

Youth and Social Media: Engagement Suggestions

The world of social media is growing every year – new platforms come and go and it can be tricky for organizations to keep up. When a new platform comes along it is hard to know if it is here to stay or if it will go by the wayside. For example, many in the social media realm were excited by Vine, an app that let you create and share 6 second videos. At its height it had 100 million daily users, the same number that login to Twitter daily. However, even with a big following it didn't last, and in fact only lasted three years (2013-2016).

That is one reason why it is important to think about the best use of your staff resources in terms of setting up and maintaining one or more social media platforms. Social media can be a great way to reach youth, but choosing a platform is not easy. Here are a few basic questions that can help you get started:

1. Who is your priority audience and what platforms do they most commonly use? Have you been able to reach out to youth in your community for their suggestions?
2. How much staff time will it take to set up an account? How much time weekly to maintain it?
3. What are your communication and outreach goals? For example, do you want to raise awareness of clinic locations/hours, promote special events, conduct health education, and/or use it as an intervention to address a specific problem in your community like intimate partner violence or homelessness? How would each platform help you achieve those goals?
4. What is your organization's social media policy? If there isn't one, it may be a good idea to create one with your organization's communication staff.
5. What platforms does your organization use? Do you need to create your own or can you ask whoever maintains the larger organization's accounts to post content for you? For example, if your health department already has a page, can you send content to the administrator of that platform?

One advantage of social media is that it is relatively easy to get started on any of these platforms, however to make it effective and worth your time may take both effort and patience. Before choosing a platform for your agency, an approach to consider is to create an account and start following some organizations you think are using it well. You may also ask youth who they are following. Following others can help to see how and why the platform is working for them before diving in.

The goal of this resource is to give an introduction to your likely candidates and some pros and cons for each. You may be familiar with some or all of them, but may not have come across how organizations are using them in their work. We looked for examples of organizations that use each medium effectively, especially examples from sexual health and/or youth related organizations where possible. Hopefully taking a look at what these organizations are doing will help you narrow down your options.



Instagram is a web or phone app for sharing pictures and videos and has a series of filters that can be used with photos that has increased its popularity. It is mainly used for sharing images, but you can be creative with what those images are. You can take a picture of a flyer, display tables or art on your walls, turn a word or pdf document into a picture with your location and hours, or use memes

and infographics that you find or create yourselves.

Pros: Since it is image based, it can be colorful and good for promoting events. Lots of youth are on Instagram and use it for sharing their photos. One of the best things about Instagram is that it can be used sporadically - it does not tend to have the same expectation as Facebook to post content every week or Twitter to post content every day. It is a relatively low maintenance platform.

Cons: The major con is that it is difficult to convey information that cannot be represented graphically.

Examples of Reproductive Health Organizations using Instagram:

Teen Source: <https://www.instagram.com/teensourceorg/>

Bedsider: <https://www.instagram.com/bedsider/>

The Tumblr logo, consisting of the word "tumblr." in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font on a dark blue rectangular background.

Tumblr is a blogging platform, but can also be easily used to add other types of content such as images. If you already have a text based blog, this would be an easy one to work with. You could copy your content onto Tumblr, then add some pictures or animated gifs to spice it up.

Pros: It is a versatile platform in that you can post long text entries, pictures or graphics, animated gifs, a picture with a long or short text explanation, pretty much whatever. If you want to go for a humor-based approach it is a good option. It is another platform that can be updated sporadically and still be effective.

Cons: Is not as popular as some of the other platforms.

Examples: Planned Parenthood has a great Tumblr, they even have a "Live chat with an Educator" feature built in <http://plannedparenthood.tumblr.com/>
Refinery 29: <http://tumblr.refinery29.com/>



Twitter is a versatile platform that can be used to achieve a variety of goals. Effective twitter accounts post their own tweets and also retweet what other individuals or organizations have said. So to do it right, it can be one of the more time intensive platforms.

Pros: Tweets are short and sweet with a 140 character limit. Youth may have less family members on Twitter as opposed to Facebook, so they may feel more comfortable retweeting or liking tweets. Another major advantage is that you can capitalize on trending hashtags to spread awareness and gain more visibility. You can post photos and images as well, including cross posting from Instagram.

Cons: Twitter accounts need frequent engagement to be effective. Effective organizations tweet or retweet multiple times per day.

Here are some different **examples** based on different goals:

Intervention based goal, for example promoting healthy relationships:

Futures without Violence: @WithoutViolence

NativeYouthSexHealth: @NYSHN

Information/health education:

Bedsider: @Bedsider

Planned Parenthood Southwestern Oregon: @ppsworegon

Guttmacher Institute: @guttmacher

Youth focused:

Sex Etc: @sexetc

Scarleteen: @Scarleteen

Awareness Raising:

SisterSong @SisterSong_WOC

COLOR (Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity & Reproductive Rights):

@colorlatina



Snapchat is a phone app with a large youth following. In 2016, the number of daily users of Snapchat surpassed Twitter. Snapchat is a bit difficult to describe, but it's "hook" is that content is only available for a limited time. We recommend watching the following tutorial on how to get started, create an account, and follow some organizations to get a sense of how it could be used for your organization <https://youtu.be/QRdCFAH6-I0>.

The best way to find organizations is to google the "[organization name] + snapchat" to get their snapchat name. For example, "Center for Reproductive Rights + snapchat". Once you have the snapchat name, it is easy to add them as a "friend."

There are a couple of ways Snapchat could be useful for a reproductive health clinic since it many youth use the platform. One way is to create a story or series of stories. For an example, see this great step by step PowerPoint presentation by Planned Parenthood of the

Pacific Southwest on how to make it work for your organization: http://thelatruster.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/planned-parenthood-Murtfeldt_Snapchat.pdf

Another way Snapchat could be useful is that you could also use it as a confidential question and answer app. Since users can send a snap to organizations directly, a youth could send you a video question, then you could respond by sending them a video answer. The content is not public but can only be viewed once. Youth may be more comfortable asking a question directly on Snapchat than on a live Facebook or Twitter Q&A where their friends or followers could see what they commented or tweeted.

Pros: Snapchat is popular with many youth and is more informal than other platforms. Many businesses are already using it.

Cons: May be a steeper learning curve than other options, and content has a time limit—stories last for only 24 hours and unopened snaps from one account to another must be viewed within 30 days.

Examples: Planned Parenthood of the Pacific Southwest, Center for Reproductive Rights



Youth may tell you “Facebook is dead” but the numbers show that many youth are still active on **Facebook**. The reality is that it is still a centralized place for national and international news, events, photos, and social connection. For best practices on Facebook, see our [Facebook Tips and Tricks](#).

Pros: Longer content is permissible; it doesn’t have the 140 character limit of Twitter. If you have a budget, you can advertise to gain followers as opposed to other platforms, where it can be challenging to get people to discover your page.

Cons: Facebook shows your friends (who may also be your actual family) what you like and comment on. So in that way it is not a very discreet platform.

Examples: Planned Parenthood of Southwestern Oregon: www.facebook.com/ppsworegon
CCare: www.facebook.com/oregonccare



Phew that is a lot to consider! Still not sure? Feel free to reach out for questions or suggestions, we are here to help! If you would like to chat about your options, contact Liz Gharst at elizabeth.a.gharst@state.or.us.