



GOODWORKS

## New PSAs: Avoid Unwanted Pregnancies

Ad Council Campaign Targets Touchy Topic With Humor

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Helping young women avoid unplanned pregnancy is the focus of a new PSA campaign from the Ad Council and the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. The multimedia effort, created pro bono by Euro RSCG, New York, is designed to reduce the rates of unplanned pregnancy among unmarried women ages 18 to 24.

According to the National Campaign, nearly one in 10 unmarried women ages 20 to 29 has an unplanned pregnancy each year, or 1.3 million pregnancies annually, giving the U.S. one of the highest rates in the developed world and a 13% increase among this age group between 2001 and 2006. While 84% of women in this age group believe it's important to avoid pregnancy right now, National Campaign research found that fewer than half are using birth control consistently.

The new PSAs, which include television, radio, print, Web, social media and nontraditional advertising, use humor to emphasize the importance of birth control and end with the line: "You didn't give up on sex. Don't give up on birth control either."

The ads direct women to go to [Bedsider.org](#), a new online and mobile program offering information on birth control options. Bedsider, developed by design firm IDEO, also allows users to set up birth control and appointment reminders, see videos of their peers discussing personal experiences and view short animated videos that debunk some myths surrounding birth control.

The effort will include outreach and engagement on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#), such as a new application debuting later this month that will invite users to anonymously submit their funniest or most awkward romantic moments.

"The Bedsider PSA campaign has an important message that we wanted to communicate in a world full of important messages," said Lee Garfinkel, co-chairman of Euro RSCG, New York, in announcing the effort. "In order to get this cynical young woman to pay attention, and break through the clutter, we had to do something that was relatable and would have a high impact."

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control is a straightforward proposition. The campaign is exclusively about what options you have if you decide you're going to have sex and don't want to get pregnant. It's really education in prevention, as simple as that."

The public service announcements aren't on a par with comedian Whitney Cummings' risqué material, but they do make any sex jokes we parents make look incredibly lame. In one of them, two partners struggle to remove jeans that are fashionably skinny. In another, the slippery shower stall poses a problem. In yet another, a passionate couple is interrupted by a voyeur: a black and white Great Dane-boxer mix with a disapproving stare. (No worries: I'm not spoiling anything here. The ads, created by the New York agency Euro RSCG, are way funnier than I am.)

At the end of each spot, viewers are directed to the website [www.bedsider.org](http://www.bedsider.org), which also uses humor to help visitors compare 15 kinds of contraception, locate the closest place to acquire various methods, set up regular birth control reminders, and watch videos of real women sharing birth control experiences, including women who are not having sex.

Animated shorts on the site debunk sex myths. As in, is it possible for a guy to be too big for a condom? One click on a drawing of a dachshund, entitled "2 big 2 fit," [brings up the answer](#). Want advice for better sex? The site has that, too, for example, "Warming the feet can increase your chance of orgasm by 30%." Who knew?

Bedsider is a project of The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, a nonprofit organization that bid last year for the coveted Ad Council support. The project is being funded -- to the tune of several million dollars -- by a private foundation that the campaign says has no connection to the pharmaceutical industry.

The [teen pregnancy rate](#) has declined nearly 40% over the past two decades, but rates of unplanned pregnancy among young adults have remained stubbornly high. This stagnation compelled Sarah Brown, the National Campaign's CEO, to seek fresh thinking, including help from IDEO, a San Francisco-based design firm whose clients include Converse shoes and the smartphone alternative Peek.

"We need to rebrand contraception as something that promotes self-determination, education and achievement," Brown said.

Not everyone will agree with Brown, of course. Recently, several conservative Republican lawmakers attempted to rebuke the concept of contraception as an endorsement of "consequence-free sex" that will bring about a "pagan society," and said it uses public funding to prevent a generation from being born. (I am not making this up. See NPR correspondent [Julie Rovner's broadcast](#).)

The problem is not contraception, dear U.S. Rep. Steve King and others; it's not taking advantage of contraception. Fewer than half of the young adults surveyed by Guttmacher said they used birth control carefully and consistently.

I confess I have some difficulty understanding why so many young couples today don't use birth control faithfully.

When women of my generation moved into adulthood, we had very few people to talk to about sex and only a couple of choices of birth control. Illegal and dangerous abortions were common. So it's easy for us to mutter something like, "Don't these young women know how lucky they are?"

Well no, many of them don't. Nor should we expect them to. What we can do is recall what it was like to do a little mattress dancing at their age, and how concerns about school or friends or the possibility of getting pregnant could keep us from really enjoying ourselves.

Few things in life feel as good as good sex, especially with a loving partner. And today, just as in the past, young people often have to brush away a bunch of pesky thought-gnats to enjoy it. The fear of pregnancy no longer need be one of those pests, and bravo to the Ad Council for reminding us all of that.

The opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of Laura Sessions Stepp.

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