

Tech huge factor in being 'cool'

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No longer are today's generation of cool kids defined by the brand names they wear -- now they're defined as being the "Creatives," according to a recent study.

Creatives are the most wired, most innovated and most influential teens worldwide, according to Energy BBDO in a study of teens in 13 countries.

The study suggests that these teens are leading the huge trend in creating original content from blogs and media content to personal Web sites and networks.

It found nearly 70 percent of Creatives going online everyday or almost everyday and who were more likely to instant message, e-mail or use a

search engine everyday.

"The Creatives are a group of young people who seem driven towards self-expression," said study author Chip Walker, executive vice president and planning director at Energy BBDO. "They are extremely connected to the world electronically. They interact on the Internet more, spend more time visiting sites, IM and text messaging -- they are more wired and this makes them more cosmopolitan and sophisticated."

And how many of these Creatives are around?

The study found these teens represented about 30 percent of teens worldwide, especially high in number in Western Europe. But it reported that the United States slightly lagged in its share.

"The cool kids were once thrill-seeking kids like jocks or the well-dressed kids, and the self-expressed kids of today were once the band geeks, theater types, or crunchy-granola types," Walker said.

External appearances mattered less, with 9 percent who said they valued looking good.

Moreover, it found that Creatives were highly apathetic about brands with 37 percent saying they "like wearing brand logos" and 64 percent believe there is "too much advertising and marketing in the world."

It reported that Creative teens' favored the brands Adidas, Nokia and Sony while they felt negatively towards other brands such as McDonalds, KFC and AOL.

The study raises the question -- how should companies market their products to these trendsetting cool teens?

Walker suggests companies need not to try to impose a brand or logo on this new generation.

Rather he says they need to appeal to teens in three ways: by promoting themes of empowerment, creating a community for networking, and a forum to link with others.

He also said that companies were on the right track allowing teens to customize their products and services they buy whether it is designing their own shoes or phones.

Amanda Freeman, VP of The Intelligence Group, a market research firm, says customization is one important way companies can appeal to teens.

However, she says they also appeal to teens with multi-dimensional products like the iPod, products on-the-go, and documentaries.

But she does not think there is just one type of "cool" kid, rather she says the key differentiating factor is that coolness means to be multi-dimensional.

"It's cool to be multi-dimensional, not stereotypical," she said. "There can be jocks who are also artistic and teens who love country but also hip-hop."

Success campaigns Freeman mentions Apple's iPod, Axe's body deodorant, the Burger King "subservient chicken" Web site, the steamy Paris Hilton Carl's Jr. Burger commercial, the anti-smoking TRUTH ads, and Geico car insurance commercials.

She warns though, companies marketing toward teens should not use stereotypes in their ads or try hard to be cool using popular lingo or

pretending to act as their friend.

Nor should they aim to categorize their product in too many aspects, she said.

While this factor is not unique, Scott Szur, president of consultancy the Harrison Group, also adds, that companies don't want to seem to have an agenda.

"Companies want to be the hot thing but they don't want to be perceived as part of the establishment," he said.

For example, he cites that Apple's Steve Jobs and company's products are careful to not be perceived as Microsoft.

Cool or not, new generations of teens are going online and companies will need to test the waters to determine how best to advertise to them through the many different channels available from mobile to Internet Web sites and social networking services.

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