleep-over. Phillips, herself a mother of 'millennials' – roughly defined as those who were pre-teen at the turn of the century - quotes her own research into how young adults view brands who attempt to 'befriend' them on Facebook or Twitter. The results? At best, brand invisibility- simply not being noticed by teens, or ignored; at worst, a lasting lack of credibility by doing something considered to be deeply 'uncool'.

To understand how to engage with this group, we need to examine how they engage with each other. This is not an exhaustive list, but here are some pointers based on the experience of our moderators, and sources referenced here.

Social media is essential (Facebook, MySpace, Bebo are the most notable). However, brand interaction that encroaches on social engagement space can be seen as intrusive, or at best, not seen at all.

Teens and tweens have short attention spans. They will dive into a new project – and then leap out again as quickly. Any campaign to this group has a two-minute engagement window. And needs to be self-explanatory: if something needs a set of instructions to let you get involved, it's out.

This group, above all others, is totally at ease with all forms of communication: instant messaging (IM), SMS, social networks and email (though in our experience email is seen as the least engaging form of communication). The most important platform to watch is mobile, which is likely to be the main choice for all the above communications within the next two years; and the least used function of a phone will be voice. Most people of 30 plus could survive a couple of days without a mobile phone at all (and might even enjoy it!), but not if you're under 20. [X-Tribes' research](#) shows that this group would rather lose the voice functionality than text functionality on their phones.

Aspirational brands are important. Name a 12-year old who doesn't want to be 18. Online communities and brand advertising campaigns targeting 10 to 14-year olds are, in truth, unlikely to pick up the top end of this age bracket. Tweens and early teens want to be where young adults are. This poses a real problem for brands. As an influencer, you have a real responsibility to a young audience, and to their parents who will trust you to keep them safe while engaging in 'your' world. But to engage them in the first place, you must treat them like adults. Finding this balance is key.

Their minds, and opinions, are developing fast. Young teens are finding their individual voices, but at the same time seeking safety in the pack. What their friends think is important, but so is self-belief, and the ability to make their own choices, and express, or try out, new views. If you're creating a community, or a campaign, it should be fluid enough to allow teens to express themselves, and allow them enough freedom to make choices, while knowing that they are in a safe environment.

They believe in causes. Successful marketers to this group are often those brands who stand up for something (Obama's campaign, referenced above, is a good example). Habbo's widely-acclaimed campaign against bullying '[Erase Hate](#)' is a great example of a brand that harnessed the power of doing something good to engage with its audiences. Finding the cause that matters gives a brand common ground with its audience. [Eloko's 'green' campaign](#) is another good example of a brand helping a young audience campaign:

Creating a safe environment matters. They may be approaching adulthood, but this group are still children, and brands have a responsibility to keep them safe from online threats. According to [research by MSN](#) into the online habits of 20,000 14-19 year old in Europe, 51 per cent of those questions frequently surf the web without any supervision. Twenty-nine per cent of teenage web users admitted

to be bullied online. That is an astonishingly high proportion, and one that brands should fight to reduce, at least where they are able to control it. (How to moderate the online activities of this age group is an area we will be addressing separately, in part two of this series.)

Understand that a brand on its own is not enough to engage interest. Even the biggest and most appealing brands have to do more to engage their audience than just put up a discussion board or a one-way message website.

This group engages on their own terms, in their own language, and when they choose. Don't try to lead them away from their own turf, but engage with them on it.

A brief overview of this market

We're focusing here on two main areas: virtual worlds and online communities; and interactive advertising or marketing campaigns.

1. Virtual worlds/communities

We're not talking here about Second Life, which has a much older (18+) audience and a heavier brand presence than any younger audience would accept. Second Lifers tend to be in their mid-30s or above [] with a much more adult content focus: in fact, [Second Life](#) has just introduced a new 'standalone' continent for adult content.

According to [Virtual World Management](#), there are 90 or so virtual worlds targeting tweens, and 78 targeting teens. Approximately 46 of these worlds are use advertising in their mix. The biggest and most notable player in the virtual world / online communities for teens / tweens is probably Habbo, whose players have an average age of 15. [Habbo](#) has upwards of 120 million players, and owns 50 per cent of this market.

Other major players worth a mention are: [Neopets](#) with 19 per cent of the market, and 45 million Neopet owners; [Stardoll](#) (the online fashion community for teenage girls) and [WeeWorld](#), both with 9.9 per cent; and [Club Penguin](#) – aimed at six to 14-year-olds – which has an estimated 8.3 per cent.

2. Brands creating interactive advertising or marketing campaigns to this age group:

The first stop for brands interacting with a teenage audience is usually to look at the social networks where they gather in groups. Facebook and Bebo fan pages, groups or campaigns have often (mistakenly) been seen in the past as the easiest way of reaching teenagers online. But when done well, with some real thought behind the campaign, they can be very effective.

It's worth spending some time looking around what other brands are doing. We've selected a few of what we think are the best campaigns targeting either tweens or teens, listed below. It's worth saying

that we've selected campaigns that target different age groups within the tween / teen range; none of them target right across the group.

Red Bull Music Academy: - a lovely example of a brand that really understands its core audience and is truly multisensory, including a website, MySpace pages, music academy courses, video and radio.

Hannah Montana's pages on **Facebook** and **Bebo** engage with well over half a million fans.

High School Musical: almost needs no introduction for any parent of a tween! The **Bebo** page includes a user-generated image maker incorporating the High School Musical stars and its **Facebook** page includes video, photos, forums and discussions.

BBC Switch's interactive drama, **Proper Messy** was a great example of multiplatform communication. The campaign included TV, SMS, Bebo pages and a blog.

Kohn, the fashion retailer for tweens and teens, **launched a new range** designed by Avril Lavigne on **Stardoll**.

So, if you are targeting 11-17 year old, how do you get it right?

Firstly, consider what you're trying to achieve. Is your community / virtual world / campaign promoting something that this market really wants?

Do your research, and listen to what your audience wants from you. If they're not interested, it's better to find out early on than develop the community or campaign first, and find out later. Adapt your idea to what teenagers want; and build in flexibility so you can change later on to reflect a new trend, or idea. Update continually.

Put some personality into your efforts. But don't try to be a 'cool kid' – it'll be like watching your Dad dance at a wedding. Think who the people are that this group aspire to, or look up to. Who are the role models you want to emulate? Create a brand personality to match that, but don't just be one of the pack. Every teenager wants to stand out and be independent.

Be credible. You want your campaign to have enough 'social currency' for a teenager to want their friends to see (on your Facebook page, for example) that they've downloaded an app, become a fan of X brand, or used Y widget. Word of mouth value, or peer to peer marketing value, is incredibly important. So, give them something that makes them look good to their mates. Again, Apple is getting this right consistently. The iPod and iPhone are both great examples of branded style statements: a blend of design, brand, clever applications and useful functionality. Although both are products, they are good benchmarks for what is important in campaigns targeted at this audience. Ultimately, if your audience aren't inviting their friends in, then you're not getting it right.

Interact. Brand advertising campaigns are no longer about pushing one-way messages on a billboard, but are all about interaction and engagement. The most effective brand campaigns combine a number of elements: staging a real event; creating 'social utility' and the ability to interact; and developing original content in collaboration with users, for example. This group will expect immediate responses, agility and quick decisions on any questions they have. And they'll expect it over any platform they choose. This is a market for which email is a slow form of communication. Make sure you're set up to respond quickly and deliver content on demand.

Create a space or campaign that is authentic, not over-branded, and is engaging to all senses. Multi-sensory campaigns that incorporate video, audio and user-generated content are all important. So too is a mobile facet – if you don't have one now, plan for this in 12 months. Retailers in particular are already starting to market heavily over mobile platforms. But getting the tone and content right is even more important on a device that is the most personal way of marketing one to one.

Be useful. If you're developing an application or widget as part of your brand campaign, make it useful. The nature of viral marketing has changed, from 'look how clever this is', to 'look how funny this is', to 'look what I can do with this'.

Know your niche. Don't try to be all things to all people. Set a style and personality that fits your audience. Girls that want Barbie aren't going to socialise with girls that want Donnie Darko.

Consider cause marketing. Is there a cause that your audience will take on, that will really make a difference to their lives? Red Bull Academy is an example. Make sure it's one that you too believe in – if you don't mean it, you'll get found out.

Get the language and tone right. Be authentic. Keep your message short and simple to cater to this group's short attention span. Don't patronise and don't pretend to be something you're not (if you're 40, don't try to be 14 – you'll get caught out. And look slightly ridiculous). Show respect, and genuine interest.

Make your community, or campaign, safe. If you're hosting a community, remember that no space where teenagers and young adults congregate should be unsafe. Don't leave groups of young people to moderate themselves, whether that's in a virtual world, an online community, or a marketing campaign that relies on users creating or uploading content. Be on hand to give advice. There is increasing awareness among this group that behaviour recorded online is there to stay and can affect them in later life. Cyberbullying among this age group is rife; no brand should condone this, to protect both the children on the site and the reputation of the brand. Remember the parents – you want to create an environment where teenagers want to engage with you and with each other; but also where their parents are happy for them to do so. Set the rules clearly, and early on.

Don't make your marketing overt. No teenager wants to be seen as an easy marketing target. Make your proposition genuinely engaging and interesting, without obvious brand messages. This will engender loyalty much more effectively than by shouting your brand messages from the rooftops. Don't over-brand: unless your brand has intrinsic credibility to this group (Top Shop, for example), overtly branded sites are a turn-off to this audience. It's ok for a brand to host an event or campaign, but not to take it over or control it.

Allow your users some freedom, but set boundaries. Set clear rules within your community or campaign, but empower users to make decisions, and give them freedom to have conversations. Sometimes, you may not like these conversations - for example if they're negative about your brand - but overly-restrictive behaviour will lose you loyalty. But you have the right to protect your reputation, and you should do so when necessary. Skittles got into hot water when it changed its homepage to a live Twitter feed on 'Skittles'. Although the stunt earned Mars a lot of press attention, it also attracted a number of people posting profane or abusive tweets that were unsuitable for younger viewers. Consider using technology to filter automatically damaging or unsuitable content and restrict the number of posts from a single person. Never allow unrestricted content to feed onto a public site. There's great information on this at Michael Gray's [blog](#).

Don't encroach on social media space that a teenager considers 'private' to them and their friends. Find out how your audience prefers to interact. For example, if IM is the medium they use with their friends, they may feel a brand is being intrusive if it too uses IM to communicate. If in doubt, ask them.

For more information on creating and managing communities, or moderating interactive brand campaigns, see eModeration's [website](#) or read our [blog](#)

About eModeration

Founded in 2002, eModeration Limited is an international, specialist user-generated content moderation company. It provides 24-hour community management and content moderation to clients in the entertainment and digital publishing industry and major corporate clients hosting online communities and consumer-driven projects.

eModeration's CEO and founder, Tamara Littleton, has an established background in editorial quality control, fault escalation and process management gained from previous work as the Product Delivery Director for Chello Broadband and Online Operations Manager for BBC Online, where she managed the world's first ISO 9000-accredited team for digital publishing management and monitored over 400 BBC websites. Tamara Littleton is a member of the Home Office Internet Taskforce for Child Protection on the Internet which brings together government, law enforcement, children's agencies and the internet industry, who are all working to ensure that children can use the internet in safety. She was also the Chair of emint, the online community for community professionals from 2006-2007.

eModeration's team of moderators and staff are the key to eModeration's success and excellent client list. eModeration draws on the expertise of carefully recruited and trained moderators located mainly in the US and Europe with specialist editorial and community moderation skills, which are matched uniquely to the client. The company can moderate 24/7 in more than 30 languages. All its moderators are managed online from eModeration's headquarters in London, United Kingdom.

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