

Using Smoker Demographics to Select Cost-Effective Recruitment Advertising

Gloria Meyer, MA, Daniel Lawrence, PhD,
George McPhail, Michael Fiore, MD, MPH,

PROBLEM

As smoking demographic patterns have changed, soliciting smokers for research studies or cessation programs has become more challenging. In the past, advertising in local newspapers was often sufficient. Now, general newspaper readership has declined and smokers are less likely to be consistent newspaper readers. Moreover, the cost of newspaper advertising has increased.

- In 1964, over 80% of adults were counted as weekly readers of newspapers. By 1997, that number had dropped to 58%.
- The demographics of smokers has also changed over the past 30 years. In Wisconsin, 60% of smokers have a high school education or less. About 50% earn less than \$25,000 a year and 77% earn less than \$50,000.

METHOD

The University of Wisconsin Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention (UW-CTRI) conducts numerous smoking cessation clinical trials and intervention programs (e.g., the Wisconsin Tobacco Quit Line) that regularly recruits smokers through the use of advertising. To ensure that the advertising used is cost-effective, the Center uses a two pronged approach.

1. UW-CTRI examines the demographics of the smokers and of the advertising media and selects media with the largest smoker-demographic audience.

- Most media—newspaper, radio and television—have precise demographic information about their audience. They have data on the age, gender, educational level and income level of their audience, including specific data on the “day part” (a block of time like “morning drive” for radio) or the specific program most watched or listened to by a particular audience.
- Both television and radio stations will produce the ads for use on their stations. The costs for television production often depends on the size of the advertising schedule purchased, but those costs can be negotiated.

2. To ascertain the most effective recruitment strategies for smokers, UW-CTRI systematically evaluates the effectiveness of media advertising by tracking the number and timing of calls.

- For clinical trials, phone screeners are required to ask how the caller heard about the trial. The responses are noted on the screening sheet. (See Chart #1)
- The Wisconsin Tobacco Quit Line also asks each caller how he or she heard about the Quit Line. The results are distributed weekly to UW-CTRI so that comparisons can be made depending on the advertising that is running.
- The method is not fool-proof. If more than one station is running ads, callers may not be able to differentiate between two or three stations. Over time, however, a picture of the most effective advertising purchases does emerge.

Chart #1

Source of Advertisement	Passed Screening		Failed Screening		Total	
Fox 47	49	24.3%	37	17.8%	86	21.0%
NBC 15	55	27.2%	56	26.9%	111	27.1%
WBUW 57	21	10.4%	10	4.8%	31	7.6%
TV (unknown)	30	14.9%	11	5.3%	41	10.0%
State Journal Classifieds	7	3.5%	10	4.8%	17	4.1%
State Journal Main Ad	12	5.9%	6	2.9%	18	4.4%
Isthmus	4	2.0%	38	18.3%	42	10.2%
Not Reported	8	4.0%	15	7.2%	23	5.6%
Other	11	5.4%	24	11.5%	35	8.5%
Waitlist	5	2.5%	1	0.5%	6	1.5%
	202	100%	208	100%	410	100%

RESULTS

Through careful tracking of how callers heard about the Quit Line or a clinical trial, UW-CTRI concluded that television by far is the most effective and cost-effective medium for attracting smokers to cessation programs.

- Generally, smokers are more likely to be reached through television, especially if there's a phone number to remember. Although radio can be used to target specific smoker demographics, the need to remember a telephone makes radio less effective.
- Most television that appeals to smokers is also the least expensive—daytime soaps, court TV, late night and over night. Advertising in prime time is not only overly expensive but it is more difficult to gain the smoker's attention. It is not necessary to gain the largest audience, just the largest audience of smokers and of smokers who are likely to need help in quitting.
- If a telephone number that the viewer must call is included, frequency is vital. A short run of three or four days with greater frequency is better than a longer run of a week or two with fewer ads.

CONCLUSIONS

- **Smoker demographics are the key to effective cessation advertising.**
- **Media—especially radio and television—have useful demographic information that can help organizations target smokers.**
- **Tracking of calls and how callers heard about the program provides valuable insight into the effectiveness of advertising.**
- **For programs using a telephone number, television is by far the most cost effective medium if used carefully.**

CONTACT

Gloria Meyer, University of Wisconsin Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention
 1930 Monroe St. Suite 200, Madison, WI 53711
 608-265-4447 GKM@CTRI.medicine.wisc.edu