

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE TECH

The coolest gadgets are what's creating the buzz in the halls at most schools

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"Oooh."

That's the typical reaction Sara Fagen gets whenever she whips out her newest high-tech device, a sleek Motorola V80 that transforms from a gleaming black pebble into perfect size phone at the touch of button. It takes pictures. It can manipulate and re-size images to send with your multimedia messages. It's equipped with wireless Bluetooth technology. It plays MP3 ringtones.

And, oh yeah. You can talk on it, too. In fact, that's what she appreciates most about it.

"I love my phone," said Fagen, 17, a Grade 11 student at Bialik High School. "I'm not necessarily attached to having the newest one, but I need a phone for communications, for social purposes. I have a music player, too. But the phone is the device that I'm most likely to take with me. I'm so happy I got it."

While other Bialik students might have different priorities, most of them own some kind of high-tech device.

Take Shawn Bramson, 15. A self-described "techie," his idea of a desirable device is one that combines function with performance. He doesn't fall for glitz or bling.

"I use things that are practical, logical," said the Grade 10 student. "Like, I don't have an iPod. I have a Panasonic - 20 gigs. It plays music and that's pretty much what I want. I have excellent headphones - not iPod headphones. I have a camera. It's water-resistant. I can take it with me anywhere - snow, to the pool. I don't have to worry about it. I get things that I know I can use always and I don't have to worry about them."

Visit any school, and it's the same story - come birthdays, Christmas or Hanukkah and

you'll find a whole new crop of devices being shown in the halls and yards. And they're likely to have all the latest features because, let's face it, teenagers take to technology like pirates take to the sea - and they know their way around.

"Our generation today is very advanced and we're very quick learners," said Grade 11 student Rebecca Rosenstock, 17. "Because I think people are constantly trying to compete for the newest fad. As time goes on, you want the newest thing and teenagers look upon each other to gauge what's the best."

It's a phenomenon that is shaping technology itself, as manufacturers strive to pack more punch into their tiny electronic products. And this race to innovate is partly driven by a sophisticated younger demographic.

"It has to do with age," said Jean-François Ouellet, a marketing professor at HEC Montréal. "Younger people tend to adopt innovations more easily or quickly than older people."

Many older consumers tend to be clued out because they're overwhelmed by all the choices available in such products as cellphones, digital media players, digital cameras and palm-top computers. That gives tech-savvy adolescent an opportunity to distance themselves from the older generation, according to Ouellet.

"It has been shown in past literature that young people - especially teens - want to be different from their parents," he said. "It affects how they choose products. They want products their parents don't own themselves or cannot own because they don't understand the technology."

That helps to explain the incredible success of MP3 players, he said.

For example, one-third of U.S. teenagers in a recent survey reported owning an Apple iPod - up from one per cent just three

years before.

Zachary Campbell is one of the Canadian students who owns one.

"I have an iPod that I use, like, non-stop," said the 13-year-old Grade 7 student. "I don't get off it when I get home. And my portable DVD player - wherever I go, I watch DVDs. I use them to kill time, basically."

Another recent study suggested the majority of North American teens with cellphones used them to download music, play video games, surf the Internet, send text messages and chat with other friends.

But there are exceptions. Some high school students have phones but are restricted in how much they can use them.

"My cellphone was supposed to be just for emergencies, like if I needed to be picked up from school earlier or later or I needed to stay for something," said Elissa Brock, a 14-year-old Grade 9 student. "But I guess I use it now a bit to call my friends and see if I could come over. But I don't use it to just talk to my friends."

Nevertheless, the push is on for manufacturers to pack more and more features into the cool, hand-held devices that teenagers love to own.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Do you use a cellphone?
What kind?

Write and tell us. Send a note, cartoon, even a photograph, as long as it arrives by Friday morning. Feel free to include your own STORY IDEAS.

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"Most manufacturers nowadays are working on convergence - on getting all your stuff into one piece of equipment," Ouellet said.

Ask Matthew Chisling which new device is making big waves in the consumer electronics market and the Grade 10 student doesn't hesitate.

"The iPhone," said the 15-year-old. "It's is the new iPod-phone combination coming out in June. It's, like, \$600 and it's already at the top of everybody's lists."

Of course, that kind of money doesn't grow on trees. It often means putting a lot of allowance aside or taking odd jobs.

"I work for my dad sometimes," said Jesse Ehrlick, a 14-year-old Grade 9 student. "I'll take a lot of it and put it aside. I'm saving up to buy an Xbox right now. I'm a long way off. It's a lot of money, but that's what I'm doing. I'm saving."

Alex Moskovitz, 16, is on the other end of the consumer scale. He's in no hurry to buy a new media player because he's happy with what he has - even if it is kind of old school.

"I use a CD player," said the Grade 11 student, who figures the world doesn't need another high-tech device. "I burn a lot of CDs and most of the time, if those CDs get ruined or the CD skips, I recycle those. So I have a bit of a green conscience."

And he's not the only one to make good use of his old stuff. Bramson is also satisfied with the gadgets he received long ago - as long as they work. He got his PDA as a bar mitzvah present two years ago.

"It still works perfectly," the Grade 10 student said. "I bring it on all my trips because I don't want to bring a giant laptop. I plug memory cards into it, which have my music and my files. And I can plug the same card into my camera and computer, so I can link them all, which is really cool."