MINI-CASE

THE MULTIPLE MARKETING EFFORTS OF FLIPOUTZ[107]

After creating Flipoutz (flipoutz.blogspot.com, facebook.com/flipoutz) in 2008, we applied to *Shark Tank* and we knew the "sharks" would want to see impressive sales of our wristband with coins you could flip out and trade with other kids. We used the traditional routes such as using social media, hiring a sales representative to focus on small retail and independent toy stores, and attending trade shows, but we also tried our own unique approach.

We created the "Flipoutz Kidz Force" to teach kids about entrepreneurship using our products to create their own business. They could buy Flipoutz wholesale or use our sample kit to take orders, then become a brand ambassador to sell to their friends and keep all of the profits! Each child that joined Kidz Force participated in weekly conference calls, received monthly newsletters, and got a training binder that taught the children how to become a brand ambassador. It was also important to us that we use Kidz Force to teach entrepreneurial skills, so our newsletter and calls focused on how kids could grow their business, as well as tips on making presentations and problem solving.

Our marketing had to follow the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) which regulates how businesses can interact with kids online. Although it required a substantial investment, we subscribed to a service that provided constant oversight of our online activities to ensure COPPA compliance, as well as a state-of-the-art technology for our website that flagged bad words, slang words, and personally identifiable information.

Since we had to be careful about marketing to kids directly in the digital world, we let our Kidz Force ambassadors reach our end users—the kids! An important note is that we were careful to make sure involvement in Kidz Force was conditioned on having a parent or teacher as an initial contact and sponsor. This guaranteed our investment as well as keeping us COPPA compliant.

We also focused on trade shows such as the Chicago Toy and Game Fair, the New York Toy Fair, the Southern Christmas Show, and the Atlanta International Gift Market to get into stores. We even brought Flipoutz to local events of all sizes, from the small Irmo Okra Festival to the giant South Carolina State Fair! My siblings and I worked five or six trade shows and festivals a year and found that our young age (8, 12, and 14 at the time) was a great way to attract buyers to our booth. We also made ourselves available to promote the product in stores. Small retailers often took us up on the offer and appreciated the extra marketing help.

Through these efforts, we were eventually carried in over 300 independent retail stores across the country. After appearing as the first children to pitch in the *Shark Tank* and seal a deal with three "sharks," we became visible to kids all across the nation who were excited to do what we were doing and become a part of Kidz Force!