

# Marketing to different ages and genders

**Barbie Clarke draws thumbnail sketches of various children to demonstrate the challenges facing brand managers of kids' products – gender and age make all the difference in this growing market**

One of the biggest challenges facing marketers advertising or promoting products or services to children is the difference in age and gender. Clearly a five year-old is a world apart from a 10 year-old. And a 10 year-old looks up to a 15 year-old with awe and respect.

An additional challenge is that children are emulating their older brothers and sisters by adopting tribal behaviour, something that has never been an issue with younger children before. Much of this of course is influenced by music, and as an extension of this by the clothes that are worn. So we have throughout the western world different tribes existing among children under 16, some of which were probably around when the readers of this report were young.

Current trends and tribes include: Goths, Punks (yes really they are back), Indies, Skaters, Townies, Kevs and Shazzaz. Often this manifests itself as a style of dress, rather than an attitude, but there are certain ways in which, for instance, a skater will walk, or hold their hands, or wear shades, or caps.

To illustrate the vast differences between age, gender, and tribe we have adopted characters that we use on our website, based on the many hundreds of children we work with each year.

## Molly, age five



Molly is five years and three weeks old; the three weeks is important when you are five years old, as there is a keen wish at this age to grow up. Molly has become quite independent now, compared to her fourth birthday a year ago. She has become less family focused, and is interested in making friends outside her immediate family, which is just as well, as in the UK at least, children are legally

required to attend regular full-time schooling at five. In fact Molly has been at school for the last six months, and is adept at putting on her own shoes, and getting herself dressed in the morning (she will only wear pink or silver); and she always takes her skipping rope to school.

Like many five year-olds, Molly veers between being quite 'grown up' – listening to junior S Club 8, wearing make-up, painting her nails with pale pink glitter nail varnish (although mum only lets her do this on special occasions), and dressing up – and reverting to some 'baby' behaviour when she is feeling a bit insecure. And that's where her old favourite Baby Born Doll works well, as she can both identify with the doll, re-enacting baby behaviour, but she can also play 'mummy', caring for, and commanding the doll so she feels she is in charge.

Molly has a hamster which she keeps in her room; she loves her hamster very much (his name is Joe), although she does not always clean his cage out and mum often has to step in to do this. She also did have two goldfish, but, unfortunately, they died, which was a pretty tough thing for her, although mum and dad helped her bury them in the garden. Molly likes to watch CBeebies, and loves to eat pizza.

## Billy, age seven



Billy is seven and three-quarters (but he would rather be eight). He cannot really remember a time when he did not go to school, and school and school friends have become a source for many of his influences in terms of music, and clothes. Home is very important to him too though, as it is for all seven year-olds, and his room is increasingly becoming a place where he can explore his world, watching TV

(favourite programme *WWE Smackdown*), and playing on his Dance Master. He also desperately aspires to be like his brother (aged 12), and when possible he will try to have a go on his brother's PS2.

He would really like to go to school on his own, on his BMX bike, but his mum and dad say he is not old enough yet. This seems very unfair, as he feels many of his friends do (although in fact these friends live very close to the school and walk with their older brothers and sisters). He quite likes to take a lunchbox to school with him, though he wishes his mum wouldn't keep making 'healthy' food like sandwiches; he'd much rather have a chocolate bar and some crisps, although he doesn't mind fruit and yoghurt.

### KEY LEARNINGS

- **Molly, age five:** Less focused on her family and becoming more independent. Starting to make her own friends. Very keen on certain toys, loves pets and likes to wear her favourite colours.
- **Billy, age seven:** Influenced by schoolmates in terms of music and clothes. He looks up to older siblings and would like more independence from his parents. He likes to watch TV and play games.
- **Summer, age 10:** Very sociable, active girl. She likes pop music and accessories. She is content with her age and has many hobbies. She likes to go shopping with her friends and is conscious of eating healthily.
- **Ben, age 13:** Happy to be a teenager at last but yearning to be 16. He is really into skateboarding and football. He likes to surf the internet and text his mates. He does not like to spend time with his parents.
- **Stevie, age 15:** Heavily into goth music. He spends a great deal of time in his room writing poetry and listening to music. He would like to have a girlfriend, more spending money and more independence from his parents.

He is looking forward to Christmas, and has already looked through the Argos catalogue to compile his list. Of course, he says he still believes in Father Christmas, but he's not really sure he exists, especially since his best friend Tom's big brother says it is make believe. An advantage of being seven though is that he gets pocket money (£3 a week), although for this he has to keep his room tidy, which is difficult, and he has to help walk the dog, Hamish, which he likes. He mostly spends his money at Woolworths, when mum or dad will take him, or the local newsagent.

### **Summer, age 10**

Summer lives in south London with her mum and older brothers and sisters. She has her hair in little plaits which she adorns with glittery slides from Claire's Accessories. Like many children of this age, she has developed a wide range of interests, and has become far more independent than when she was seven or eight. Her mum describes her as 10 going on 20. She loves music, and is really good at playing the violin. But she also adores playing with her karaoke machine, and thinks Britney is really cool again now, although she probably likes Kylie more, and of course Avril Lavigne and Beyonce; she has all her CDs. Her favourite thing to do right now is to have sleepovers with her friends, and most weeks in the holidays she spends a night at a friend's sleepover. She also loves her roller skates.

Summer thinks being 10 is pretty cool, and is happy not to be a teenager, as that looks quite bad, and really stressful. She is happy to eat whatever she is given, as long as it is not meat, but thinks it is important to eat fruit, and drink lots of water.

When not at school, Summer would not be seen out without her hair glitter and lipgloss, and she wears baggy combat trousers and trainers. She likes to watch TV; her favourite programmes are *Pop Idol* and *Fame Academy* (for which she regularly registers votes), and most of the soaps, but especially *EastEnders* for which, like most of her friends, she never misses an episode.

She is desperate to have a mobile phone, and is pretty sure that this is what she is going to get for Christmas, after all she goes out a lot now to the shops on her own with her friends, and mum will always know where she is with a mobile phone. Her bedroom is very important, and mostly the door is closed; entry is only permitted by knocking. Here she listens to CDs, watches TV, and DVDs.



### **Ben, age 13**

Ben is a fanatic Arsenal fan, and he never likes to miss a match on TV. Like many 13 year-old boys, Ben thinks being this age is better than being 11, but it would be better still to be 16, when more things are legal.

It is a bit bewildering being this age, his parents do not really seem to understand him, but then he's not too keen that they know much about him anyway. Some

of his friends want to play in the park, where he can practice doing a fakie, others are getting girlfriends, so it is all a bit confusing.

The worse thing about being 13 is that, although you are clearly not a child, no one seems to take you very seriously, and you do not

seem to have any power.

Most of the girls in Ben's class seem much older than him and his other male friends, and they are going out with 15 and 16 year-old boys. He finds it better to listen to music than be too interested in girls, especially as they seem to ignore him anyway. His favourite bands are The Darkness, Slipknot and Limp Bizkit, and he is really into the skateboarding scene. He is extremely good at skateboarding, and will only go to Freespirit for his accessories. He would like to get most of his clothes there too, but mum tries to get him things from Marks & Spencer, which can be a bit embarrassing. Most of his friends are either Kevs or Rude Boys, or Skaters, although they all get along quite well together.

He mostly communicates with his friends, when he's not with them, through text messaging and instant messaging (chatrooms are no longer cool). He uses the internet quite a lot at home, as it is invaluable for school work, and for checking out the team.

### **Stevie, age 15**

Stevie is a Goth. His bedroom is painted black, which his mum really hates, and he listens to Cradle of Filth and Fear Factory. He also listens to old music like The Mission, The Cure, and Sisters of Mercy; he hates pop music. Stevie quite likes writing poetry, when he's alone in his room, which is quite a lot. He will go downstairs when he is hungry, although he would much rather eat in his bedroom, alone with his thoughts. His mum and dad do not really understand him, and still try to dominate his life, even though he is now 15; sometimes he just wishes he was 18 so he could leave home.

He has had a girlfriend, who was also a Goth, but now they are just friends. His best friend Jamie has just got a girlfriend and spends all his time with her, so he never sees him any more. If he could have anything, he would like money, and after that a fit girlfriend. With his money, if he had it, he'd buy more CDs.

When he does go out it is mostly to hang out at the shops on a Saturday with his other Goth mates. Sometimes people laugh at him for the way he looks (he likes to wear black eye make-up, which he steals from his older sister), but that is what you expect if you are a Goth.

There is real pressure from school, because he'll be taking GCSEs soon, and what with that and his mum and dad, he really would prefer to avoid authority figures. They keep telling him he has lots of potential, but he wishes they would just go away; his other friends just do not have this hassle. Anyway his parents are so embarrassing; he does his best not to let them talk to his friends when they come around.

*Barbie Clarke is the managing director of Kids and Youth, an agency that specialises in kids, youth and new media. Kids and Youth was founded in 2002 by Barbie Clarke, previously founder and head of NOP Family, and Joe Michael, previously founder and head of NOP World's New Media Division. Barbie Clarke has been a youth researcher for 18 years. She has a post-graduate qualification in psycho-dynamic counselling and has worked in a therapeutic setting with young people in prison, and in school. She regularly gives papers at international conferences, writes articles, and appears on TV and radio commenting on youth research.*

*www.kidsandyouth.com*

*barbie@kidsandyouth.com*