

# 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.<sup>1</sup>
5. More U.S. teens own a mobile phone than own a personal computer.
1. More than 75% of teens send or receive text messages and are more likely to use text messaging than email.<sup>2</sup>
2. Girls and boys use media differently. Boys watch more television and share videos online, while girls blog, email, or Instant Message.
3. Teens are adept at simultaneously using media and technology, such as the Internet, email, and television.
4. Teens are able to accept change and adapt quickly.
5. 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](mailto:SPCBHealthMktg@cdc.gov) or contact Fred Fridinger, Chief, SPCB, at [FFridinger@cdc.gov](mailto: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.



“I’m having a great time in high school, but I do worry about my future and what opportunities will be available to me. I want to be successful, healthy, and happy.”

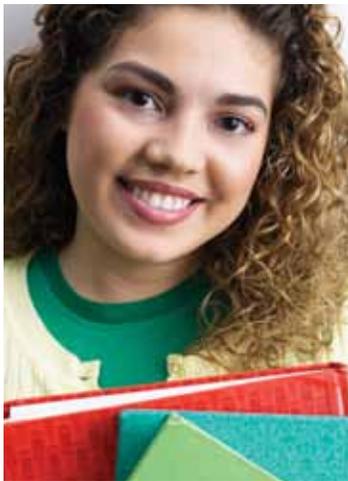
## Katelyn Jackson (A Visible Teen\*)

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.



“I work very hard at school, and enjoy my friends and family. I’m called a “brainiac” because I spend a lot of time on my studies and extracurricular activities. I have high goals for myself and want to make my parents proud.”

## 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.



“I want to get out of high school and become a graphic designer. High school is lame. I know my parents care about me, but we just don’t connect. I have one or two good friends, but I’m a loner.”

## 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.

## 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.<sup>3</sup>
- ❖ 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.<sup>5</sup>**

- ❖ 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.<sup>6</sup>**

- ❖ Use social media to reach teens and to encourage sharing of your messages.
  - ◆ Teens are the most fervent users of social networks (65%).<sup>3</sup>
  - ◆ 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%).<sup>4</sup>

## 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.

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

Source: America's Promise (2005). Voices Study: Research Findings.

## 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.<sup>5</sup>
- ❖ Eleven percent of teens have no health insurance; nearly 7% have no routine source of health care or regular health care provider.<sup>8</sup>
- ❖ Half of teens live in suburbs, and the other half live in rural areas or in central cities.<sup>7</sup>



## 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.<sup>9</sup>
- ❖ 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.<sup>10</sup>
  - ◆ When directed by the TV show, 33% of teens say they have participated in online polls, played online games, or entered contests.<sup>10</sup>
- ❖ Youth magazines are popular among teens. *Teen People* is one of the fastest growing magazines in American publishing history.<sup>11</sup>
- ❖ 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%).<sup>11</sup>

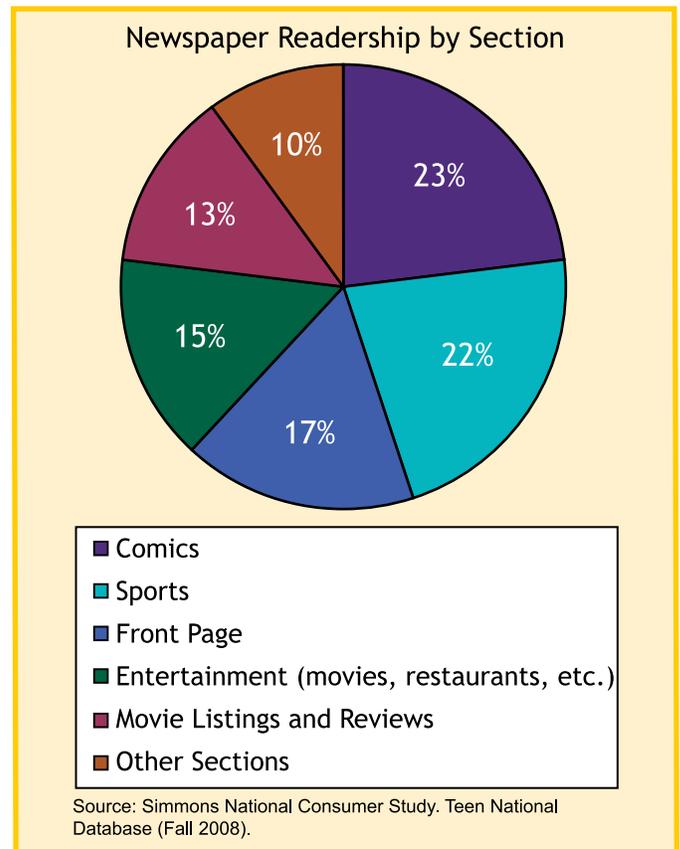
## Traditional Media

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

Teens Attitudes about Traditional Media		
Statement	Agree, %	
	Girls	Boys
I love watching TV	55	59
I love going to the movies	75	70
Newspapers are boring	41	44
There should be a special newspaper for young people	57	44
Newspapers help me know what's going on	50	46
It's more fun watching TV with my friend	52	59
I learn a lot from TV	30	46

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%).<sup>11</sup>
- ❖ 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).<sup>11</sup>



## 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.<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ 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.<sup>1</sup>

### Most teens (93%) spend time online.<sup>11</sup>

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

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

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

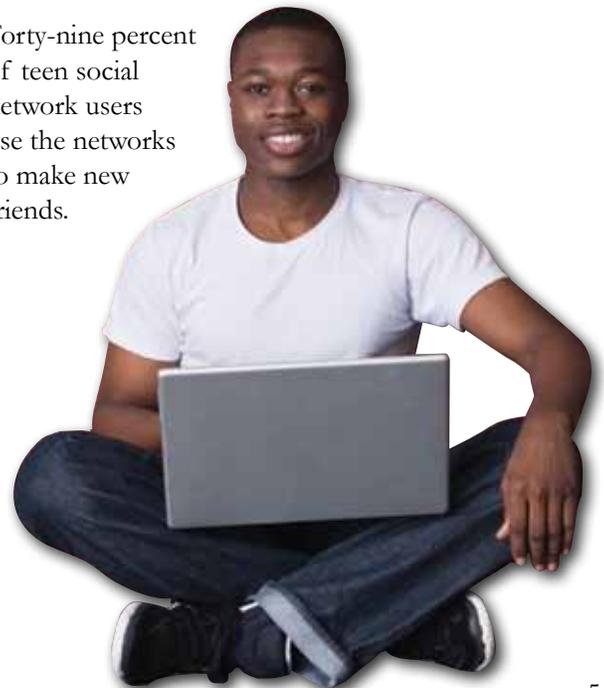
## Social Media

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.<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ 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%).<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ Among teens who use social networking sites, 41% say they send messages to friends via those sites every day.<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ 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.<sup>6</sup>

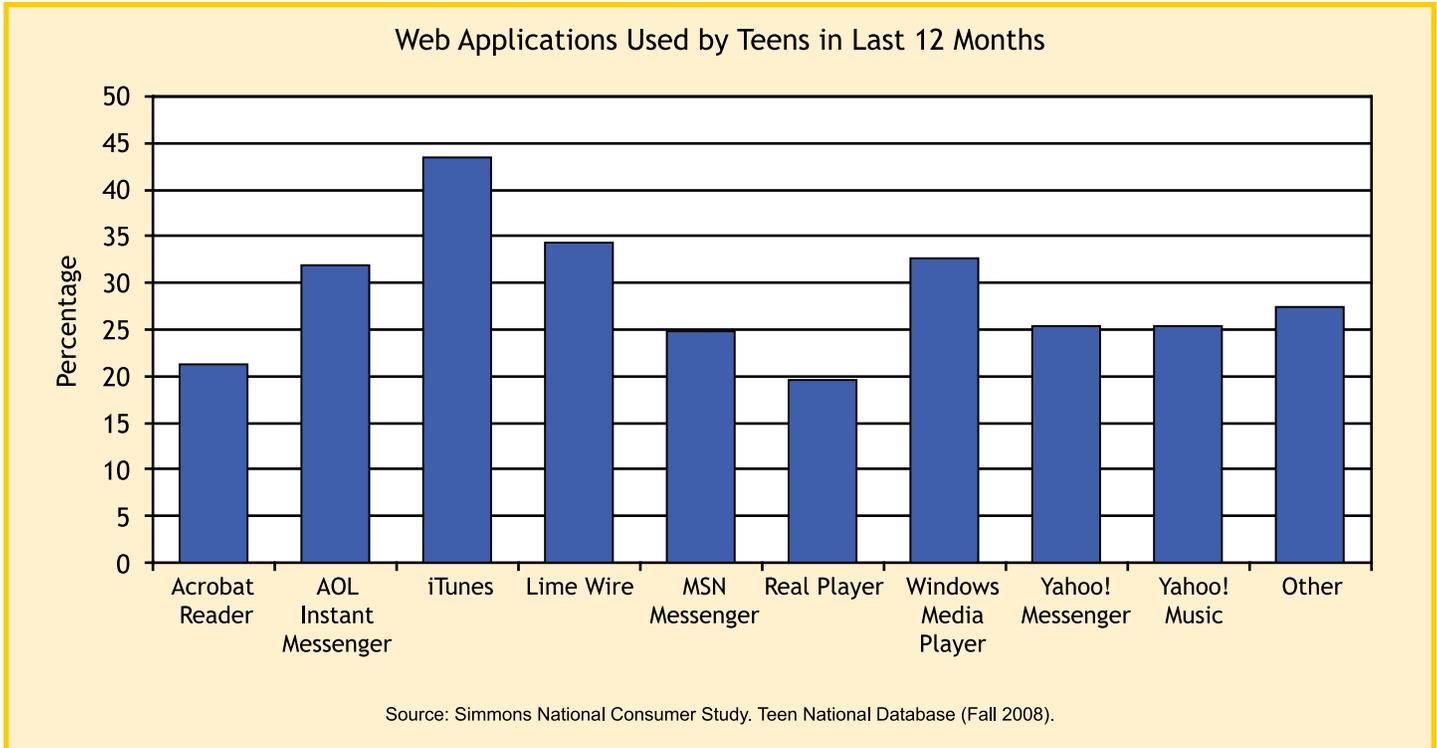
### How teens use social network sites<sup>11</sup>

- ❖ 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.



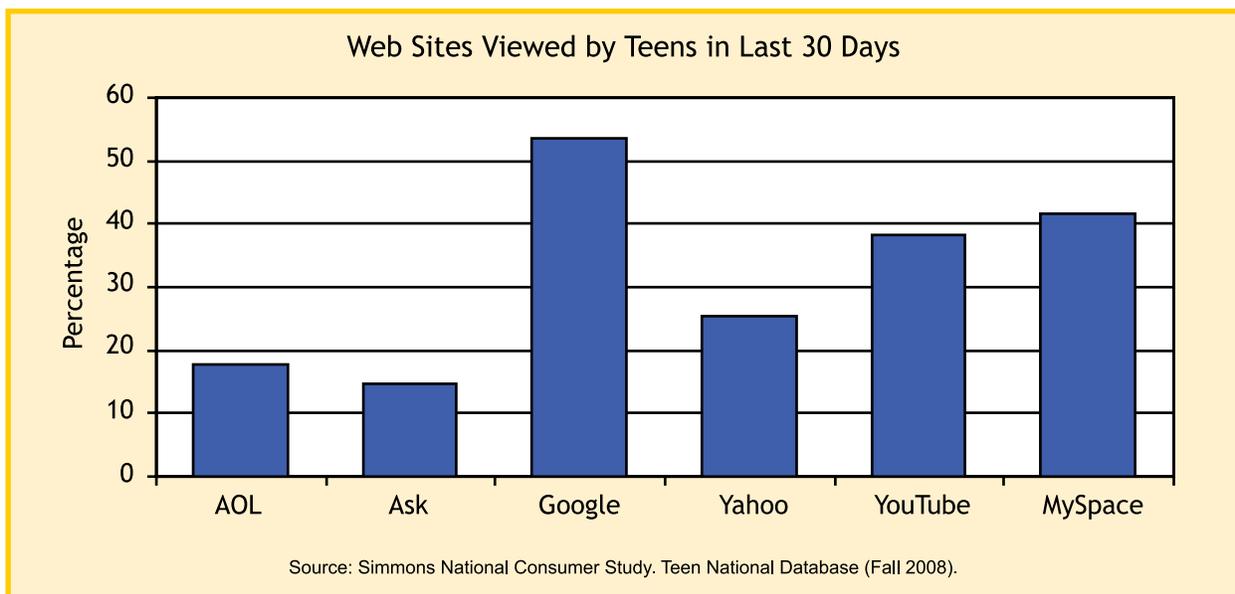
## Web Applications

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



## 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.<sup>11</sup>



## Mobile Phone Use by Teens

- ❖ Two-thirds (63%) of teens own cell phones.<sup>11</sup>
- ❖ Teens use many features on their phones, especially the camera, Internet, games, and texting.<sup>11</sup>
- ❖ 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.<sup>12</sup>

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 main stream, 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.

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For more information, email [SPCBHealthMktg@cdc.gov](mailto:SPCBHealthMktg@cdc.gov) or contact Fred Fridinger, SPCB Branch Chief, at [FFridinger@cdc.gov](mailto:FFridinger@cdc.gov).

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

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
Office of the Associate Director for Communication  
Division of Communication Services  
Strategic and Proactive Communication Branch