

Initial Reactions to Store, Website notes, SWOT and apparent marketing strategy

Pleasant Company (founded by P.T. Rowland in 1986), Acquired by Mattel, Inc. (1998)

Initial Observations: American Girl Series offers an idealized lifestyle to tweens and their parents through a consistent brand that promotes self-esteem and innocence. Three boutique stores, in NYC, Chicago, and now in LA, provide destination experiences that have attracted a reported 5 million visitors. Each store includes a professional Broadway-style musical, professional preschool show, salon, photography studio, clothing, “Just Like Me” dolls, books, beauty products, a magazine, and a high-end, age-appropriate restaurant.

Online Resources:

<http://www.americangirlplace.com> - consumer website

<http://www.pleasantcpublications.com/aboutus/aboutus.aspx> - B-to-B website

(*indicates a direct quote from this website)

<http://www.americangirl.com/corp/html/aboutpc.html> - Company Profile (^ quote)

<http://www.commercialexploitation.org/news/marketingandtweens.htm> -

Marketing and Tweens by Alicia de Mesa, Business Week, 10/12/05 (# quote)

<http://www.savegirlhood.com> - “The centerpiece of the American Girl campaign.”

http://www.comm.uiuc.edu/Flash/cook_adage_1205.pdf - “American Girl Campaign offers to Save Childhood: Plays to Parental Fears of Children Growing up in Over-Sexed World” by James B. Amdorfer; AdAge.com, December 7, 2005

Objective: “Pleasant Company's products aim to enrich the lives of American girls by fostering pride in the traditions of growing up female in America and celebrating the lifestyle of girls today. The AG dolls and books are more than just toys, they’re aids to growing up in a world pushing girls to mature too quickly.”

Target Market:

*Core: 7- 9 year old girls in the USA

*Peripheral: 4-7 year old girls, 9-12 year old girls, and their parents/guardians

#Defining the Tween Market - (aka preteens) begin to reject childlike images and associations, aspiring to be more like a teen. Yet unlike teens, tweens are usually completely dependent spenders relying on allowances and gifts—hence parental approval is imperative to branding awareness and strategy.

Divisions and Brands

- The Consumer Catalogue Division is responsible for direct-mail sales of all American Girl merchandise to millions of households around the United States.

Pleasant Company is made up of four operating divisions that serve the American Girl brand and its customers. The Publications Division comprises a full in-house editorial and marketing staff. This division publishes and markets American Girl books and the company's award-winning magazine American Girl®, and Daughters newsletter, directly to booksellers, consumers, schools, and libraries.

- The Retail Division launched American Girl Place™, the company's first retail destination, in Chicago in 1998. This division also runs the American Girl outlet store in Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

- The Customer Programs Division manages The American Girls Living History Programs™ and special charity events that educate, entertain, and promote a sense of community for American girls.

Marketing Strengths:

Consultants are available in stores by appointment to advise purchases and activities

Strong website community: providing games, quizzes, activities, E-cards (all free)

-- studies show that the longer a consumer thinks about a product, the more likely they will buy (or inspire the buy) the purchase of that product, or another in the same brand
Paid-membership club and online community – with instructions for parents and content managers – further promotes the brand on a daily basis to primary customers and establishes a direct marketing opportunity

Character (historical fiction books have feature film potential (including 2 past successes)

*Advice and Activity (self-help) books come in color-coded categories: including “Just for Fun” “Be Your Best” “Body & Mind” “Do-it-Yourself” and Memories”

*American Girl products and experiences have educational merit as well as entertainment value—like “chocolate cake with vitamins.”

Marketing Statistics:

*From 1999 to 2003, American Girls Collection books performed significantly above the industry growth rate. In fact, more than 100 million American Girl books have been sold since 1986, making American Girl one of the top children’s publishers in the nation.

*57 million American Girl consumer catalogues are mailed to moms and girls each year.

*92% of girls ages 9 to 12 are aware of American Girl books, according to a 2004 awareness and penetration study.

*96% of adults with 7- to 12-year-old girls in their households had some awareness of the brand, according to the same study.

Marketing Weaknesses:

Brand does not transition to teens--with the exception of their customized line of Bath&Body works toiletries and cosmetics—consumers simply grow-out-of the product

Brand is Girls Only

Historical novels have difficulty presenting the past accurately, yet maintaining a wholesome image

Any criticism from special interest groups such as religious organizations, lesbian, women lib?

Marketing Opportunities:

Currently, dolls are primarily marketed in the USA. However, Canada, Mexico, and Central/South America can also be targeted without changing the brand name

Pleasant Company Publications launches Matchbox Books™ for boys ages 3 and up.

Girls Intelligence Agency (GIA) a market research firm that created slumberparties as an intimate, if not covert, form of a focus group in tween girls' own environment: their

bedrooms. GIA also features a "Best Friends Forever" (BFF) network where girls are given products to discuss among their friends, reporting back resulting comments to a GIA agent.

Marketing Threats:

Walt Disney Company – princess series, animated characters, themeparks, movies
“La Bratz” – Dolls, Clothes, Accessories, and media

Build-A-Bear, Inc.

Manhattan Toy Company, with its successful Groovy Girls line of dolls. Each doll features a girl of different skin tones, hair types and facial features reflecting the real American ethnic landscape of today.

Olsen Twins products

#In 2004, a public interest group asked the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to "use its subpoena power to get access to marketer research studies to help determine if online data collection actually succeeds in helping advertisers to reach kids and tweens." It also asked for a moratorium to be placed by the advertising industry on interactive tactics that "could potentially harm or negatively affect children and youth."

#PBS also offers a website called "Don't Buy It," chock full of advice on how to make kids intelligent consumers. Features include "advertising tricks," "buying smart -- see through the sales pitch," and "cover model secrets."