



TEENS

Basic Instincts

by Grant MacDonald, Founding Partner, North Castle

You want your brand to be cool so teens will eat it up. Right? It's a call we've been hearing for years... "make my brand cool." Big bucks have been spent tracking down "cool" so brands will reflect what's "hot." But to what end? We can't all be cool and neither can our brands.

Cool is thin ice. Cool is fleeting and hard to invest behind. Sure, your brand can capture cool once, or maybe twice. But sooner or later you will miss cool. What's left if you miss? Millions of dollars spent on a brand that is suddenly un-cool and with little residual value.

Cool is okay as one of your marketing weapons, but it better aim at a much deeper and more compelling promise inside your brand. Something that transcends cool and builds a long-term relationship.

So what's beyond cool? How do you make a deeper, more engaging and longer-lasting connection that you can invest behind year after year? You tap into the *Basic Instincts* that drive teen behavior and shape their identities. You tap into and build upon the unique drivers of teen behavior that will be there year after year.

We've spent ten years understanding the Basic Instincts that drive teens and their brand habits. It has been our mission to study every aspect of the teen psyche and teen marketing. This includes talking to thousands of teens about brands, identifying successful teen campaigns and understanding the strategies behind them. We've created a model of teen marketing and used it to create success stories. We'd like to share some of our insights with you.

Here are the top-ten Basic Instincts that marketers have used to engage teens. They all originate from the same fundamental dynamic—teens search and strive for personal identity and meaning. Think back to when you were a teen as you read each Basic Instinct.

FIVE NICE

→ **Personal Expression:** Teens want to be known for having their own styles and identities. They try on new identities daily and look for brands that help them express their individuality. Personalization, customization and accessorizing are key brand appeals. Teens want to be in a world where they can be anything. They want to

look for personal expression in the products they consume. For example, iPod has given teens powerful ways to experiment with, and share, their expressions of identity.

→ **Social Connection:** Teens want to be accepted and validated by their peers for who they are. How badly did you want to be accepted as a teen when you entered a room full of friends? MySpace.com has given teens a whole new way to build a network of peers who share common ground and accept each other based on their shared interests and identities.

→ **Accomplishment:** Every teen wants to be recognized (by peers and parents) as being really good at something. It is a tangible demonstration of who they are—whether it be funny, smart, good-looking, athletic, musical, etc. The Army has told generations of teens to "be all you can be." The Anti-Drug campaign is another recent example where "accomplishment" and recognition is the solution.

→ **Belonging:** Every generation has its big identifying issues or generational consciousness. For this generation, it is technological smarts/leadership, diversity and





A top-ten list of what makes brands cool — both naughty and nice.

tolerance. MTV has consistently appealed to teens by helping to define and reflect what teens represent, and then delivers it to them.

→ **Freedom:** Teens are constantly under the thumb of rules, regulations, authority, parents, expectations and pressure. Think how powerful your brand could be if it offered release and escape to teens.

FIVE NAUGHTY

Ah, the fun stuff!

→ **Rebellion:** Teens define their identities by destroying the rules, taboos, institutions and sometimes smashing the mailboxes that came before them. For more than ten years of double-digit growth, Slim Jim appealed to the rebellious side of teens by asking them to “Eat Me!”

→ **Tribalism:** Rites of passage are so important in making a statement that one has arrived on the scene. Some of these are socially acceptable while others are more of the bleeding edge variety; defining teens as growing up but separate from the adult herd. It’s “belonging” with an edge.

→ **Risk Taking:** It is amazing that some of us survive our teens. We were invincible, bulletproof and immortal. We defined ourselves by pushing the envelope and testing the limits. Mountain Dew has consistently engaged teens by projecting risky, on-the-edge behavior.

→ **Cynicism:** Teens define themselves by questioning institutional rules and authority. They want their own set of guidelines, not the ones of previous generations. The anti-smoking “Truth” campaign has consistently asked teens to question conventions and not be duped by manipulative institutions.

→ **Sexuality:** This is about more than sex. It is about allure, control, attraction and influence as a validation for who you are. AXE body spray broke through with a simple promise: Use AXE and get girls. New TAG body spray has recently flattered AXE with a very similar appeal.

Ten years in ten minutes! Remember, a little information in the wrong hands is dangerous. It helps to have the whole user manual. Nonetheless, think about

which *one* Basic Instinct your brand can really deliver.

That’s right, pick just one. The most successful brands have put a stake in the ground by focusing on just one Basic Instinct and being relentlessly consistent. Every aspect of their marketing mix delivers and reinforces the same single-minded promise. The result? They have taken it to the bank. ■

Grant MacDonald is founding partner of **North Castle**, an independent advertising agency with expertise in marketing to teens.



North Castle has created numerous successful platforms and campaigns for brands such as Slim Jim, Hershey Brands, Bubble Yum, Norelco, Tremor, and The Partnership for a Drug Free America.

For a free presentation of *Basic Instincts: Best Practices in Teen Marketing*, contact Grant at gmacdonald@northcastle.com or (203) 358-2123.

