

## Kids just want to have fun

Today's kids are more knowledgeable and demanding than ever about what they want in frames.

by Kim Edwards

Today's youth market has never been bigger, across all types of merchandise. Kids today have more spending power than previous generations and influence over their parent's decisions as well. Canada's generation Y kids (born between 1993 and 2000), have a combined \$15 billion in pocket money, according to *Kidfluence*, a book by Anne Sutherland and Beth Thompson. And they are spending it on big purchases like computers, vacations, and yes, eyewear.

Today's kids know what they want and know how to ask for it when it comes to frames. They are also more fashion conscious than they used to be, says Jeff Stern, vice president—brand for Marchon Eyewear. “This is apparent as kids will want to change their frames more often vs only getting new frames when their prescription changes.” Although kids may be concerned about looking good, they are still looking for “fun” when it comes to their eyewear, he adds. “Fun can be in the form of color, a material that's interesting or it can be theme/character based products.”

Kids are following trends at younger and younger ages. According to *Kidfluence*, by the age of eight, kids recognize brands and start making independent purchases. “Kids even as young as five or six know what the fashion is. They'll say to their parents that this is what I saw on TV, this is what I like, this is cool and not cool. They are subjected to so much marketing on TV,” says Mike Christiansen, owner and designer of Venus Eye Design.

So what are the fashion trends that kids want? Believe it or not, they often want to look like mom and dad. “[Kids want] overall more grown-up styling.... They are influenced by their idols, society in general, from media with TV, kids and teen publications and the Internet. [These influences have] built up the desire with kids to be more grown up and want more styling with their apparel and accessories,” says Lisa Cesaro, Tommy Hilfiger brand manager.

Kids are not afraid of taking on bolder, chunkier frames, says Christiansen, who recently conducted a focus group with kids between 3-16. “They want thicker plastics, definitely thicker temples. More colour. Pressed aluminum. Whatever they see their parents wearing, they want to wear that kind of stuff too.” Monika Dygut, marketing coordinator for Canadian Optical Supply agrees that boys are looking for strongly-shaped frames. “They prefer rectangular, sporty shapes for their eyewear,” she says. He says that boys in his focus group like red and green frames, sometimes as accent colours. “Anything with chunkier temples they love.”

Superhero frames are still popular for boys, especially since comic book characters like Spiderman and Superman continue to dominate the silver screen. “As boys get older they tend to like action oriented themes such Power Rangers (fantasy/pretend, good vs evil etc.). As they get older they are not only interested in themes from the TV and movies but they may also follow and participate in sports. X Games fits this need of being action packed,” says Stern. But there is a limit to how much the name of a character will impact kids to purchase frames. “I’ve noticed a trend away from generic kids frames. Away from slapping a name on [frames] like Batman and Barbie. Kids want a style, a funkier style that resembles mom and dad’s eyewear,” says Christiansen. “Some of the boys may not want a theme and they may opt for frames such as Flexon, which really spark their interest,” adds Stern.

Colour is definitely something that girls look for when choosing frames. Dygut says that girls “typically like to add a little sparkle to their eyes and overall appearance by combining modern and youthful shapes with radiant and shimmering colours.” Venus Eye Design’s study found that girls liked lemon lime colours and pastels.

As for the brands that girls prefer, Stern says that age is definitely a factor in determining what they want to wear. “Starting with Pooh and Tigger.... they then enjoy the world of make believe and fantasy. Disney Princess across all of their product sectors is a \$3 billion business. Isn't that incredible? We tie each frame to a Princess, giving it characteristics which come straight from that Princesses story. These are good role models that parents can and do feel comfortable with.”

But being a princess is not what every girl in today’s modern society aspires to, and other choices in frames reflect that.

“Naturally we need to make sure we are also prepared to address the need of girls that are a bit more "Tom-boyish" in nature. Following many requests we will soon launch a Pink Power Ranger frame taken right from the Power Ranger TV character, “ says Stern.

Finally, some girls enjoy frames that are not tied to any particular character. “Older girls may opt for products from our Flexon kids line or our Disney collection styles which mimic the type of styles that teens are wearing,” says Stern. “What is the TV character, actor or singer wearing that they aspire to be like? You'll want to have a range of products to cover those needs.”

Active kids still love the sports-related frames. “Kids love the renowned sport branded aspect, whether it be related to t-shirts, shoes, or eyewear,” says Dygut. Sports-oriented brands like adidas do very well with their kids lines.

As much as kids may want certain frames because they are a popular brand or they have a look that they want, parents have concerns as well when it comes to their kids eyewear. Practicality is important, and parents have to draw the line somewhere when it comes to budget. “The most important factors include comfort—providing children with a non-slip fit that will prevent the glasses from ever slipping off. Second, the frames must be

lightweight, durable, and easy to wear. One of the biggest problems with choosing suitable frames for kids is that their noses are not fully developed, so they don't have a bridge to prevent plastic frames from sliding down," says Dygut. Since kids often play rough and tumble games, parents want to ensure that the glasses that they buy their kids stand the test of time. "Parents are also looking for frames that come with a good warranty. Kids are more prone to certain types of accidents, and thus require frames that will stand up to the test. Children break and scratch glasses all the time, this is why adidas offers a 2-year warranty that on all their frames," says Dygut. Features like spring hinges help to ensure that frames last. "These special hinges allow the temples to flex outward, away from the frames, without causing any damage." Although they sometimes cost a bit more, spring hinges can be a worthwhile investment on children's eyewear. "Kids are not always careful when they put on and take off glasses, and the spring hinges can help prevent costly repairs. They also come in handy if the child falls asleep with the glasses on, or just has a rough day at play. Spring hinges are strongly recommended for toddlers, who sometimes get carried away playing with their new glasses," says Dygut. Materials such as Flexon and titanium also help when it comes to durability.

The "kids package" that many stores offer gives parents some choices if they are on a tight budget, but stores would be wise to offer more options to parents, says Christiansen. "Historically, yeah, parents have always been directed to a kids package. But I do see a lot of offices offering better kids packages now. There's a low end kids package and if you want the funkier stuff, here is a better kids package. Some of the frames are retailing for what an adult frame would. So there is more choice and range for the kids frames."

Wardrobing (buying different frames for different needs) does not seem to be as popular for kids as it is for adults. Cost may be a factor for this difference. "We're not seeing this too often. The cost factor mentioned below probably impacts this area," says Stern. Dygut agrees that finding a pair of glasses that suits all of the different activities that kids do is ideal. "Children are looking for a comfortable pair of glasses that can be worn at all times of the day, regardless of what they are doing. This is why it is essential that the glasses are suitable for playing a game of jump rope, as well as comfortable enough to wear all day in school."

Since parents are willing to spend money if it means that their kids will have crisp vision and feel comfortable in their glasses, it pays to have the options so that they can find the right frame. says Dygut. "Parents are willing to spend a significant amount of money in order to ensure that their children are wearing comfortable, safe, and durable glasses. It's all about protecting the next generation's vision." •