

# 2016: A 10-year-old's odyssey

Kids experts dish on what a child's life will be like when *KidScreen* turns 20

by Lana Castleman

## Generation Next

According to John Geraci, VP of youth research at Rochester, New York-based market research firm Harris Interactive, 2016's 10-year-olds will be smack in the middle of Generation Next. This group will have made a clean break from today's Millennial kids and be well on its way to establishing its own defining characteristics. But Gary Pope, partner at London's Kids Industries points out, children's capabilities and developmental patterns will not change radically by 2016, because evolution simply doesn't move that quickly. You can expect, however, the environment shaping a 10-year-old's life will be quite different and technological innovation will drive those changes.

## Family

As the progeny of Gen X parents—a group known for its cynicism and ironic detachment who grew up with divorce and extended families—these kids won't be as coddled as much as their predecessors. Geraci says there will be a move away from creating the child-centric households we see today (in the U.S. in particular) and parents will compel kids to find their own path and become more independent. Even the mass production of motorized scooter-like devices will encourage kid independence. Irvine, California-based Strotman International director for consumer insights Brady Darvin says mom won't have to drive her 10-year-old everywhere and she will become a bit more detached from her child's daily activities. Because of this trend, he notes, family weekend and meal times will assume an even greater importance for mom and dad.

Also, grandparents should be playing a bigger role in the lives of 2016's 10-year-olds, Geraci says. They'll be living longer, be more active in their later years and he suggests the sheer size of this demo (Baby Boomers, anyone?) will push American society's current reverence for children on to older Americans.

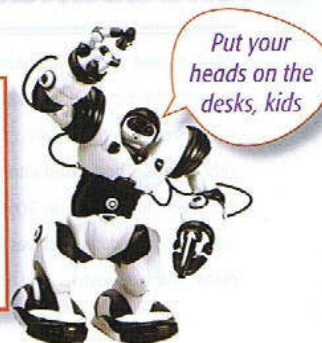
## Socialization

Using their bedrooms as command central, 10-year-olds in 2016 will spend most of their free time virtually interacting with friends (via broadband-enabled devices) instead of going outside to play. But it won't necessarily be a docile existence. Strotman's Darvin suggests virtual "evergaming" sports leagues will develop, where kids will interact with a gaming system in their rooms and be able to face off against other kids who live in remote locations. Similarly, Kids Industries' Pope predicts this generation of kids will develop more global virtual friendships. Thanks to the growth of worldwide corporate cultures which foster a common ground and the explosion of handheld broadband, children will be able to identify and build friendships with those from other countries more easily than they do now. "Perhaps we will for the first time see how the global child decides to live his/her life," he says.

## Education

The academic performance of 10-year-olds living in the U.S. at this time is going to be heavily measured. Geraci says, the current emphasis on teaching and testing performance in core subjects such as math, science and reading will only increase and he foresees kids' stress over schoolwork reaching hysterical levels. Moreover, there will be little time or money for public schools to teach subjects that fall outside of the core—pushing music, art and other creative endeavors from the curricula. Geraci posits that this overemphasis on core subjects will make for a more homogeneous generation lacking in creative talents.

As for kids' daily school routines, technology will play a big role in how kids learn. Electronic learning aids and computers should completely rule classrooms in 10 years and there's a possibility that robot teaching assistants will become commonplace.



## Entertainment and media consumption

We're just starting to see a push to pull shift in media and moving forward, it's expected kids won't have a clue what it was like to suffer through an excruciating week's wait to watch a new episode of a favorite TV show. They'll watch what they want, when and where they want to watch it thanks to some speedy all-in-one gadgets. And even though sources of content appear to be infinite, Geraci says kids will end up drawing their entertainment from only a handful of areas.

As for movie going, Mike Farrell, director of research at Toronto, Canada's Youthography, says kids will still be drawn to the big screen, but the experience might change. For example, live performances could be incorporated with the film to make it more of an event for the audience and it "will surely involve" digital communication with the attendee prior to and after the movie to create a feedback loop.



## Technology

Much has been made of the role technology assumes in kids lives right now; in 10 years, you can expect it will permeate just about every aspect of a child's world. All of the analysts participating in this piece agree that the current generation's handheld gaming systems, portable players, mobile phones, PDAs and laptops will merge into one mondo device. Strotman's Darvin also says the console will more than likely be GPS-enabled, allowing parents to more easily track the whereabouts of their kids.

More importantly, the tech powering this all-in-one gadget will be transparent. According to Ross Rubin, NPD Techworld analyst, high-speed wireless data should be pervasive by 2016. He says kids won't give a second thought to group videoconferencing with peers, watching movies, concerts and playing video games downloaded on-the-go as private social networks let them seamlessly pass on and seek out recommendations.

Additionally, the growth and development of electronic paper technology (which is in its infancy now) stands to affect a

## Marketing and advertising

10-year-old's everyday life in the future. Rubin says e-paper should enable kids to keep all of their textbooks and notes on small flexible screens that roll up to something roughly the size of a ruler. It may also jazz up kids fashions, says Darvin. Flexible e-paper screens could be incorporated into clothing, so kids would be able to program their T-shirts to display whatever message or image they want. And when it comes to e-paper's marketing applications for kids, imagine what could be done with full-motion screens on cereal boxes.

## The real experts: today's kids weigh in on the future of Gen Next

The Harris Interactive YouthQuery (December 2005) polled 1,856 kids ages eight to 18 and asked the respondents what they thought the future might be like for the next generation. Here's a selection of what they had to say:

"10 years from now, toys will be floating around!!!!!!"; "Every home will be wirelessly networked. TV, computers, telephones, even some appliances will be connected to the internet at cable or T-1 speeds. All of the information will be streamed over the net. Children's toys will also be wired, and have an AI interface"; "I think that the toys will be more like humans. They will walk like us, talk like us, and dance like us, and eat by themselves"; "Kids tomorrow will be more advanced and more techie than today's generation. We have seen in just forty years what can happen to children. Of course I would never want to go back to the '60s or '70s"; "Probably going to school over the internet, for all I know... Or, at least, there will be a much bigger educational influence on the internet starting at an earlier age. Recreationally, kids will probably spend a lot more time indoors"; "Everyone will have broadband connections so there will be television-like quality to stream original creative content that is not available today. It will become a moving media instead of a static, text-based, internet."