

PR Firm Creates Teen Sisterhood

By Richard Lee
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Isabelle Diamond and Taryn Murphy are sisters—in an electronic sort of way.

Although Isabelle, 16, lives in Stamford and Taryn, 15, is a Wilton resident, they are connected and they know each other's likes and dislikes, each other's tastes in music and clothing, and they keep each other informed about their daily activities. It's all thanks to The Sisterhood, an online social networking forum launched by Euro RSCG Worldwide PR that has spread to hundreds of teen girls across the nation.

"I think the whole idea of The Sisterhood is neat. We're all girls, and we can relate in so many ways," said Isabelle, who with her sister, Evelyn, were early joiners through a request from Norwalk resident Marian Salzman, president of Euro RSCG. "I've learned that at some time, we've all faced the very similar things. We have our own perspective and priorities."

The information that Euro RSCG gleans from the teens gives the public relations and marketing firm a glimpse at what adolescent girls are thinking—a key ingredient for retailers and marketers in developing strategies to attract them as customers.

The initiative has turned out to be more a social laboratory than a marketing initiative, Salzman said.

"I've learned that far more than having merely changed over the past five years, the concept of the American teen has undergone a social paradigm shift," she said. "To put it simply, teenagers are at a new frontier of social culture.

They're changing the field of marketing, altering communications, inventing new lexicons and adopting still-embryonic innovations."

Taryn has become a prolific blogger as a result of her involvement, refining her composition skills.

"I blog a lot of things. We e-mail producers and they send us samples and I test them. I put reviews on The Sisterhood website so others can learn about the product," said Taryn, who plans to blog about a concert she recently attended. "It's really opened my eyes to how much I like writing and public relations writing."

A Euro RSCG white paper on teen girls and their lifestyles represents a critical step for brands that want to reach this demographic group, which has been difficult to grasp, Salzman said, referring to a November survey by MicroDialogue that looked at the spending and communications habits of 100 girls from 13 to 18.

It found that 71 percent of teenage girls go online for a targeted purpose—to maintain existing friendships. Some 78 percent of teen girls use social media to keep in touch with friends, while three-quarters report being in "constant contact" with friends through texting, Facebook, iChat, AIM or other social media services.

Sixty-five percent say when their favorite brand or store has a sale, they want to share the information with their best friend or sister, and 57 percent want to share a new brand or trend they have discovered.

“They share their secrets and influence one another,” Salzman said. “As marketers, it’s important to see what they are talking about and what they are buying. We’re using it with a couple of clients. Right now, we have about 500 girls. We have girls from every part of the country, and there are very big differences.”

Euro RSCG has come up with a refined version of online panels that are prevalent in the marketing industry as a way to gain opinions and information on products and trends, said Kevin McEvoy, marketing professor at the Stamford branch of the University of Connecticut.

“It’s an excellent idea. Teenagers are notoriously hard to reach because they are not big in participating in traditional media,” he said, noting that promoting the forum as a club makes it appealing to adolescent girls. “That’s a very clever way of doing it.”