

How marketers prey on the tween generation

By [Beatrice Ciabatti](#)



Beatrice Ciabatti.

This last Christmas my kids asked me for a special gift: a teddy bear. Without knowing what awaited me, I took them to the workshop (that is the term used by the genius marketers of the brand). The shopping experience there is great, you get to choose your bear, the color you want it to be, then they stuff it and put a heart in it. The teddy bear is practically "born" before your eyes for the happiness of children.

At this point you might think: What an original gift, and not so expensive, since the bear costs about \$20.

Wrong! Prepare your wallet because you have just been hooked up in the Build a Bear world, a diabolically brilliant stroke of marketing!

The bears are "naked," and of course you don't want your newly born teddy bear to catch a cold, thus you

need to buy his first clothes.

While you stroll through the aisles of the store you start to understand the trick. There is a dress for every occasion, all depending on what you want your bear to go: outfits (golf suits, fishing suits, camouflage, and even tuxedos), dresses, tops, bottoms, shorts, skirts, pants, pajamas, boxers, coats and even Harley Davidson jackets, baby clothing, graduation clothing, accessories, shoes, etc.

With a quick glimpse at prices I realized I had to spend about \$8-15 per outfit, presumably to avoid the embarrassment for the teddy of being seen in the same clothes every day. With just an extra \$4, you can buy sound accessories for your bear to say phrases like "I love you," or "Happy Birthday," or the passport for Teddy to fly back home.

By the time I had finished shopping the "necessary" clothing I had spent another \$120. Just before passing to the cash register, my kids realized their teddy bear required a pet, a mini furry doggie that added \$10 each to the tab. As I looked at the store I realized that dressing the teddy bear could continue forever and ever and if my kid's interest in the bear continued, by year's end, I figure, I'll be out of \$480. — nearly the price of an iPad.

And this is just the beginning. My kids are 9 and 12, an age group called "the tweens" by marketers, who define this group as avid consumers. Marketers that study the buying behavior of this objective group say they are kids starting to discover life outside of their family and this obviously makes them insecure. Nothing like the right merchandise to ease this difficult transition from the secure family world to the scary world outside home and this is a marvelous opportunity for marketers to create profits for their companies.

Peer pressure also plays a big role in kids' buying behavior, and so ads mainly placed on the Internet, shrewdly offer tweens a world of things made just for them and their friends.

I had never thought of spending that kind of money in a Build a Bear store and I could tell by the look of the other parents getting in line at the cash register that they hadn't either. I was wondering why we ended spending all that money?

Probably some of us were exhausted after a couple of hours hearing the phrase "Please can I have it?" Probably some of us didn't want our children to be excluded or otherwise suffer socially because they don't have hot new product. Probably some of us felt also a little guilty for spending too much time at work. Marketers deliberately work on these parental weak points and we end up surrendering to their strategies.

But we should remind ourselves that not fulfilling each of our children's desire doesn't make us bad parents, but good ones. Learning to cope with disappointment is a crucial step in kids' growth. We might also consider whether we're giving our kids material things when what they really want is our time and attention.

Beatrice Ciabatti is marketing director of [Ilaría-Peru](#).

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