

Fun with Facebook: The Impact of Focus Groups on the Development of Awareness Campaigns for Adolescent Health

[Research poster presentation #53]

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Purpose

Efforts at improving adolescent health through mass communication are frequently undertaken by corporate design firms using traditional design development methods. While such methods may create work that is aesthetically significant, its effect on its intended audience is often overlooked in the process. Left unaddressed are youth media consumption, existing knowledge of health issues, and youth social patterns.

Methods

This project presents a model for developing effective communication by directly engaging designers with their adolescent audience. By conducting focus groups with local youth, we wanted to learn about 1) attitudes and prior knowledge about the areas identified in Indiana's Adolescent Health Plan, and 2) consumption of media (how they consume popular culture and current events) and preferences in programming (what they consume—favorite shows, videos, music, etc.). An additional aspect of this project was the capacity of the design team to interpret and utilize focus group data.

Results

Knowledge of adolescent health issues: Designers learned first-hand youth attitudes toward adolescent health issues and were able to use the information to develop their communication. Storylines, dialog, and casting decisions were well informed by the focus groups. Media consumption: While television remains the most popular method of media consumption, social networking sites play a large role in determining what media youth consume. Focus group conversations included discussion about favorite musical artists, television programs, and commercials. The connection to peers and information sharing enabled by Facebook presented the most potential for effective media communication and development. These data resulted in development of public service announcements (PSAs) and a health survival booklet. PSA resembled instant communication or ‘chats’ on Facebook and addressed topics of obesity, stress, vehicular safety, and substance abuse. By mimicking chats in progress and using other popular Facebook features, these PSAs provide a familiar visual reference for youth while leveraging its social networking function for emotional impact. The handout booklets balance practical information with content intended to entertain as well as inform the reader. The small size of the

booklets responds to concerns about discretion, while easy access to reference information makes the booklet useful for youth and parents, caregivers, or professionals.

Conclusions

As a product of the Indiana State Adolescent Health Plan, this project promoted health awareness through PSAs and promoted intervention through print materials. In a media landscape distinguished by fierce competition for the youth audience, a young design studio, trained in 'user-centered' design methodology, developed relevant and informative communication materials to raise awareness about adolescent health issues. The parties involved, their relationship to each other, and the project development process itself is a model for the production of relevant public awareness campaigns.

Sources of Support

None.