

Shopping with tweens



By [Maria Berrios-Carter](#)

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I discovered a golden marketing opportunity last Saturday at precisely 3.15pm. I know it was 3.15pm because it was the tenth time I had looked at my phone.



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I was in a kind of marketers no man's land. A place where nothing was being directed at me. No ad was vying for my wallet's affection or playing on my emotional strings. Even the sales assistants left me alone. I felt abandoned, neglected as if mass media had deemed me not worthy enough to irritate. But as I gazed down at my phone, still 3.15pm, I looked up and found I was not alone. Across from me, next to the JoJo Siwa giant bows, stood another displaced figure. A father, looking down at his phone.

"It's still only 3.15pm!" I wanted to shout to him. As he looked up, our eyes met, and that's when I saw it. The look of 'the invisible parent syndrome'.

You'll find us lurking in the shadows of Typo, Claire's, and Accesorize, teeming with girl tweens. If you find us unresponsive to your requests, it's because we cannot hear any more. After countless shops beating down the latest half pint's pop song, and high-pitched screaming, our eardrums are in survival mode and no longer functioning. While our eyes have reached glitter overdrive, and are no longer able to discern pink from teal. The lucky ones, you'll find nursing cold cups of once comforting cappuccino's, the adrenalin kick, now long gone.

Which brings me to the gaping marketing opportunity that came to me at, 3.15pm. Back when I was living in London, H&M came up with a brilliant idea. The premise was simple: 'What if we entertained all those bored, boyfriends, dragged to go shopping by their girlfriends and motivated them to stay longer at our stores?'

Invisible weekend parents

The solution they came up with was pure genius. They placed game stations and comfortable couches at various sections around their stores. It was a huge success. Guys were more than happy to stay and play games, girls shopped for longer and H&M profits soared. Some of the high-end stores caught on to this trend and started offering man lounges, stylish spaces where men could watch sports or enjoy a drink in their man caves, while the women went gathering for shoes. All very civilised, all very strategic.

So how can we reach the “invisible weekend parents”, trapesing around stores with their tweens, not old enough to be allowed on their own, and too young to be distracted by face painting or psychotic clowns?

How can a store engage me? Serve me free coffee for starters. How about a head massage, or neck massage from all that “No, you can’t have it” head shaking? Anything to relax my tired limbs. The more relaxed we are, the more willing we might be to say yes, to yet another water bottle with an ironic catchphrase, which will probably break in 5-months, and elope with a muddy rugby sock with commitment issues.

For dads? Two words. TV + sports, or how about a game? Your character is trapped inside a store. Your mission? To find the exit. The challenge is having to fend off zombie shopkeepers and sardonic emoji pillows. The more shop assistants the character kills with witty comebacks, the more points the invisible parent earns until he’s gained 100% visibility power, and finds the exit of the store and wins the key to the store.

Silent shopping experience

What about offering a silent shopping experience? Picture this, kids come into the store and are given headphones to listen to the store’s super exclusive playlist as well as special deals. If they want to communicate with the sales assistant or each other, they’re only allowed to text. Just imagine, it could be quiet, oh so quiet... shhhh... shhhh.

So, that’s the challenge. How to target the Invisible Parents. Please feel free to mail me your ideas. Until then if you come across a figure, lying in a foetal position at Cavendish, clutching on to a sad face emoji pillow, please don’t wake her. She’s probably having a dream about a colour-blind unicorn called Stabby that is glitter intolerant and doesn’t believe in humans.

Unless she’s hugging a brown emoji pillows. Then please kick her awake, because no one should ever fall asleep holding on to happy excrement.

ABOUT MARIA BERRIOS-CARTER

Maria Berrios-Carter is a senior copywriter at a Cape Town-based marketing agency. She loves the smell of freshly squeezed ideas in the morning and working with people who have a passion for their craft. Email Maria at mberrioscarter@gmail.com and connect with her on LinkedIn.

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