

Marketing to a “Bundle of Contradictions”

By Amy Dawson
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I'm a parent of two teen girls. They're great daughters, but I often wonder how I will keep my hair from turning gray between now and 2015 when the youngest graduates from high school. Both girls are absolutely obsessed with their cell phones and maintaining their extensive network of friends through texting, MySpace and Facebook.

In fact over the weekend, I was at the Verizon store twice. The first time was to repair a phone that wasn't working, causing my oldest to panic over the number of text messages she was missing. Her Facebook status cited that her phone was broken so all of her contacts were aware she was out of texting commission. The other Verizon visit was for a phone upgrade for the younger daughter - and not just any phone would work. It had to have certain features and benefit to be acceptable, and to give her thumbs their daily workout.girls-phones

So when I read a new white paper this morning, “The Teenage Girl as Consumer and Communicator,” released by Euro RSCG Worldwide PR, I wasn't too surprised.

The white paper confirmed something I've seen in my two girls - and in every teen girl I know - they go online to maintain their friendships. In fact, 71 percent are online with friends, not just surfing randomly. And their value-minded moms seem to be influencing them with 77 percent more likely to buy sale-priced items than one at full price. This is great to hear, considering how fickle teen girls seem to be with their tastes and preferences changing all the time.

Both daughters want to redecorate their rooms, but I'm a little reluctant to start this

process because they're constantly changing their minds. One day they're influenced by a friend's room, another by something they saw on HGTV. In great article in MediaWeek, “Their So-Called Life,” author Marita Scarfi uncovers additional insights into this hard-to-engage demographic. Scarfi calls teen girls “... a bundle of contradictions, they're still building their identities and moving among these different identities every day.”

I couldn't agree more. My daughters play the role of sister, friend, student, daughter, performer, athlete and others, and how they behave changes depending on where they are and with whom. One point Scarfi makes that's a little disconcerting for me, though, is that it is widely believed that teen girls can filter information they find online, but this isn't always the case -especially when it comes to information regarding mental, sexual and general health issues. Teens may end up on credible sites like Yahoo Answers or WebMD, but they may also be guilty of Googling health questions, leaving them susceptible to incorrect information.

As marketing communications professionals, we must work hard to find ways to connect with these girls - not just so they buy our products and services, but so they make smart, safe and informed choices. Finally, we cannot underestimate the role the parents play. Even though kids might work part-time jobs and/or receive an allowance, mom and dad are often key to closing the purchasing loop and providing kids with factual, credible information needed to make positive choices.