



The home market

What kids can teach us about marketing—if we're prepared to listen

"I'd rather play a game than watch television 'cos I'm part of it, not just sitting watching."
—Sam, a Kiwi ten-year-old.

If you want to know what your customers will be doing in the future, pay close attention to their kids. Children are our true early adopters. Because they're not constrained by adult habits they have no concept of what's unachievable. They're comfortable with the latest technology and are happy to modify it to work better for them. They want immediate results and, most of all, they want to interact.

Media-savvy kids have grown up with gadgets and games and expect to be able to participate in programming and communication, change outcomes and have their opinions heard. If you don't offer them interaction, they'll find someone else who will.

When I created *Eardrops' Journeys*, CDs for children designed to improve their listening skills, I knew I'd need a visual interactive medium too. *Eardrops.co.nz* has simple activities for children and extra resources for parents online but more importantly it offers two-way communication through email, newsletters, guestbooks and competitions.

Interestingly, the majority of visitors to the site from New Zealand and overseas arrive there after a Web search for 'online toddler games'. Gaming technology has always led the way, interactively speaking.

And who generally plays them first? Young people. For years they've been able to influence how a game's story ends or play it as different characters. They're active producers of the content of each game, and now they expect similar levels of interactivity wherever they get information.

Anahera Higgins, producer of TV show *Mai Time*, says: "Young people are technically savvy and want answers now; they have an opinion and want it heard. We have several different interactive platforms operating such as live-to-air text voting for on-air competitions, and we report the results online immediately. Also extremely

interactive elements of a show. Perhaps one day there'll be a division called 'NZ On Line' but until then I see an opportunity for 'cross-pollination'—finding other means of funding. Of course, advertisers and sponsors already know the awesome marketing potential of interactive media and are keen to be involved.

Although it's tricky for producers to balance the expectations of the audience with their already-taut budgets this is an area with unmistakable potential—providing it's done right. Kids will switch off the uncool and the uninteresting with one flick of the remote. Just watch them! They seek out well-

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popular are the 'shout outs'—texts from viewers that run along the bottom of the screen about five minutes after viewers send them. Interactivity is about the audience being able to play a real role in our *Mai Time* community both on and off the air."

Interactivity is a bottom-line essential, especially when producing media for children. The legislation governing NZ On Air doesn't allow for the funding of standalone interactive content, although some funding for TV productions may go towards

designed multi-dimensional media that allow them to really become part of the community attached to a television series, product range—or even a brand.

Even if you're marketing to adults, it's worth paying attention now to what the kids are doing. Your best market researchers may not be working from offices; they might be interacting from home.

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