

# Why Did the Kids'

## Growth may go to brands that allow our ever-changing

In a typical weekend, my 15-year-old daughter and I both will crave a Starbucks pit stop, shop separately under one roof at the Gap, and download off our master iPod account.

The line between kids' brands and adult brands obviously has been erased in my world.

Can you remember shopping with your father in the same store? I can't. Did he ever wear or buy brands to make him seem younger or "cool"? I'm afraid not. He purchased for value, for quality and for a semi-annual shot at "luxury." He may have dealt with an occasional "keeping up with the Jones" scenario, but never did he attempt to keep up with the

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Jones' kids. He lived and shopped in a separate adult world. I may have had input, but it was limited.

But, over time, kids' voices have grown louder and what they have said has been overheard by grownups. Thus the blurring begins—and with it the opportunity for kids' brands to crossover to adults, and vice-versa.

The possibility was made abundantly clear in a *Reveries* survey on the subject. Sixty-eight percent of 254 respondents said the potential of kids' brands to appeal to adults was "good", "very good" or "excellent." An exactly equal number—68 percent—said the same of the potential of adult brands to cross over and appeal to kids.

What is age anyway? Kids are growing up faster, seniors are staying active longer, and parents are waiting longer to have kids. These realities lead to the point that age parameters no longer make as much sense. When is a kid no longer a kid? When they vote? Drive? Graduate? Today, it is much more about attitude than it is about birth certificates. People slowly pass through life stages more seamlessly than ever before.

If a young male plays video games into his 20s, does this make him a kid who won't grow up, or an adult who shuns responsibility? Perhaps neither. Maybe he's simply drawn by content that has been created to match his ever-changing interests. Companies like Nintendo see themselves less as a provider of Pac Man, and more as a network that provides different programming to different audiences.

Growth may go to brands that allow our ever-changing society to gradually push them up or down the age chart.

Meanwhile, more than 40 percent of 15-year-olds carry cell phones. Does that make them adults? Of course not. The cell phone is now viewed as a safe communication mode that allows parents to connect with their kids at will. The category has expanded its target by capitalizing on this socially acceptable

benefit. The point is, before marketers can discuss the power of a brand's ability to expand either up or down in age, it's imperative to clarify how a brand might be relevant across cohorts.

Essentially, there are two ways to view crossover potential. Under one scenario, the brand is accepted and consumed in much the same way by kids and grownups alike. For example, Starbucks attracts kids to drink the same products they sell to adults. The acceptance of coffee as a drink, combined with the sociability of coffee shops, is as compelling a message to kids as it is to adults, and has connected them to Starbucks brands.

Alternatively, Starbucks might develop a line of kids'

### survey

Which of the following **kids' brands** do you think has potential for development among grownups via new products or line extensions?

Responses	Number of Responses	%
Fischer-Price	34	3.8%
Play-Doh	58	6.4%
Thomas the Tank	12	1.3%
Nintendo	205	22.7%
Yugi-Oh	11	1.2%
Power Rangers	11	1.2%
Jacadi	6	0.7%
Osh Kosh	69	7.6%
Crayola	125	13.9%
Hot Topic	55	6.1%
Legos	138	15.3%
Gymboree	22	2.4%
Matchbox	123	13.6%
Other	33	3.7%

Source: *Reveries*

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# Brand Cross the Road?

society to gradually push them up or down the age chart.

Frappes (like a McDonald's kids' menu) extending the brand into an incremental product line. For Starbucks, either approach would probably work, but would result in very different outcomes. However, the potential rewards are greater with line extensions, including distribution gains, new SKUs and revenue streams, and greater overall opportunities (e.g., Toys R Us frappe bars, vending machines, or a place on the McDonald's kids' meal board).

But before H&R Block runs out and introduces a line of retail math high school tutoring classes, it must be noted that these satellite businesses are not always as stable as the mother-ship. Someday, in the near future, tea may become today's coffee forcing the shut down of such "kid" initiatives and causing a total reversal in the process. Such shifts are not necessarily permanent, and must take into account the ever-present fad factor.

Whatever the approach a brand may take, there are specific reasons why some brands succeed at crossing over:

- **Relevance:** Try making Tums cool. Good luck! Antacids lack relevance to the younger group and would never cross over in appeal. A brand must have a reason to cross over.
- **Innovation:** It doesn't really matter which age group Apple had in mind when it created the iPod—it's an ageless product that is must have for kids of all ages.

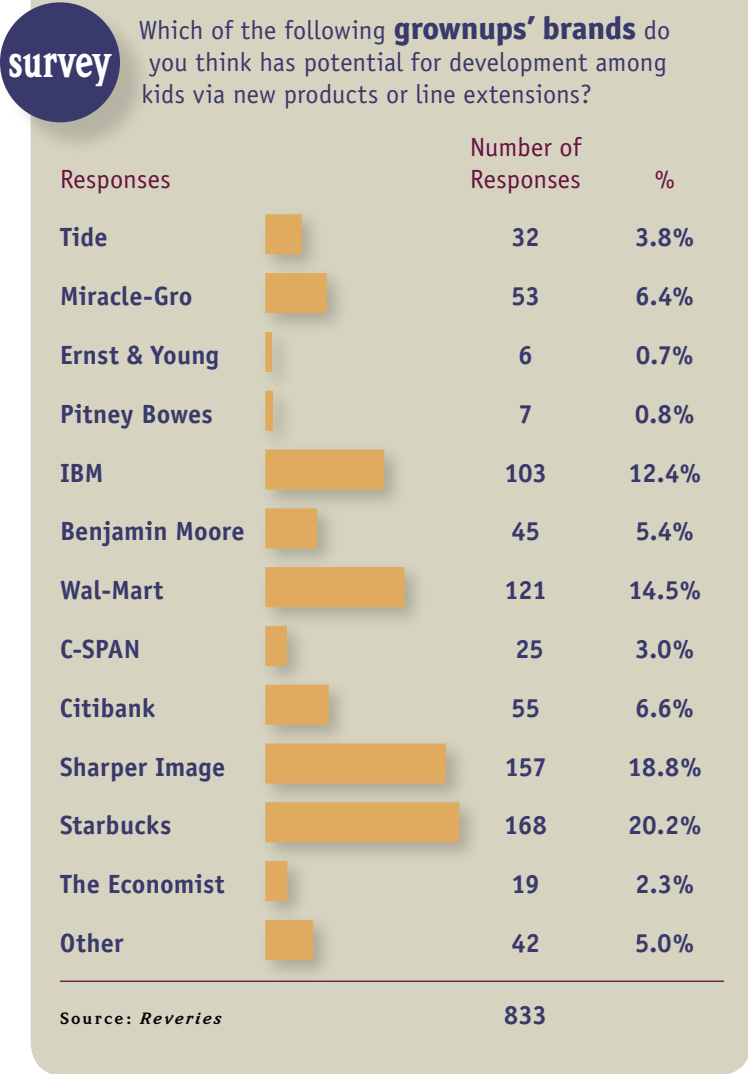
➤ **Transition:** Going from chasing Pac Man to hunting down drug dealers is a natural evolution that works for game players as they grow up. Similarly, going to the movies is a lifelong event that transitions from "G" to "PG13" to "R," with content gradually adjusting to the viewer. Some brands can navigate the same path.

There are limits here, of course. It's hard to believe that anyone would ever buy a Lego drill and drill bits, for example. The Lego brand is so far etched into our brains as a product that was part of our earliest memories that it's hard to see it ever making that transition. For that reason, Play-Dough tile grout is also a bad idea. The same holds true for brands that are clearly defined as products for seniors, such as Depends, for example!

However, too many categories are marketed under the pretense that this conversation could never be applicable to their brands. This self-fulfilling prophecy makes it impossible for some marketers to imagine success in some cases, which is too bad. Categories like deodorant for teen boys, and Hello Kitty Debit Cards, demonstrate that a simple lack of vision may be a marketer's biggest obstacle.

What we do know is it's a different world. Girls wear their older sisters' jeans to look older. Upstairs, mom tries to squeeze into the very same type of pants. Culturally, we are now motivated to get invited to that "cool party" as early as possible and clearly want to be the last to leave.

In the end, growth may not be the exclusive purview of the



brands that spend the most, but rather the brands that best define themselves in the marketplace, and then allow our ever-changing society to gradually push them up or down that age chart. ■

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