

How Can We Reach Youth Using Social Media? – Video Transcript

(Highlights from Dan Melton's Presentation at the "Taming the Media Monster" Conference, June 26, 2009.)

Dan Melton: ...right now sex and media can go out and hit three hundred million people in our country like that. But when it comes to actually delivering an intervention or talking about sex education, you have to go through three hundred million bureaucrats uh, which is a huge problem. So while the distribution systems are set up right now for sex and media, distributions are not set up for sex education and media and that's what my company is really working on doing is changing that paradigm to give you the ability to very quickly get out and deliver your message or your organization uh, to the people in your city and your zip code, even in your block. ...we hear a lot about generation Y or generation net uh, but actually today we're really seeing Facebook, Myspace and Twitter as the definition of our current generation. Uh, it's sort of like—think about radio or television. Uh, those defined the generation when those came out, but we didn't say electricity, right. We didn't say electricity define those generations, right. The Internet today is...is just sort of like electricity to young people and really it's about Facebook. It's about Myspace. It's about what we do on the Internet. ...Facebook and Myspace and Twitter is all about building up uh, this sort of new skill set where I as a young person can influence a thousand other young people in twenty seconds. It's a really important point to think about in that we're really in a new age where consumption and mass media uh, are in the power uh, are in the hands of a sixteen-year-old. Uh, I, how many people are on Youtube and have watched Fred? Anybody seen Fred? Yeah. Fred...Fred is a sixteen—I think he's seventeen-year-old. He started this (unclear) site, he does once a month in a very high-pitched voice uh,

talks about his life and it's hysterical and stupid. Uh, but that's would, that's what makes it great. He has a million people who follow him on Youtube. That doesn't even count how many people watch his videos. So if Fred wants to say one thing about a condom, fourteen million people are gonna see that at, within twenty-four hours of him publishing that episode. So I guess what I'm saying...saying about that is, you are in control of sex education at your agencies, but Fred is in control of its distribution uh, which is sort of an interesting point to think about in that you have to think about when you deliver your interventions in this new digital media is you don't get to control it anymore, which is a big, big piece.

...but, who here thinks uh...uh, kids are gonna want to play educational games on Facebook? Raise your hands. You'd be wrong actually uh, I'm happy to say. Uh, we hear about Mafia wars and all of the actual sort of violent games, but what we don't hear about are the very popular games that are put out by one of the companies called, "Play Fish." And so this is Play Fish. They have mini-golf, not really educational. Uh, they also have uh, the Biggest Brain. This is an IQ development uh, game. They have another one called, "Geo-challenge." And what I'll do real here is I'll just sort of demonstrate this. Uh, I'm just gonna type in Play Fish so we can see all their games...So here are some of Play Fish's games. Uh, and we can see here Bowling Buddies and what you'll notice down here is on some of their games, this one has got about two point three million active users per month playing this game. Their Geo-challenge quiz and their My Biggest Brain have three million and six million active monthly users uh, that play this game. So this is really where it's at. So earlier we heard that uh, a number of young people don't think that clinics ought to have Myspace pages; uh, that they probably wouldn't want to see uh, your clinic or your organization on Myspace, but what we're not asking—and this is for the researchers in the room—would you play a sexual health game online? Would you actually

play something or engage in a game online? And I think the answer is “Yes,” demonstrated by this group. So one of the things that we’re working on is uh, a...a software as a service uh, excuse me, a software as a service sexual health game—sexual health education game. And what we’re doing is we’re developing a system in my company to help organizations develop question sets and deliver ‘em through an interactive game on Facebook that are tailored to your geographies. And what’s really interesting and what I love about the MyTwitFace generation is they give us their demographic information so I know who is accessing your services by demographic, by location; by age; by race; by gender; by content on their actual site; by what they look at online; what other games they have and how many friends they have. Who are those friends? What are their demographic information? What do they do on Facebook? So you...you sort of can understand that uh, I get see not only you, but who you are connected to and understand if you’re an influence or not on Facebook. And this is what we’re working on and my time is running out. So uh, we are working on illustration right now so this is the actual technology, it’s not the uh, what the end user’s going to see. But essentially what it is, is it’s a sex venture and you go and you play a sex venture and uh, I will just customize my character here...What we’re doing is uh—so I’m gonna play this game and I know how old this person is. I know their age. I know their gender. Uh, I can also look at their activity streamline and pull out content pieces in it. And I also have access to their friends’ network, all right. So with those five pieces of data that you have, I can now design a tailored intervention specifically for you based upon those characteristics. So to give you an example, if you’re a fourteen- to sixteen-year-old and you’re a female, can anybody tell me what the two things that I need to make sure that you know about, top two? Anybody? (Inaudible, from audience: “Gardasil”). Uh, that’s a big one. That’s right. Anybody else? Come on. If...if a fourteen- to sixteen-year-old comes into your clinic and

you...you get two points with them, one you probably ought to talk about Gardasil. What's the other one? Birth control in general, right, contraception. We want to talk to 'em about those things. That's right. So in our game that's exactly what we want to do because we know who's accessing this. That's what we want to display. ...so what we're trying to do is develop applications that you can pay fifty, a hundred dollars per month and still have access to things like this and deploy 'em at your local level and get evaluation data out of it as well.

(Question from the audience: "How do we evaluate this?")

But how do you design an RCT when every single intervention is different? Uh, every single play is different. Uh, moreover, ethically how do you design an RCT intervention when your friend can get on Facebook and send you that link for that game and then you get to play that game? So the challenge to research in the audience is how do they evaluate this? Now I can give you all the data on all the plays, all the shares, all the demographic information associated with every single person when they play it and we're doing pre-imposed surveys on a percentage of the people who play it. So I can give you all that data, but the question is how do you evaluate it? How do you control? How do you, you know, control especially for spurious effects? I mean, you know, as an example, when my game pops up, Trojan condoms pop up in the upper right hand corner sometimes, right. So there's multiple elements that are going on inside Facebook. It's a big problem...