



“Adults are learning to deal with technology, but kids have always had it.”

Tina Wells is one adult who really “gets” teenagers.

When she was one herself—age 16, to be exact—she wanted to be a writer and was fascinated with pop culture. She combined these two passions by writing articles about companies and products targeting the youth market for *New Girl Times*, a newspaper for young girls. She soon realized that she had a lot of thoughts about what could help these companies strategically connect with their intended audience, so she pitched her ideas to them directly. The response was overwhelming, and Tina’s company, Buzz Marketing Group, was born—while she was still in high school! Today Tina leads not only a staff but also a worldwide network of more than 9,000 teenage consultants (called “buzz spotters”) in creating marketing solutions for clients in the music, fashion, cosmetics, publishing, and advertising industries—gathering the information they need from teens, and guiding them in how to use it. She was kind enough to take the time to talk to us about her cool career and some of the interesting insights it has given her into the teen world.

Tina Wells

CEO, Buzz Marketing Group

What’s something that you learned from your very first job?

That knowledge was power. I knew I was doing something unusual and I knew that people liked what I had to say.

You utilize an incredibly valuable network of teens to do your work. Who makes a great “buzz spotter?”

People who aren’t afraid to show their opinions, and who have their own styles. Those who don’t follow what everyone else is doing, whether it’s in fashion or music or how they live their life. People who would go against the grain are always interesting to talk to.

How do you stay ahead of trends rather than playing catch-up?

The trends I tend to study take two to three years to really manifest themselves—and sometimes we hold on to trends for almost three years before we break them.

What are teens teaching adults these days?

A lot about how they consume and utilize technology. Adults are learning to deal with technology, but kids have always had it.

How do you think teens will get music in the future?

They don’t have the same attachment to an actual CD that adults do. I think that they’re going to be more interested in interactivity and things of that nature. So, it’s going to be much more about selling an experience

than selling an actual CD. Young people talk about how important music is, how much they need it, and yet they won’t pay for it. For them, it’s more of a digital currency than something that you [physically] own. I remember when my girlfriends and I would buy seven copies of the same Backstreet Boys album because we wanted one in our gym locker, one at home, one in the car, etc. No one does that anymore.

Has there been a music-related trend that you predicted in advance?

I’m known for predicting that illegal downloading wouldn’t stop—if anything, it would increase—about five years ago. That was a bold statement to make then, and everybody thought they would get this under control. But I knew it was going to keep going.

What helps you to excel in what you do?

Being open to change. Teens can change their thoughts and opinions just as often as they change their clothes.

What’s the most fulfilling part of your job?

Seeing that our clients actually are getting what they need out of what we’re doing and what we’re telling them to do. It’s great when you predict something and it happens, or you tell a client to try something and it works. And the teens I talk to every day know that I’m there trying to make things better for them—that’s really fun and exciting. **MA!**

—CAROLINE HORN



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