

New Media - Going viral to influence teenagers

The Health Sponsorship Council (HSC) is a government agency that encourages New Zealanders to adopt and maintain healthy attitudes and behaviours. One of HSC's tobacco control programmes, Smoking Not Our Future, promotes smokefree attitudes and behaviours among 12 to 24-year-olds.

Educating and influencing young people can be a challenge, as many youth are increasingly resistant to traditional advertising. Smoking Not Our Future needed to find an innovative way to ask young people to consider the negative effects of smoking.

In response to this challenge the HSC has developed three anti-tobacco viral games that can be discovered, shared and played by young people, with the added bonus of limited spend on paid media placement.

A good viral game engages with the audience, allowing them to interact with your message. This increases the impact, makes it more likely to stick in players' minds, makes return visits more likely, and encourages people to pass it on within their existing social networks. Success with viral marketing hinges on peer-to-peer sharing of innovative content through existing social networks, which can be a powerful tool to promote messages.

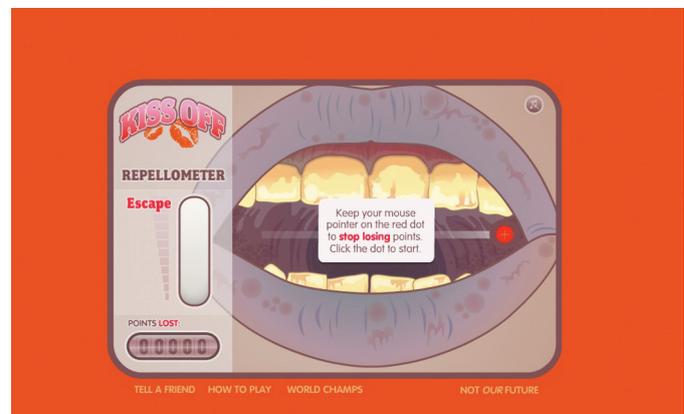
Kiss off

Kiss off, the first viral game developed by the HSC, was designed to contribute to anti-tobacco attitudes. It is based on the proposition that teenagers worry about their first kiss, about how good a kisser they are, and that it is undesirable to kiss a smoker.

The game was virally 'seeded' to gaming websites that young people visit to play free

online games. In a two-week period Kiss off had 3.5 million plays. At one stage the game was getting 56,000 plays an hour, or 15 plays a second.

Kiss off has also been integrated as a Facebook, Bebo and MySpace application allowing users to play the game on these sites.



A web development company designed and built the game but there was no paid media spend to promote the game.

Butthead Bash

Butthead Bash communicated anti-tobacco messages through an old-fashioned arcade-style fight fought by New Zealand celebrities that support Smoking Not Our Future and the evil Barry Butthead (a fictionalised tobacco company representative).

Players access the game through a website and also through 'badges' that players upload to their personal profile pages on social networking sites Bebo, Facebook and MySpace.

Butthead Bash was launched in late-2008 and was promoted through a 15-second television advertisement for one month, as well as limited online and print promotion, including a competition. Uploading the badge



automatically entered players into a competition to win tickets to New Zealand's largest youth music event - Big Day Out.

In a one-month period following the launch, there were about 15,000 plays of the game and nearly 2,700 entries to the competition.

Kanvas

Kanvas, which launched in early-2010, is a viral art game that aims to highlight the negative aspects of tobacco use. Players access the game through a website and create fun or bizarre posters using design features available on the site.

Players can share their posters with friends, upload them for public viewing on the site, or social networking sites like Facebook. Prizes, such as tickets to music event Homegrown, are awarded for the best posters.

Posters do not need to have an anti-smoking theme but the majority of posters show negative tobacco depictions.

Over a two-month period following the launch of Kanvas, 739 posters were created and there were 525 registered users of the game.

The game was promoted through contacts in youth media, as well as a small amount of magazine and online advertising.



Lessons learnt

- The success of viral games depends on developing content that will resonate with young people – that may mean taking risks and going out on a limb.
- You must have a realistic perception of the cost of viral marketing because you get what you pay for. Many YouTube videos are filmed on a hand-held camera but most viral campaigns are professionally produced.
- Success usually requires initial media buy and/or public relations.
- Developing and promoting a successful viral campaign may be lower cost than a mass media campaign but it can take time.

Visit notourfuture.org.nz to view the games. For more information call Susie Robertson on (04) 472 5777 or email susie.r@hsc.org.nz.

About the HSC

The Health Sponsorship Council's (HSC's) function is to promote health and encourage healthy lifestyles, with a long-term focus on reducing the social, financial and health costs of a number of health behaviours. To achieve this it delivers a range of initiatives that aim to improve health outcomes by:

- reducing cancers, heart disease, chronic respiratory disease and stroke by reducing the incidence and prevalence of smoking
- reducing skin cancers (including melanoma) and eye disease by increasing sun safe behaviours
- reducing obesity and its associated illnesses (diabetes, heart disease, kidney failure, joint deterioration etc) through better nutrition and physical activity
- reducing emotional, social and financial harms by reducing the incidence and impact of problem gambling.

For more information about the HSC visit www.hsc.org.nz

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