

Youth Marketing Tips

How Can You get a Greater Understanding of the Urban Target Audience?

Read. Don't know the difference between “crunk” and “off the hook?” Learning the language of the culture is a good first step toward consumer insight with teens. A must-have reference is *Hip Hoptionary: The Dictionary of Hip Hop Terminology*. Using this comprehensive compendium of urban teen lingo, you'll finally be able to translate every lyric from Snoop and Fifty Cent. Also, check out *Hip Hop America* for an enlightening perspective on the music and the culture.

Listen. Tune into a local urban station to immerse yourself in the music. The music may not be of your choice, but your target audience certainly enjoys it. Feel free to browse the websites of urban radio stations such as 97.1 and 94.9 to see what type of images are utilized and to get an idea of what urban truly means. You also may consider loading a selection of top hits on an MP3 player so you'll always know what's hot. If you still can't decipher the lyrics after listening for a while, check out Ohhla: The Original Hip Hop Lyrics Archive. You'll learn words you never knew.

Watch. In two words: BET and MTV. Specifically, check out BET's Rap City: The Basement for a look exclusively at hip-hop and rap artists. Music videos provide the essential link between music and style. Many of today's artists and hip-hop celebrities have their own fashion lines: Fashion and music are of equal importance to urban culture.

Go. To have a fuller appreciation for urban teen culture, you have to experience it first-hand. Do some research and find out where teens go for their music and fashion in your city. Visit those stores and see how they use visual merchandising and music to connect to their consumers.

Teens are brand-loyal consumers with significant influence and financial resources. To connect with them in a meaningful way requires your brand to learn about and live in the culture. If your brand has values and benefits that connect with the urban teen mindset, the advertising and marketing need to reflect insights from their culture, experience and aspiration. Do the right thing, and you'll be off the heezy fo sheezy.

**If You're Looking to Grab Buzz for Your Own Brand,
Here are Some Pointers for Reaching Urban Markets:**

Be exclusive: Like the urban lifestyle that so many pre-teens, teenagers and even young adults want a part of, successful buzz targeting this lucrative segment should be perceived as privileged information. Once something becomes common knowledge, it loses its buzz-worthiness, just as an urban brand is cool until it becomes commercial.

Those who have the privilege of hearing buzz feel like they belong to an elite group. So spread the buzz only to tastemakers and those next in line down the hierarchy of cool. The rest will be sure to catch on as they actively seek out trends and don't wait for trends to come to them.

Be original: If you try to imitate other successful buzz tactics, you risk having your brand perceived as the "follower." A unique brand requires unique buzz. Get a marketing team of students involved; they absolutely understand the soul of the brand and intuitively know how to present it in a way that resonates.

Stay true to your brand: Don't be a sell-out. For example, if your brand is firmly established as a family brand or a commercial teen brand, it may be hard to create true street credibility. The buzz could even backfire by positioning your brand as one that's trying too hard to be cool.

Know where that buzz comes from: The medium is the message when it comes to ad placement, and the same rule applies here. Some may argue that as long as the message spreads, you're doing your job. Not true. Buzz is created by word of mouth, which has a strong effect on shaping first impressions of your brand. You'll have a hard time conveying the message that your brand is "cool" if the person passing on the message isn't cool at all or if the buzz is seen as an obvious corporate ploy. Just as there are tastemakers there are also taste-killers.

Act locally: People are becoming increasingly aware of discrete marketing ploys. You cannot always rely on celebrities to act as believable tastemakers if they're seen as being in it for the money. Such celebrities don't create authentic buzz, they simply pass along a firm's message.

Local buzz and urban marketing experts know which local tastemakers to target depending on your strategy, and how local urban markets will react to different buzz tactics.

Return on Investment of buzz marketing may be hard to quantify as it has long- and short-term effects on your brand and bottom line. But buzz marketing is essential when it comes to making sure your brand is accepted as authentic in the urban market.

Youth Pulse: What Makes Them Beat

Target mindsets: Effective marketing starts with understanding your audience. What do they believe? What do you want them to believe? Why should they believe it? What's the single idea that will have an impact on their mindset? Asking consumers some straightforward questions may get part of the answer. For example, try establishing a marketing committee comprised of youth, or hold focus groups with youth who are not participants in your afterschool program.

Do something ownable: Far too often, we utilize marketing strategies that we are comfortable and familiar with. Marketing strategies that have been previously used are assumed to have a predictable outcome when used. Such "me, too" marketing does little to build value for a brand that can be owned. Instead, the application of case-specific insights and knowledge of the consumer's mindset should be used to develop new and innovative ways of making a connection with your target audience. For example, try holding events that capture the general audience instead of just program participants. Better yet, try hosting an event for those who currently are not a participant in your afterschool program and make it exclusive.

Ready, Set, Engage!

- Young consumers are often the architects of change in our culture. They find the most amazing ways in which to use technology, often beyond its original intent. They are physically mobile and mentally agile. And if your brand isn't moving at least as fast as they are, you're falling behind.
- Establishing a connection with Millennials is important—now and in the future. If your brand is able to maintain a relationship with them, it taps into a lifetime of consumer loyalty and preference. And that's something to text home about.