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## Top 10 Up & Coming Teen Sites

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We all know today's teens are media-savvy and defensive about being "marketed at." But a brand's got to make a living. So how do you engage this finicky, aloof, but potentially lucrative audience? The answer is by understanding their passions and discovering for your brand to contribute to these passions in a meaningful way.

Teenagers care about self-expression, exploring their identity, honing their personal taste, connecting romantically with other teens, and being amused by silly, scatological, hyper-hormonal comedy. What follows are 10 up-and-coming websites that reflect the teenage mindset and interests, with examples of how marketers are participating.

### 1. [Dollwizard.com](#)

Avatars are dolls for the digital age...with slightly less gender baggage attached. Dollwizard, while not the only avatar making site (see Meez.com, Dressupgames, Shrinkpictures.com), is the largest community of customizable avatar creators on the web.

Teens can craft digital identities for themselves and outfit their "mini-me's" in replicas of high fashion labels or clever t-shirts. An avatar can closely resemble one's personal appearance, or, more popularly, can be a fantasy creation of an idealized self. A recent art book by Robbie Cooper, *Alter Ego: Avatars and their Creators*, shows photographs of people next to screen grabs of their avatars; the subjects split between accurate and fantastical selves.

The teenage life stage is about figuring out who you are, what you care about, and how to communicate these things to the world. Avatars are another useful tool in the process of exploring and expressing the "self."

Savvy brand advertisers participating in this world can become a part of that online trading ground by providing relevant content to enhance self-expression. For instance, clothing brands can create digital versions of their fashions to fill teens' virtual closets. A particularly good example of contributing content is a current promotion for the movie "Hairspray" in which avatars based on characters from the film are available for download.

### 2. [eSpinthebottle.com](#)

An online dating site for teens and college students built around the oldest flirtation device in the book: spin-the-bottle. Users log on, create a profile, and then click "Spin bottle." Five different

profiles come up, matched by various compatibility measures from the profiles. Users can click on any of the five people to view their profile and send them a note, or keep spinning, seeing five new people each time.

The site boasts lots of fun personality quizzes (what is your flirting style? what kind of sexy are you?), astrology charts/matchmaking, and tools and widgets that help young people get to know and understand themselves and each other. As with almost all teen sites, there is a ranking component (rank pix and profiles) and IM compatibility.

Marketers can sponsor special “tabs” in the site, incorporating product messages into content. Currently, under a tab called “Girls Only,” there are listings and information about CosmoGIRL, Seventeen and Teen magazines. Savvy marketers who get it will strive to develop content that contributes to and enhances the core purpose of the site: facilitating teens meeting and flirting with other teens. eSpinthebottle.com is part of the eCrush media platform.

### 3. [Twitter.com](#)

Twitter is a phenomenon that spawned a new category of communication: “micro-blogging.” It is a global blogging community where users post the minutia of their life from their cell phone, IM or directly on the website in the form of 140-character blog updates. Readers sign up to “follow” people’s Twitter streams and can bask in the ordinary details of people’s lives.

At first glance the site seems choc-full of meaningless, well, Twitter, but there is a positive, cumulative effect from being privy to your friends’ ordinary thoughts. You come to know little details that make you feel close, e.g. what time they feed their cats, that they hate their new rain boots, that they feel naked without their cell phone.

In a fractured world where people are separated by distance, suburban sprawl, overstuffed calendars, experiencing the banalities of everyday life is something to cherish. Twitter enables this prosaic form of closeness between people. Marketers can use Twitter as they would any communication platform – as a way to communicate with and receive input from consumers. For example, on July 23rd immediately following the YouTube/CNN debate, John Edwards answered questions from Twitter users in a live webcast on [JohnEdwards.com](#).

### 4. [Whateverlife.com](#)

The runaway popularity of MySpace has given life to a cottage industry of support sites. Whateverlife.com is a clearinghouse for creative tools and guidance, offering pre-made layouts and graphics for MySpace profiles, as well as content and technical support. Users can get input codes for a melting pot of designer layouts, images, videos and other decorative tools like glitter writing and quote banners that crawl across the top of a profile. They gain computer and design skills by reading tutorials on optimizing one’s profile, using HTML and Photoshop, even building a website from scratch. For creative self-starters, there is also a Whateverlife magazine to which any user can contribute writing. The style of the site is “street-cute” (pastel rainbows and puffy clouds meets hip-hop tagging) reflecting the slightly more alternative personality of MySpace loyalists.

Marketers can cultivate interest in their brands and products by providing cool content for users to enhance their MySpace profiles, such as the theatrical trailer for the “Bratz” movie that is currently available.

## 5. [Tickle.com](#)

Tests and quizzes that help you figure out who you are, what your taste is, and what makes you different from your friends have been a mainstay of teen media forever. Now there's Tickle.com, an online clearinghouse for all the best, catchiest quizzes. Some tests, like "The Classic IQ Test," are created by professionals; others, like "How Much Do You Know About Tim Burton," are made up by Tickle members and submitted for inclusion in the site.

Celebrities, entertainment properties and brands are welcome to create quizzes; currently, Mandy Moore has a "How Well Do You Know Me" quiz, most likely in conjunction with the release of her new album. Smart advertisers like eHarmony and People Magazine use the quiz format as a hook for their marketing message, so that the brand is perceived to be providing entertainment value to the users.

## 6. [Photobucket.com](#)

If Flickr could be described as a "photography hub" then Photobucket takes the concept to the next level and serves as a "creativity hub." Photobucket is a storage receptacle for billions of personal photos, graphics, and videos. They pioneered the concept of "linking" media from one Web site - Photobucket - to hundreds of thousands of other sites outside Photobucket, including: MySpace, Facebook, Bebo, Friendster, eBay, Craigslist, Blogger and Xanga. Users have access to everyone's material, so the site serves as an enormous library of great user generated content.

What takes it beyond Flickr is the creativity tools that enable instant, easy, fun self-expression. Users can make slideshows, photo albums, avatars, and cell phone wallpaper from their photos, images found online, or other user's photos. The slideshows can be sent to friends, used for school/work presentations, or as digital background stimulation for parties. Offering content or paying for featured placement on the site are two ways marketers can leverage the popularity of Photobucket. Currently, there are stills from the "Bratz" movie, "The Simpsons" movie and a Michael Jackson video featured on the homepage under "Hot Image" and "Hot Video" picks.

## 7. [deviantART.com](#)

Young artists have a terribly hard time cracking the gallery system. Rather than languish in a garret waiting to be discovered, they've taken distribution and promotion into their own hands with deviantART. Artists can upload any kind of two-dimensional creation and share it with the world – paintings, sketches, flash games, graphic art, photographs, comics, and manga now have a platform from which to be discovered, shared and sold.

In addition to uploading their own artwork and displaying it on a profile page, users can mark their favorite pieces of art and assemble them into a "gallery." The site has a slightly goth-emo-romantic vibe (e.g. dark greens and gray shades, lots of Harry Potter fan art), but many of the works on display are impressively mature.

Advertisers should keep an eye on deviantART as a source for trends and passions of today's "creative class." This consumer segment is self-motivated, opinionated, hungry for new experiences, and influential among their peers. It is also a stomping ground for future art directors and designers.

## 8. [MP3Masher.com](#)

An MP3 file storage, audio mixing tool and community, designed by a professional DJ that enables teens to take community-licensed tracks from record labels along with selected beats, rhythms and

samples, and mix-and-mash the tracks along with their own voice and their personal collection of MP3 music. The site leverages the youth trend of media manipulation, iPod DJing, and audio mash-ups, putting the tools of the trade into users' hands, for free. Finished musical creations can be used as ringtones, audio-enhancements for social networking pages, and custom tunes for MP3 players. Brand marketers looking to participate can contribute audio assets so kids can express themselves through their favorite brands.

### 9. [Pandora.com](#)

Pandora.com is a free Internet radio station whose mission is to reward the musically curious with a never-ending experience of music discovery. It syncs with the Music Genome Project, the most comprehensive analysis of music ever undertaken. A team of 50 musician-analysts has been listening to music, one song at a time, studying and collecting hundreds of musical details on every song. Songs are analyzed and classified according to their musical traits.

By dropping the name of a song or artist into Pandora, the user is provided with songs that sound similar, based on shared musical traits. For example, Morcheeba songs are defined as having an electronica influence, a subtle use of vocal harmony, and mild rhythmic syncopation.

Users can establish channels of songs based on their preferences, bookmark those songs and artists, and share them with friends. It enables users to get to know their own taste by educating them about the nuts and bolts of music. Marketers can run ads on the site, reaching dedicated music aficionados with their messaging.

### 10. [Iconator.com](#)

Instant messaging is the number one online activity among teens and 55% use some kind of icon personalization. Iconator.com is a source for fresh and interesting buddy icons, mobile wallpaper, away messages, and profile page avatars. The existence of a site like this demonstrates that teenagers will personalize any representation of self, no matter how seemingly small or insignificant. Brands can co-brand sections of the site to stage contests, for instance allowing the community to take a brand's logo and mash it up with other imagery so it takes on an entirely new appearance.

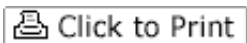
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