



## Decoding Youth: Why 12 is the new 20

*WGSN reveals the way to profit in the youth sector*

**London, May 13 2009** WGSN, the world's leading fashion and style forecaster, shared its youth market intelligence at last week's World Retail Congress in Barcelona. Content Director Juliet Warkentin presented the session entitled 'Decoding Youth', covering areas such as youth tribes, the current mood in this market and key points for brand strategies.

The youth market, unlike the rest of the apparel sector, has not been hit as hard by the recession. "What is apparent is that this market is still driven to purchase products that hit the zeitgeist for them" says Warkentin. "Even though they are struggling to get jobs, when they find an item they like they are still buying." But while youth appears to be more resilient to the downturn, getting the trend right is the key to unlocking profits.

One aspect of understanding what drives trends is the different youth tribes. No longer defined by a location, they spring up in random locations thanks to blogs and social networks. The traditional model of linear trendspotting, whereby a trend filters from a Tastemaker through to Early Adopters, Trendsetters and finally the Mainstream, still exists, but according to WGSN **random trend analysis is just as important as linear** – at least in the world of youth.

**And youth is no longer defined by age.** If a customer fits into a macro type, e.g. the multi-cultural break-dancing Urbanite, the music-loving MySpace-addicted Indie or the preppy Sport Casual type, they are part of the youth target market. And while older customers are 'growing down', many youngsters appear more mature. "**Kids are growing up faster than ever before – 12 is the new 20**", according to Warkentin, who cites 12-year old blogging star Tavi as proof of this trend. Her Style

Rookie blog has a global fan base, including Karl Lagerfeld, thanks to her personal photoshoots and experimental style. Warkentin continues: “Everyone I’ve met in the past few months seems to have their own blog. Blogs give you a voice and that means power. As such they ‘edit’ the world they see around them and to this end have become a target for marketers.”

**WGSN describes the current mood in the youth market as distinctly dissatisfied and therefore taking on a punk and DIY attitude.** The forecaster has also noticed a rise in underground movements and is expecting to see a re-evaluation of what’s important and an exploration of the limitations – resulting in a new-found freedom in design.

How is all this relevant to brands? “**Keep your brand transparent, relevant and be prepared every once in a while to think outside the box**”, advises Warkentin. The youth sector likes to make informed choices and a brand that owns up to its mistakes. A brand that is personal and involves or connects the customer is also more likely to succeed. Being relevant can come in the most simple but pertinent forms: Uniqlo’s human vending machine that gave free Heat Tech T-shirts to customers who were really cold, to pop-up shops, such as last summer’s Tretorn mobile pop-up for flip-flops and wellington boots in New York’s Central Park, ensure a brand stays relevant.

“During the Q&A session in Barcelona we also discussed the importance of being authentic. In order to really speak to the youth market, brands and retailers need to focus on strong products that are true to their roots. **The youth market tends to create its own trends at speed and loves finding products that are new or personal to them. Hence the importance of authenticity**”, concludes Warkentin.

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