



# IT'S A TWEEN THING

Pre-teen  
personalities shine  
through party  
preferences

By Abby Heugel | Managing Editor

OMG! LOL!

You don't have to have children to know that the tween demographic — ages about 7 to 12 — is taking the world by storm.

As a group, America's more than 21 million tweens account for about \$43 billion in spending power annually, according to EPM Communications' "Tween Spending & Influence" report.

While a majority of their money is spent on clothes and keeping up with the latest trends, it also extends into how they celebrate and the parties they have — which is where you come in.

Tweens are at that age when they don't want to be babied anymore, but they aren't quite old enough to do things on their own yet. They also tend to be incredibly passionate about their interests as they are exploring their independence, but they don't carry the insecurities that often come along with age of adolescence.

And when it comes to birthday parties, it's clear they've moved beyond the princesses and dinosaurs and moved onto themes that really show their personalities.

## Bright and Bold

Tween girls are a target market for anything and everything fun. Brenda Fink of Party Magic has found colors are more vibrant now. Instead of standard red, blue and yellow they're seeing bright pinks, lime green, neons and the addition of more themes like candy, polka dots and zebra.

Dori Pomerantz Saypol of Total Party LLC said Hello Kitty has been very popular with the younger tween girls and they've been asked to bring Hello Kitty into the party décor in several ways — from centerpieces to sculpture.

"For the older tweens, we see colorful feathers are a big trend," Pomerantz said. "They want to be more grown up like the 16 year olds and they are requesting feather centerpieces and feather balloons columns at the party entrance.

"By having samples of different feather centerpieces in our studio," she continued, "the tweens say they 'gotta' have it and the parents can choose from the budget-friendly options or splurge on one that is over-the-top."



When an 8-year-old girl wanted a Hello Kitty balloon sculpture, Total Party created a 4-1/2-foot-tall Hello Kitty Balloon sculpture.

Photo: Total Party

From outlandish hats to way out and wacky sunglasses, wearable products are big in this market, at least for Charles Johnson of Balloons by Absolute Value. The range of hats might be short brimmed, glow-in-the-dark, jester, too big disco hats with fur trim, etc. and shoppers might even add colorful feather boas as an accessory.

"Themes kind of go to the music they listen to or the shows that they watch," Johnson said. "Two weeks ago I did a mustache theme party. It was neat with mustaches all over – from the balloon décor to people wearing different style and sized mustaches."

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## Parental Guidance Suggested

Since tweens often don't have money themselves, it's important to appeal to the parent as much as the tween and finding that balance is key. Jelsma said they try to keep full sets of items for the tween parties in stock to appeal to the tweens tastes as much as the parents' wallets and offer package deals at a discount that everyone likes.

"Our most popular display is a corner of my showroom set to look like both a girls and boys party with full balloon décor and themed party supplies and backdrops," she added.

Johnson said that although the parent has the final say, the girls tend to get what they want at almost any expense, which means retailers can offer more options.

"Parents are online looking for the dream party that their daughter has in her head," Johnson said. "I had to overnight designer prints at the last minute because the daughter changed her mind, and parents didn't blink an eye at the extra expense."

So what are the most profitable items to sell? For Fink at Party Magic, that would be their custom creations — centerpieces and columns out of air filled balloons. They always have centerpieces and helium bouquets on display in the latest trends.

"If the customer sees it, they will buy it," Fink said. "I like to cross merchandise and have everything they might need in one area — paper goods, custom centerpieces, cupcake toppers, favors, tablecovers, etc."

For Jelsma, their zebra balloon columns are a big hit with the girls, and their team spirit balloon columns are a grand slam with the boys.

"We started incorporating large scale décor and the effects once only used by large scale corporate parties or extravagant Quinceaneras," Jelsma said. "The new trend of huge and exciting parties has opened up a new market, allowing us to really 'wow' our customers and keep the parties coming in."

So whether it's a party full of glitter and glam or mascots and mustaches, you can be sure that as long as kids are still growing up, this trend will keep growing as well. **P**



**Dori Pomerantz Saypol of Total Party said older tweens are requesting feather centerpieces and feather balloons columns at the party entrance.**

Johnson has found that instead of home parties, they're often at a hotel or banquet room and often have a DJ, dance floor, catered food, sophisticated décor, etc.

"Balloon bouquets are rarely used," he added. "Instead they request ceiling balloons, columns for the DJ and sometimes a balloon drop at the end of the evening."

When it comes to tween boys, there is (usually) much less glitter and fuss. Themes have remained fairly consistent over the years, with sports, technology, hunting and superheroes rounding things out, and most still prefer parties at home.

"For boys, we have noticed that popular sports teams are exploding," said Lizz Jelsma of Dan D Party Corner. "Every party has a specific team to be designed around featuring their mascot and sport. Colors are all about team pride and who is winning when it comes to both college and pro sports.

"We used to not sell many items for tween boys, as many did not like the idea of theme parties or extravagant décor," Jelsma continued. "Now when it comes to sports they are into it almost as much as the girls."