Audience Insights
Communicating to Teens (Aged 12-17)

Today’s teens are the most marketing savvy and brand-conscious generation to date. Their health behaviors and outcomes reflect their economic, racial, gender, and geographic disparities. These Audience Insights will help you capture the attention of the 25 million teens in the United States.

Insights into Teens

1. Teens are the most ethnically diverse generation in the United States to date and the least likely group to differentiate between ethnic and racial identities.

2. Peer pressure influences a teen’s behavior in positive and negative ways. It can motivate teens to strive for success and seek conformity, or it can impair judgment and increase risky behaviors.

3. Teens use technology to share information through social networking, blogging, emailing, and texting.

4. Most teens (55%) use social networking sites, such as Facebook and MySpace.¹

5. More U.S. teens own a mobile phone than own a personal computer.

6. More than 75% of teens send or receive text messages and are more likely to use text messaging than email.²

7. Girls and boys use media differently. Boys watch more television and share videos online, while girls blog, email, or Instant Message.

8. Teens are adept at simultaneously using media and technology, such as the Internet, email, and television.

9. Teens are able to accept change and adapt quickly.

10. Teens believe they have considerable stress in their lives and want information about how to handle it.

Audience Insights can help you to communicate more effectively with your audience in order to influence their behavior. CDC’s Strategic and Proactive Communication Branch (SPCB) divides audiences into segments with similar needs, preferences, and characteristics and provides CDC programs with audience-specific information, marketing expertise, and communication planning. To develop Audience Insights, secondary data is collected and analyzed from CDC-licensed consumer databases, books, articles, and the Internet. For more information, email SPCBHealthMktg@cdc.gov or contact Fred Fridinger, Chief, SPCB, at FFridinger@cdc.gov.

Department of Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Teens at-a-Glance

These composite profiles are for illustrative purposes only.

*Katelyn Jackson (A Visible Teen*)
San Diego, California
Sophomore, Eastwood High School
Age: 14

- Is popular at school and is considered a trendsetter among her friends. Considers herself 'a fashion diva.'
- Is a good student but worries about getting into her first choice of colleges.
- Is very conscious of her weight, tries to avoid sodas and fast food, and goes to the gym three days a week with one or both of her parents.
- Has her own cell phone and uses it to text her friends, access the Internet, and take and send photos to her friends.

Alvarez (A Status Quo Teen)
Phoenix, Arizona
Senior, Palisades High School
Age: 17

- Comes from a very supportive family; both her mother and father graduated from college and are professionals.
- Makes high grades and takes advance placement classes in science and math; wants to go to an Ivy League college.
- Plays team sports and is physically active.
- Is considering a career in health care as either a pediatrician or a psychiatric social worker.

Michael Cho (An Isolator Teen)
Worcester, Massachusetts
Junior, Calgary High School
Age: 17

- Wants to be in control of his life and often isolates himself from his peers and parents. Believes his parents don't understand him and has difficulty communicating with them about most things.
- Considers himself to be very creative; develops and posts his own video files online; dabbles in animation.
- Has challenges in core courses but excels in visual arts. Would like to become a digital graphic designer but is not sure how to make it happen.
- Can't wait to get out of high school.

*Based on the Cheskin Research five teen segments. See page 7.
Targeted Health Communication

Knowing the habits and preferences of teens can help you plan health communication and marketing efforts for this audience.

- Make sure the message is relevant to the lifestyle of teens and that the media used to convey them resonate with teens and their peers.
  - Today’s teens have never known a world without computers.
  - Texting has replaced talking among teens. Forty-seven percent of teens say that texting is so important that if it was no longer an option their social life would end or decline.3
- Use an audience-centric approach that takes into account teens’ attitudes, opinions, knowledge, and behaviors.

Six million teens (31%) use the Internet to get health information, a 47% increase since 2000.5

- Develop multimedia communication campaigns that incorporate words, music, and images in the messaging.
  - Music is particularly important to teens.
- Talk to teens as part of the formative research phase of a communication campaign.
- Address the multicultural diversity of the teen market.

When it comes to searching for information on dieting, health, or fitness, girls are more likely than boys to use the Internet.6

- Use social media to reach teens and to encourage sharing of your messages.
  - Teens are the most fervent users of social networks (65%).7
  - Most teens use networks to stay in touch with people they already know, either friends they see a lot (91%), or friends they rarely see in person (82%).8

Health-Related Concerns

Today’s teens cite handling stress as their number one health issue. Their primary sources of stress are school, family, and money. Other top health concerns are physical activity, nutrition, and mental health.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health concerns for U.S. teens</th>
<th>9th-12th grader, %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Handling stress</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Exercising</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Staying healthy as I get older</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The best foods to eat</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Handling depression/anxiety</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Dieting</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Sexuality</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Taking vitamins or supplements</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. When to visit the doctor</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. What to look for on food nutrition labels</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Facts About Teens

- In 2002, approximately 67% of teens lived with both parents. Approximately 75% of Asian/Pacific Islanders, 75% white non-Hispanic, 63% of Hispanics, and less than 40% of African American teens lived with both parents.5
- Eleven percent of teens have no health insurance; nearly 7% have no routine source of health care or regular health care provider.8
- Half of teens live in suburbs, and the other half live in rural areas or in central cities.7

Send your feedback or comments to SPCBHealthMktg@cdc.gov
Media Habits

Teens use a multitude of media each day, and technology is also an integral part of teen life. Technology influences the types of media teens use—from accessing entertainment and news and researching potential purchases and school work to maintaining friendships.

- Thirty-five percent of teens watch TV three or more hours per day; boys (38%) watch more than girls (33%). Approximately 62.7% of African American, 43% of Hispanic, and 27% of white teens watch three or more hours of TV per day.³

- Teens use several types of entertainment and media devices simultaneously, sometimes while doing other things.
  - Teens actively multitask or let one medium influence their use on another concurrent behavior in another. For example, 45% of teens Instant Message or email others who are watching the same TV show.
  - Most teens (49%) multitask frequently, from three times a week to several times a day.¹⁰
  - When directed by the TV show, 33% of teens say they have participated in online polls, played online games, or entered contests.¹⁰

- Youth magazines are popular among teens. Teen People is one of the fastest growing magazines in American publishing history.¹¹

- When asked how many movies teens had seen in a 90-day period, the most common answer was “2 or more” (17%), followed by “6 or more” (16%), “3” (15%), and “1” (16%).¹¹

Traditional Media

- Teens enjoy traditional media, such as television, movies, and newspapers. However, 42% of teens believe newspapers are boring, but 47% agree that newspapers help keep them informed.¹¹

- Teens also said they desire a special newspaper for young people (50%), indicating that they believe newspapers to be valuable media outlets.¹¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree, %</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I love watching TV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I love going to the movies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers are boring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There should be a special newspaper for young people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers help me know what’s going on</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s more fun watching TV with my friend</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learn a lot from TV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Simmons National Consumer Study. Teen National Database (Fall 2008).

- Teens are interested in just a handful of sections when it comes to reading the daily newspaper: comics (23%), sports (22%), front page (17%), and entertainment (15%).¹¹

- Boys and girls are similar in their interests, with the exception of the sports page, in which case the percentage difference was slightly more than 15% (30.2% for boys and 15.1% for girls).¹¹
Online Activities

- Most families have rules about Internet access and restrict the amount of time teens may spend online and the sites that may be visited.
- Among teens who go online, 77% go to get information about news and current events.¹
- Fifty percent of teens visit Web sites they see on TV as they continue to watch TV (active multitasking).
- Many teens (59%) use the Internet for creative work, such as online blogs or Web pages, videos, photography, stories, and other art work.¹

Most teens (93%) spend time online.¹¹

- Online creative work frequently starts a virtual conversation, as digital images and writings elicit comment from viewers.⁵
- Girls are more likely than boys to write blogs; boys are more likely than girls to upload video.⁵
- Fifty-five percent of teens use social networking sites, such as MySpace and Facebook.¹
- Email is not a popular method for teens to reach their peers; only 14% of teens say they email their friends daily.⁵

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teen Online Behaviors (last 30 days)</th>
<th>Girls, %</th>
<th>Boys, %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use email</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use Instant Messaging (IM)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post on bulletin/message boards</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check movie times</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do research online</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look at video game news and cheat sheets</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use digital imaging/photo albums</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Download music files</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View information about sports</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get news or weather information</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Simmons National Consumer Study. Teen National Database (Fall 2008).

Social Media

Teens use social networking sites, like Facebook and MySpace, for creative expression. They use a variety of tools and techniques to manage their online identities.

- Thirty-five percent of online teen girls blog; 20% of online teen boys blog.¹
- YouTube and other video sharing sites tend to be the domain of boys. Online teen boys are twice as likely as teen girls to post video files online (19% as compared to 10%).¹
- Among teens who use social networking sites, 41% say they send messages to friends via those sites every day.¹
- Fifty-five percent of teens have a profile on social networking sites, and 42% of those teens said they also blog. Seventy percent said they read the blogs.⁶

How teens use social network sites¹¹

- Among teens with online profiles, 66% limit access to their profile in some way so that it is not visible to all Internet users.
- Among those whose profiles can be accessed by anyone online, 46% say they give at least a little and sometimes a good deal of false information on their profiles. Teens post fake information to protect themselves, but also to be playful or silly.
- Forty-nine percent of teen social network users use the networks to make new friends.
Web Applications

Girls are slightly more involved with Web applications than boys, possibly because they are more interactive Internet users than boys.11

Web Sites

Few specific Web sites were used regularly by teens (20% or more of the sample). Those that came close to 20% or more were search engines and the social networking site, My Space.11
Mobile Phone Use by Teens

- Two-thirds (63%) of teens own cell phones.11
- Teens use many features on their phones, especially the camera, Internet, games, and texting.11
- Girls are the dominant users of camera features.
- Games are more popular among younger teens; older teens favor texting.

Five Teen Segments

According to Cheskin Research and its 1999 study of teens and the Internet, teens are divided into five distinct segments on the basis of attitude, behavior, and conformity.12

1. Explorer: This group tends to be very creative, independent, and differ from the norm. This segment is relatively small (approximately 10%), but they are very influential. Many teen trends begin within this segment. They are passionate and committed to the interests and issues around which they build their identities, but their interests can change rapidly.

2. Visible: Visible teens constitute 30% of teens. They are well known and popular because of their looks, personality, or athletic ability. Visibles tend to spread the trends they adopt more widely because of their presence and popularity among other teens.

3. Status Quo: These teens represent 38% of the teen population. They display traditional values of moderation and achievement and seek mainstream acceptance. These teens are well liked by both their peers and adults. When a trend becomes mainstream, they will adopt it.

4. Non-Teen: These teens tend to behave more like adults or young children because of a lack of social skills, an intense interest in academics, or an indifference to teen culture and style. These teens (13–15%) become psychologically isolated from both their peers and adults. Once the parents of Non-Teens encourage their kids to adopt a trend, it is already out of style.

5. Isolator: Isolators are more psychologically isolated from both their peers and adults. These teens (5–10%) are most commonly associated with societal problems.

References

11. Simmons National Consumer Study (Fall 2008). Teen National Database.
For more information, email SPCBHealthMktg@cdc.gov or contact Fred Fridinger, SPCB Branch Chief, at FFridinger@cdc.gov.

Internet: http://www.cdc.gov/HealthCommunication/

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Division of Communication Services
Strategic and Proactive Communication Branch