



CHILD'S PLAY

CATERING TO A YOUNGER (MUCH YOUNGER) DEMOGRAPHIC

Photo retailers spend so much time concentrating on the burgeoning soccer-mom demographic these days that it's easy to forget that the kids they're dragging after them could also be a viable audience for photo gear, electronics, and gizmos. According to the **NPD Group**, cellphones (34%), digital cameras (23%), and portable digital music players (22%) registered the highest levels of purchase in 2007, with a slight skew toward the older kids. In the same study, 34% of kids ages 4 to 14 used (even if they didn't own) digital cameras, a 6-point increase over 2006.

"Beyond specialized photography products, we've found that kids and teens are looking for new and different ways to showcase their photography and creativity," says **ERIC KINTZ**, VP of strategy and marketing for **HP's** Web Services and Software division. "They're looking to express themselves by personalizing their images and creating unique photo projects, where they can combine their images with professional content from designers and celebrities like **GWEN STEFANI** and **HANNAH MONTANA**."

Features to Focus On

Before you order those **MICKEY MOUSE** digicams, you should adhere to one of the most important rules in retailing: Know thy customer. By knowing the features that both kids and their parents are looking for in their image-creating endeavors, you're already ahead of the game.

First, don't lump all the youngsters congregating in front of your counter under the same umbrella. "Keep in mind the age of each child," says **LIZA ABRAMS**, director of licensing and corporate communications for **Sakar International**. "Are they 3 or 12?" Younger kids, for example, will probably require more rugged cameras.

However, even after age is taken into account, the most important features are perhaps the most obvious, as noted by **SALLY SMITH CLEMENS**, product manager, **Olympus Imaging America**: durability, portability, and looks (as well as color choices).

No parent will dispute the ruggedness factor. "You can count on kids dropping their cameras many times," says **CHRIS HEATHERLY**, VP of electronics, **Disney Consumer Products**. "How will the camera take a beating? We've engineered our Disney Pix Jr. camera, for example, to be resistant to drops and to protect the camera optics and LCD screen."

Epson product manager **KRISTI FOX** concurs that photo products for kids should be designed for kids. "Portable photo printers should be durable [and with] no sharp edges," she says. "Epson's PictureMate Dash has all of these features and many more."

Being able to carry this coveted gear is also vital to the small fry. "The device has to be compact and portable," says **TIFFANY GUH**, director of marketing, **Digital Foci**.

Taking portability and compactness a step further are teenagers, according to **DXG** product marketing manager **MARCO DELROSARIO**. "Teens, more so than older age groups, are more tech-savvy and are looking for a device that's both functional and fashionable," he explains. "Teens view any electronic device as an extension of themselves. Therefore, design, color, and overall look of the products is important."

In fact, what they carry in their pockets is as much status symbol as it is functional memory-maker. "The device needs to look cool and be something they want to show off to their friends," says Digital Foci's Guh.

OK, so the product looks good and won't shatter to pieces if your tyke takes a tumble. But can they actually figure out how to use it? "Cameras these days are overloaded with too many menus, modes, and features that make it difficult for kids to use," says Disney's Heatherly. "Our camera for preschoolers, therefore, has only five buttons, including the shutter. We even eliminated the power button."

How to Sell to Small Fries

You may have a fresh V-Tech shipment ready to fly off the shelves, but knowing how to effectively sell the product is the next step in your youth-indoctrination program.

First, your sales staff should be well versed in how these products work. "Parents will be looking for high-quality, fun features, and affordability," says **SAMARA TUCHBAND**, senior marketing director for **VTech Electronics North America**. "It's important for photo retailers to focus on these key features and communicate the benefits to parents. It's also important for salespeople to have a good working knowledge of the products so they can answer questions and provide recommendations based on the customer's needs."

Making the display visually appealing is also key. "Make it fun," says **JOE GANAHL**, president of **Intova**. Setting up a display of related products

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disney



dxg



epson



olympus

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focusing on recreation, for example, would help customers by creating an image of how they can use the product.

"It's important to make a statement with kids' cameras and make them visible to parents," says Heatherly. "People who buy their kids a camera are not necessarily going into the store with a mission to buy one; rather, they discover the product and realize that the quality and affordability of what is available is so great that they give it a shot. If a kid's product is just sprinkled in with adult product, it may get lost."

Smith Clemens from Olympus stresses the ancillaries. "Be sure to have the must-have accessories available through your store," she says. "Special straps and carrying cases, waterproof housings—they all appeal to kids. Stores can stock and display a variety of colors."

She also mentions events and activities that can draw young customers in. "Offer store-sponsored photo classes for kids and initiate photo contests with themes that appeal to youngsters (pets, sports, nature, etc.)," she says.

Epson's Fox seconds the interactive approach. "Photo retailers could host photography and printing workshops just for kids, or offer special discounts for 'my first camera' or 'my first photo printer,'" she says. "Retailers could also create a list of products available in their store that are ideal for kids, sell photography books geared toward children, or conduct a photo contest for kids of a certain age group. There are many opportunities for independent or... photo-specialty stores to give back to their communities and help kids discover photography."

Getting the kids involved is the whole point of Lucidiom's animated DVDs that can be made on-site at photo retailers using Lucidiom APMs (Automated Photo Machines). The animated DVDs can be customized with a child's photo so that the child becomes the main character. "We like to put all the creativity in the hands of the consumer," explains Lucidiom VP RICK GLOMB. "We'll hear from folks who tell us that they have customers come in and sit at the APM with a child in their lap. With the Kideo, it's all about the storytelling."

Thinking beyond the everyday experience is another way to market to this demographic, according to HP's Kintz. "Photo retailers should take advantage of marketing calendar opportunities to rethink merchandising, expand their creative offerings, and drive simple and emotional impulse purchases as teens shop with their parents—from holiday sales to Halloween and Easter, to name a few," he says. "HP has also partnered with leading retailers to tap into local communities to market these products to schools, PTAs, and local sports clubs. We've developed partnerships to embed ourselves in the younger generation's communities and create exciting publishing opportunities at the point where they create content. The "Hannah Montana MyConcert Memory Book" is a great example where you can create a professional photobook, mashing up personal photos and professional photos of MILEY CYRUS during her "Best of Both Worlds" tour. Snapfish is also a great online property that allows you to share photos and create all kinds of creative offerings (photobooks, posters, mugs, etc.) that you can pick up at retail or have delivered to your house."

Technology that's tailor-made to each child also holds intrinsic value. "Look for ways to customize," says Digital Foci's Guh. "While kids want something everyone else has, they also want to be able to customize it to make it unique."

Above all, keep it simple and geared toward the appropriate age group. "Simplicity needs to be called out," says Sakar's Abrams. "I have young children, and if a product looks like it's going to be confusing to me, I'll walk right by. Kids (and their parents) need immediate gratification—not hours of learning how to use a camera or camcorder. The wonderful thing about electronic gadgets is that not only are many of them very easy to use, but children are light-years ahead of adults in terms of their knowledge. Electronics for the youth market are here to stay, and I think retailers have gotten very creative in the way they market them." ■



digital foci



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Go to the continuation of this article on www.imaginginfo.com to see some of the newest products geared toward fledgling photographers and to hear manufacturers' thoughts on why it's so important to get the younger generations into photography.