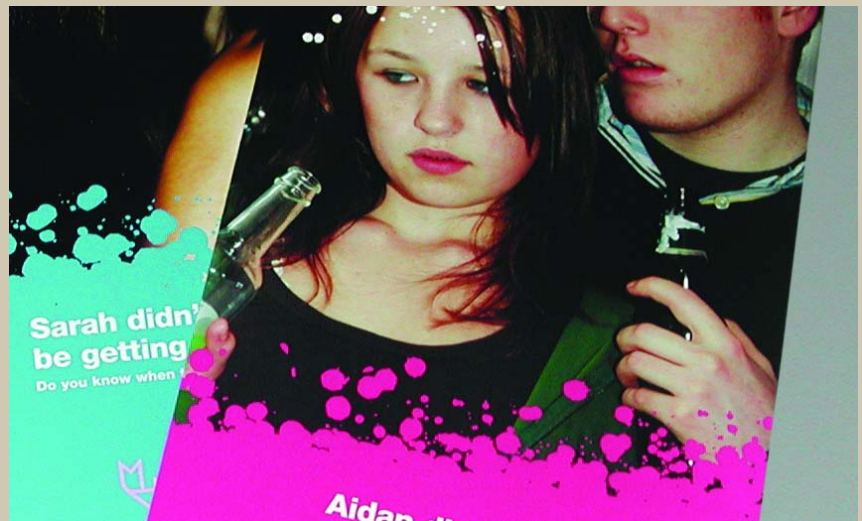


Getting inside the minds of teen drinkers

KEEP CONTROL

Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA)



THE ISSUE

We could pretend that youth don't drink.

We could also pretend that heavy drinking is harmless. That it doesn't harm friendships and reputations. That it doesn't put youth at risk for injury or sexual assault. That there isn't evidence the alcohol industry targets youth with its advertising. That abstinence messages resonate with youth and actually work. We could pretend a lot of things.

Or we could face the facts.

And the facts are that in a 2005 survey, 62% of Ontario students in grades seven through twelve reported drinking. Of them, 23% (about 220,100 students) reported binge drinking at least once in the month before the survey. And those were just the ones who admitted it.

THE CREATIVE PROCESS AND THE APPROACH WE TOOK

The *keep control* campaign is all about facing the facts – edgily, bluntly and unapologetically. In short, it's about communicating with youth the way they communicate with one another.

Through reviews of best practice studies around risky drinking and interviews with youth advisory teams in Toronto and Ottawa, a portrait emerged of the character and concerns of teenagers who drink, the environment in which they live and the types of messaging that would actually connect with them.

It quickly became apparent that scare tactics don't work – especially when they present exaggerated or worst-case scenarios that fall outside the personal experience of the audience. However, teens are concerned about social embarrassment. In short, they don't want to look stupid in front of their friends.

Given that, the *keep control* campaign focuses on the idea that youth, armed with the facts about the consequences of risky drinking, are intelligent enough to make the right choices about alcohol – which is to say, the choices that help avoid social damage.

The striking *keep control* posters depict the moment at which a fun party topples into something with serious consequences. They ask youth (and it is an important distinction that we ask, rather than tell) if they know when to stop drinking:

Five drinks ago Aidan didn't think he'd be raping his friend's sister.

Do you know when to stop before you lose control?

If you're going to drink, be smart about it.

keepcontrol.ca

The campaign's radio spots take the next logical step, focusing on the consequences of losing control. Keeping in mind what we learned from our research, the consequences are presented without judgment or hyperbole, and with an emphasis on the social costs ("And everybody knows."; "People are talking about it."; "My parents know.").

The television spot, which ran on MuchMusic as part of its promotional partnership with OPHA, as well as on other stations province-wide, likewise focuses on the aftermath of a moment of lost control. Judging by the comments on the keepcontrol.ca blog, youth recognized the scene as something within their experience – and appreciated its honesty enough to visit the campaign website.

The keepcontrol.ca website is designed as an opportunity to "continue the dialogue" begun in other collateral by engaging youth with features such as:

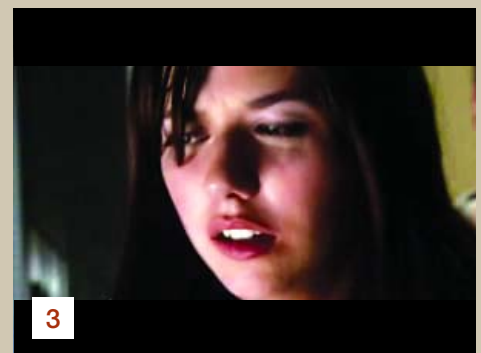
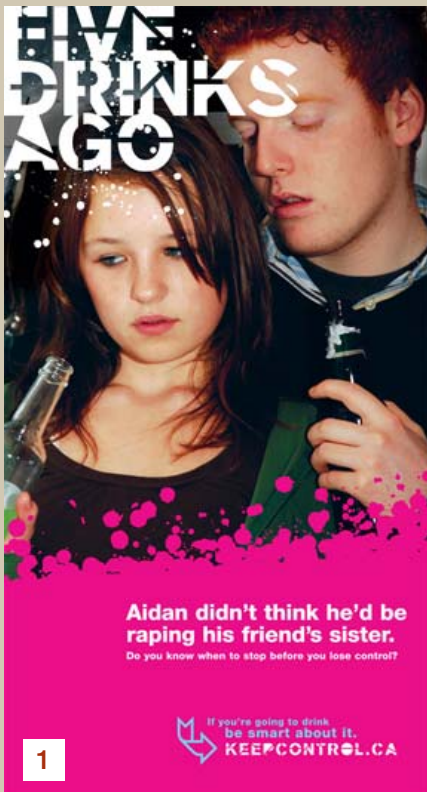
- An interactive quiz through which they could earn free music downloads from MuchMusic;
- A youth-led blog;
- Access to other campaign materials (television, radio, print); and
- A variety of downloadable templates for t-shirts, stickers and other "take the message to the streets" pieces.

But getting the message out there in a form youth would accept and embrace was only the first step. Getting them to adopt it as their own and carry it to their peers was our true goal.

OUTCOMES

Perhaps the key measure of success for the *keep control* campaign was the effectiveness of its peer-influence program. Pilots of the program were launched in six English and French markets across Ontario. In each market, youth were trained to use campaign materials and have since gone on to make presentations in schools, community centres and youth centres.

Growth in the number of youth-led presentations and activities has led Health Canada to finance pilots in four new markets, including two Aboriginal communities in Northern Ontario and additional English and French communities. HBS is currently working with an Aboriginal youth advisory team to develop campaign materials suited to their communities, cultures and unique challenges.



- 1,2 Posters
- 3 Television Spot
- 4 Website