

Reaching Tech-Savvy Youths

NOPE Task Force has started a new Facebook page directed at youth who are spending considerable time immersed in digital media. Reaching youth online takes times and patience.

By Karen Perry



As anti-drug advocates, we do everything we can to teach our nation's youths to stay clear of dangerous drugs. It's a message we echo in classrooms, community centers, and certainly at home.

But what about online?

Young people, especially those ages 8-18 and tech-savvy known as "Generation M2," are immersed in electronic media. These kids and teens spend nearly eight hours a day in front of various electronic screens – that's more time than sleeping, doing schoolwork or getting involved in other activities, according to CNN, citing the Kaiser Family Foundation.

So we have to bring our messages to them – in their digital space. But how?

One way is through social media.

At NOPE Task Fore, we recently created a separate Facebook page for youths aimed at ages 13-22. We've started posting content that's more appealing to them, like asking pointed, short questions and getting them to respond. This new page is in addition to our existing Facebook page, which we are now targeting toward parents and advocates.

Reaching youth online takes times and patience. For one thing, social media trends that take months to play out in the adult world can come

and go in a matter of days among teens. But teens can easily be engaged if we follow some basic principles.

Here's several of them:

- Use tools they already know like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram;
- Create content that's easily shareable;
- Find opportunities for youth to engage, collaborate, and start conversations;
- Be creative, entertaining, and funny in what you post, since Generation M2 gets bored fairly fast;
- Don't take your messages too seriously but make them worthwhile as they are competing with many other distractions.

And, know this: close to 64 percent of online teens blog, share content, and "remix" information, meaning they embrace the web -- and so should all of us.

We are seeing a major shift in how young people spend their time, and where they get information. Teens are more social media savvy than most of us because they have grown up using social media and have more time to learn it. Many say it's in their DNA.

One writer on Social Media Today describes teen online behavior as this: "They want a genuine experience, they want to be heard and recognized by the brand. They want to be famous and anonymous at the same time and they want you to leave them alone, while not ignoring them."

So true, right? As advocates, we have to get comfortable in using social media if we're going to reach youth online. There's no way around it.

"Like" our new NOPE Task Force for Youth page:
www.facebook.com/NopeTaskForceForYouth

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