Get what you pay for or pay for what you get?
Comparing the impact of popular promotional strategies used in a public health marketing initiative

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MCD

- Founded in Augusta Maine – 1966 – NGO
- Maine is in the northeastern corner of the country bordered by Canada, New Hampshire and the Atlantic Ocean
- We currently work in Maine, other US states, and 15 African countries.
- Active in the prevention, management and remediation of chronic and infectious diseases as well as in behavioral health and policy.
- Particularly interested in multi-sector projects and the ROI of the programs we design.
21 Reasons & MESAP

• **21 Reasons**: Field project based in Portland, Maine, USA. Uses community organizing and environmental-change strategies to reduce youth access to alcohol.

• **MESAP**: Provides substance abuse prevention training and technical assistance based on our lessons learned in the field.
This presentation

• Case study comparing traditional vs. online marketing strategies to address alcohol consumption by young adults in a small city

• Examines results including...
  ▪ Number of total respondents
  ▪ Demographic accuracy in reaching target audience
  ▪ Return on investment

mainebac.org
Brief Alcohol Check-up
The Project: **MaineBAC.org**

- Part of a broader initiative to address excess alcohol consumption among 18-25 year olds in Cumberland County, Maine, USA.

- Web-based alcohol assessment and feedback tool used e-CHUG, designed to reduce high-risk drinking among college students (Hustad, Barnett, Borsari, & Jackson, 2010; Walters, Vader, & Harris, 2007).

- Organizers translated e-CHUG to be used with off-campus audience.

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The Project: **MaineBAC.org**

- Tool aims to help move high-risk subset of the target audience from pre-contemplation to contemplation of reduced-risk drinking.

- Marketing focused on directing target audience to visit MaineBAC.org, from which they would then click on link to the test.
Marketing Strategies

• Earned media
• In-person outreach and distribution of branded materials
• Online advertising

Strategy: *Earned Media*

• Press release distributed via email in July 2008 to announce the launch of website

• Resulted in news and editorial coverage by several local and regional media outlets, including newspaper and television news
Strategy: **In-person Outreach**

- Conducted by young adult “promoters”
- Conducted at free outdoor concerts, outdoor fairs and festivals, and evenings in the “Old Port”
- Promoters received training & scripts to promoters to enhance consistency.
- Promoters taught to visually identify potential members of target age group and offer free branded merchandise
Strategy: **Online Advertising**

- 2008: Banner advertisements on two locally popular news sites.

- 2009 and 2010: A series of 7 ads on Facebook, targeted at members ages 21-25 living in Portland region.
Process Measures

- **# news stories generated**: This helps measure earned media efforts.
- **# branded items distributed**: This helps us to measure in-person outreach efforts.
- **# online ad impressions & “click-throughs”**: This helps us measure online advertising efforts
Outcome Measures

- **Site visitors:** Number of unique site visitors to the MaineBAC.org shell
- **Test takers:** Number of individuals who clicked through from MaineBac.org to take the e-CHUG test
- **Demographic information:** Self-reported age of the test taker (used to calculate accuracy in reaching target age group of 18-25)

Results: Total numbers, 2008-2010

- **Site visitors:** 6,071 unique site visitors to MaineBAC.org
- **Test takers:** 2,918 clicked through and took the e-CHUG test
  - 1600 test takers during the first weekend (media coverage, website launch). Total of 2,392 test takers for year 1.
  - In years 2 and 3, the number of test takers dropped to 280 and 246 respectively.
Results: Demographic Accuracy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Site visitors</th>
<th>total # taking test</th>
<th># in target age taking test</th>
<th>% of test takers in target age group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>3,494</td>
<td>2,392</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>13.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>958</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>61.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>1,619</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>84.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>6,071</td>
<td>2,918</td>
<td>699</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion: *Earned Media*

- Primary cost is staff time.
- Large numbers visiting the site and taking the test.
- Effective strategy to optimize the novelty and news-worthiness of a project launch.

But...

- Momentum is not sustainable past initial launch period, unless new and news-worthy announcements are generated.
- Drew large numbers of people who were not in target age group.
Discussion: *In-person outreach*

- Relatively expensive
- Investment did not necessarily translate into web visits or target-age test takers
- “Getting what you pay for” is not guaranteed
- Quality control factors can impact success, unrelated to methodology or messaging
  - the personality of the promoters
  - the weather

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**Burger Converter**

Ever wonder how many cheeseburgers you drink in a month? Find out with MaineBAC.org. Personalized results, free, anonymous, online.

👍 Like
**Discussion: Online advertising**

- Total number of test-takers went down, but higher proportion are in target age group.
- Peaks in 2009-2010 online advertising coincided closely with peaks in web visits and target-age test takers.
- “Pay for what you get” low-cost price-per-click, indicates that online advertising that can be targeted to a tailored demographic is both efficient and cost-effective.

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**Return on Investment, estimated in cost per year**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total cost (in-person, online, and earned media combined)</td>
<td>$3,836</td>
<td>$1,058</td>
<td>$1,610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average cost per site visitor</td>
<td>$1.10</td>
<td>$1.10</td>
<td>$0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average cost per test taker in the 18-25 age group</td>
<td>$12.06</td>
<td>$6.11</td>
<td>$7.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

- **Traditional methods** (earned media, in-person outreach) netted the most visitors to the website.
- **Targeted online advertising** resulted in greater demographic accuracy and a higher return on investment.

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