

## Marketing to Teens

Last month my good friend, N.M. Dayama, recollecting his trip to a newly opened shopping mall, observed, that “Today’s youngsters have more money to splurge, inspite of the so-called global recession than we could ever do spend in the best of our times.”

This remark set me thinking and eventually made me meet friends and colleagues in the industry to discuss the importance of youngsters in boosting our industry and economy.

This paper is a compilation of my thoughts based on discussions with marketers, planners and colleagues in the FMCG sector and those who have watched teen behaviour at close quarters as part of their business regime.

### India in the next decade

India with over 1.1-bn people is the second most populous country in the world. It is home to 1/6th of the total world population. During the next decade, a massive increase in the population in the 10-59 age group is expected.

Precisely by 2016, population in the age group 15-59 will increase to 800-mn, age group less than 15 years will be about 350-mn, and age group over 60 yrs will increase to 112.9-mn. Rapid increase in access to education, information, communication, employment and healthcare is expected.

Proper utilisation of all these, will surely lead to improved quality of life in India. Expectedly, the dependency ratio will decline. The trend

for urbanization will continue over the next few decades with India having five or more new mega cities added every decade. All these paradigm shifts will not only transform cities into engines of social economic change and human development, but will also utilise the increasing connectivity to create an urban-rural economic and social continuum to improve quality of life of the population.

This demographic transition and stabilization, of sustainable improvement in human development, is a challenging opportunity that marketers can ill afford to ignore.

Marketing products to teenagers today becomes all the more important, if one has to achieve and sustain success in business.

### Why do teens use cosmetics?

Teenagers today want to have a clear, clean, fresh-looking skin with a natural classic romantic trendy look, appropriate for the occasion. Latest market research analysts confirm that teenagers use a variety of personal care products as a means to establish their sense of identity, fit in with their peers, experiment and have fun.

Teens are a growing demographic in India, unlike in the west, making them a very crucial group for manufacturers and marketers. Teens today feel a need to be different. The challenge is to approach them with a distinct marketing strategy customized exclusively for them. Marketing statistics and statistical analysis normally do not work because teens constantly keep evalu-

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ating and re-evaluating products one after another. Today, teens are better informed. They have more money to spend and do not hesitate to purchase newly launched products to be up to date. To succeed in this market, marketers have to understand these fundamentals, in addition to the surface differences needed to lay and establish a strong foundation that pays dividends over the years.

### Think like a teenager

To develop products catering to teens we need to think dynamically by putting ourselves into their shoes. Address their lifestyle experiences and translate them into insights. Sell desires, lifestyles and images, rather than products.

If one blindly follows the prevailing general trend, it will become too topical for their comfort. We may even look plain foolish in their eyes. It is no doubt important to talk their language, and use informal communication techniques but, at the same time, it is advisable to avoid slang that may look forced and artificial.

Never communicate like a parent, or offer advice, as it is likely to be misunderstood. Teens are sensitive by nature and like to receive communications from an informed equal. They do not like someone else to be judgemental or to correct him or her. Importantly, communications should establish real emotions without su-

perfection. Remember, only a universal emotion can last beyond generations.

### Teen likes and dislikes

Teenage likes and dislikes play an important role in forming long-term personal care habits and preferences. Teenagers use personal care products due to their desire to establish a sense of individuality, tempered by a need for belonging within society, in general, and by a particular peer group. They also want to distinguish themselves from the herd. Their insecurity and, in that respect, their desire to be different, is tempered by the fear of rejection or exclusion from their peer group.

Fun is another important aspect of teen personal care, applying particularly to girls, who are more willing to experiment than males. Celebrity idols sometimes influence. Teenagers do tend to try to emulate their favourite idols or the star of the moment looks.

This is far more compelling for young women and this sometimes may even last beyond one generation. It is important to establish real emotional contact. Superficial contact will just not do.

Positive reinforcing and proper positioning should reflect their desire for freedom and enjoyment. One important need governing teenage personal care consumption is their desire for maturity. They strive to appear and behave as if they were older than they really are. This again manifests more among older teenage girls who then frequently listen to their mothers and their friends, thereby favouring many of the same brands aimed at an adult audience.

### Just be different

Teens are outrageous, adventurous and willing to change for the better. However, this facade is only on the surface, as deep down they are conservative, risk averse consumers, very careful about what they use, especially so in case of body care products.

This no doubt is a contradiction. Marketers must take care of this dichotomy when explaining the product usage benefits to influence them. Subtly make performance differences and high quality information obvious. Clearly identify publicly addressable information and segregate those for individual private interaction. Even though the idea is to sell to teenagers, product packaging should not look too young and trivial.

### Value for money

Our world today sees continuous growth of product quality. Consumers today are adept in assessing quality versus price to choose brands that give them value for money. In this milieu, teens are no strangers to this concept.

Product pricing should be such to derive consumer empathy without any loss in profitability. Consider factors like packaging, weight of the pack and colour while designing the product, as all these are important purchase statements for this consumer category. It is possible only if cost is one of the key strategies in product designing and we are able to maintain the price level within reasonable limits so that product pricing will surprise and delight them.

Teens are smart and it will be

naïve to believe that they will always pay for quality. They may pay for once, but for all subsequent buy, they will invariably calculate its true worth in terms of its value for money.

### Attracting & holding teen excitement

Conventional wisdom suggests that one needs to be perpetually dynamic to hold interest. In truth, we have to stay exciting and interesting. We will have to achieve all this without much churning or by taking unnecessary risk. Adopting causes that teens care about will give an opportunity to stay relevant and interesting.

Make execution exciting and benefits simple and timeless. Some benefits like fun, excitement and value for money will never go out of style. Subtle changes in packaging, or to flavours and fragrances used, can keep brands fresh and up to date. Modern promotional philosophy like, E mails, SMS's, usage booklets, online usage help, and relevant conversation about the brand at regular intervals will keep the concept up to date.

### How to communicate

The new teenage generation process information differently when compared to others. They are used to icons, clearly see blinding series of images, understand short and disparate communications, thanks to SMS craze, and yet seem to be unable to focus on simple paragraphs we are accustomed to, in our generation.

They get bored easily when they are asked to follow regular norms, and so "V have 2 change our communication", according to their processing style.

Use of graphic images or a visual signature to look and speak like them in jingles and bytes is the need.

**Act like an adult but, not ostentatious or dull**

Teenagers clearly do not know as to how they want to feel or how we feel for them. What they do know is that they deserve information but not in the form of a long winding lecture. Teens crave for respect as an individual and cherish recognition as a group. They want benefits of a category with the excitement of youth. Marketers have to follow this tightrope to be successful.

Make customised products that suit the environment, making sure that they do not have to apologise to their elders for using it. Help them to understand that we are addressing them and them alone. Use quality as an important compliment. Remember people of all ages, young, teen, middle aged or old all like brands that care about them and how good a deal they are getting by choosing and using the product. Show concern to their issues seriously by respecting them, as teen concerns may not look to be compelling to an elder, but is very much relevant to them at their age and generation.

**Be an authority not an adversary**

Teenagers have always considered elders as adversaries. The only way to overcome this is to build an honest and straightforward relationship with them. Nothing wrong to be an authority, but do not behave authoritatively. If the relation is on a firm footing, then they themselves will become product brand ambassadors. Build relationship by giving useful information gearing to the

larger concerns of the audience. Remember simple self-promotion does not count. We should talk so interestingly that a third party picks up the idea and promotes.

If our communication is not able to do this then it fails to meet the audience needs even though they may be meeting ours. Build brands with an inherent ability to get a recommendation and is promoted by word of mouth all by itself. Give teens something that they want to share and they will talk about it non-stop, one to tens, tens to hundreds, hundreds to thousands, and thousands to lakhs.

**Take them seriously, but don't be serious**

Success or failure of a brand is no doubt important, but at the same time, one cannot afford to take things too seriously with teenagers. Although they want us to take them seriously as a group, they do not respond well to people and companies who take themselves seriously. We have to see humour in our product category and find ways to use humour to drive home any serious messages putting them at ease. However, we need to take care not to make fun of our product or its real benefits, as this might work for a while but will eventually cost us their respect.

**Every one likes a free lunch**

We know that teenage consumers are prepared to experiment with a variety of products and brands. Have you watched a group of teens at a shopping mall or a multiplex theatre? If you have, then you will know that they are inveterate moochers. They always want free samples to try, use, taste or feel the experience.

However, on the other extreme, if you give them what they want they will also not hesitate to buy and go broke. We need to find ways and means of incorporating this aspect in the overall marketing plan. One method is to promote the product at a price low enough for them to try out, without feeling the pain of spending. Trial samples, without risks, will work very well with this group, if your concepts are clear and correct.

**Overall impact**

We may follow most of the requirements including the minor ones, but still fail miserably if the big picture does not stand out in the crowd. To be successful, is the biggest challenge.

Today, marketers bombard consumers with millions of marketing messages. In the sea of competing voices, teens have that unique ability to allow messages to bounce over their heads, except a few that matters. Presenting an idea by maintaining a clear understanding of the image, chaos and fun is a dynamic activity.

Honestly, if one does not add up all the relevant information and say it in a manner that teenagers can comprehend, it will just fizzle out and go unnoticed.

To be successful in marketing to teens one will really have to take their differences seriously even if it may all seem very complex and unorthodox.

Have I have confused you all with my assessment? If so then I have done my job.

Enjoy and have fun!