



ACT for Youth Center of Excellence

# prACTice MATTERS

A collaboration of Cornell University, the University of Rochester, and the Center for School Safety

## Technology and Social Media for Adolescent Sexual Health: 2015 Focus

by Deb Levine, BSW, MA

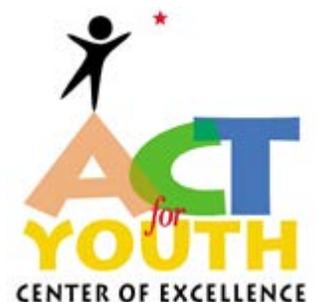
Changes in technology and social media are always happening. Just as soon as you've mastered Facebook, teens and tweens are onto something else. Yes, it's the same as it ever was – whether it's the newest gadget or hippest band: Once parents and grandparents are onto it, it's over for teens.

The good news is that teens' questions about sex and relationships don't change very much through the years, and teens need trusted adults and smart peers to help them find medically accurate, timely answers. This is important because as youth professionals you can focus on what you know. You know program development and you know how to engage youth in your sexual health programs and services so that they are youth-driven, youth-first, and cutting edge.

There's no playbook for working in the media-saturated environment our teens live in, nor is there one way to reach the vast majority of teens with accurate health messaging. While this article won't try to cover all of today's newest, latest, and greatest in technology (because, yes, it will be obsolete by the time it's posted), I'm going to break down current topics into a few major, manageable themes:



**Deb Levine** has devoted her life's work to changing the way young people access and engage with sexual and reproductive health services. She founded YTH (Youth-Tech-Health), an organization that advances the health of youth through technology, and Go Ask Alice!, one of the first online forums for sexual health. She is also the co-creator of Circle of 6, an app that promotes dating safety. Follow her on Twitter: [@DebLOakland](https://twitter.com/DebLOakland)



February 2015

- Rock star digital videos
- In-classroom sex ed
- Instagram, Vine, and other visual platforms
- Mobile apps for sex education

## Rock Star Digital Videos

Since so many youth-serving organizations are making digital videos to raise awareness, educate, and inform about sexual and reproductive health, it's smart to use our limited budgets to be sure that the right people are seeing them, and that the videos have an impact. Making videos "go viral" is hard work. And while you may not even want your video to go viral, you do want your digital videos to be seen by as many of your target audience as possible.

While it's unrealistic, and certainly over budget, to create a 25-page marketing plan for each video your team creates, you can think about the timing of each release, as well as who your partners are, in order to ensure good reach to the right youth. Here are a few tips to help you take your videos that you spent so much time on into the five-figure range.

**TIP #1: The first days matter.** Time the launch with a current event, and be ready to send out emails and shout outs via social media. Anecdotally, Mondays and Tuesdays are the the best days to release. In addition to your usual partners, think outside the box. You want to spread your message beyond those already converted.

**TIP #2: Tag your titles.** In other words, use the search terms young people would use in the titles of your videos.

**TIP #3: Keep your videos short.** I know it's hard when there's so much to say. But youth (and many adults) today have very short attention spans: under five minutes.

**TIP #4: Tell a good story.** Evoke emotions such as awe, excitement, amusement, anger, and anxiety. Contentment and sadness don't work very well.

**TIP #5: Be ready for after-the-viral.** If your video does take off, quotes will be needed for blogs, reporters, and websites. Make sure your website is up to date and ready to roll, with current "Contact Us" information, and that your team is on call to answer inquiries promptly.

## Teens PACT: Marketing Success

Teens PACT, a project of Community Healthcare Network in New York City, has worked with youth to produce many high-quality, short videos about sexual health and related topics.

"Know the Signs," a video about dating violence and abuse, has over 26,000 views, whereas many of their other videos from the same time frame are hovering at 500-5,000 views. Teens PACT had an informal marketing plan around "Know the Signs" that worked.

The video was launched in August 2012, the same month that the journal *Pediatrics* did a special issue on teen dating violence. Teens PACT capitalized on relationships with partner organizations to promote the video, sending emails and links out widely. Because of the new research, media outlets were interested. Media response included video pickup by blogs and embeds in Facebook pages, such as the Never Alone Again blog and the Keep Calm Stop Emotional Abuse Facebook page.

**Teens PACT "More Than Just Sex" YouTube channel:**

<https://www.youtube.com/user/morethanjustsex>



## In-Classroom Sex Education

Working with students in an interactive way stimulates memory and critical thinking; when they are in the heat of the moment, it's more likely they'll remember what they learned. Technology can be used during in-classroom experiences as a teaching tool or a research tool. Both have benefits for students' enhanced learning and information retention.

Resources:

**BioDigital Human.** This site depicts a 3-D body and provides lesson plans on various systems, including the reproductive system. (Registration is required. Must use a Chrome browser and be connected to the Internet).

<https://human.biodigital.com>

**PlayForward.** Elm City Stories allows the player to interact with a virtual world, making decisions and seeing possible outcomes. The game is designed to help prevent HIV infection.

<http://www.schellgames.com/game/play-forward/>

## Instagram, Vine, and Other Visual Platforms

Facebook and Twitter are not working well these days for agencies seeking to engage youth. They are still working for advocacy and communication efforts with adult supporters, so don't give up on Facebook and Twitter. But to reach young people, consider that today's youth are very visual – cropping and editing photos and videos on their phones and posting for the world to see and comment upon.

Here's a quick tutorial on Instagram and Vine, two sites popular with teens today:

**Instagram.** Compatible with iPhone and Android devices; free download from iTunes and Google Play stores.

*How it works:* You take a photo or shoot a video with the camera on your phone, and use Instagram or other free apps to edit (add text, change colors, make a collage, merge photos). Then you post it on your Instagram account with a caption. Like Twitter, searches are by hashtag. A quick Instagram search for #sexed came up with selfies alongside conference presentations, and everything in between. There is room here for good, solid sex info!

## Teens and Tech Stats

The Pew Research Center surveyed teens in 2012, giving us a snapshot of teens' digital life. Online engagement and cell/smart phone ownership have likely increased since the survey.

- 93% of teens age 12-17 have access to a computer at home.
- 78% have cell phones, and nearly half of these have smart phones.
- One in four teens go online primarily via cell phone.
- Teens from lower-income families are “somewhat less likely” to go online.
- Facebook continues to be the most-used platform for teens, though enthusiasm is “waning.”
- On average, 24% of teens who go online use Twitter. Black teens who use the internet are more likely than white teens to be Twitter users (39%).

View the full reports here:

### Teens and Technology 2013

<http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/03/13/teens-and-technology-2013/>

### Teens, Social Media, and Privacy

<http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/05/21/teens-social-media-and-privacy/>

---

**Vine.** Compatible with any phone that has a data plan. Free mobile site.  
<https://vine.co>

*How it works:* You can explore, watch, and upload very short (six seconds or less), looping videos. Searches are by hashtags. The most popular videos inspire response videos.

Keep alert for Snapchat, Kik, and sites yet to be developed. Hashtags seem to be the commonality among sites right now, making it easier for users to find what they want and cultivate followers across multiple platforms.

## Mobile Apps for Sex Education

Everyone's going mobile. Between phones and tablets, it's really time to integrate the best apps out there into your repertoire to connect youth to clinical services. Close to 50% of teens in the U.S. today have smartphones already; this number is only going to grow. Here are a few of the trendsetters in the sexual and reproductive health arena. All are downloadable in the iTunes and Google Play stores, unless otherwise noted.

**Teens in NYC.** Created by the New York City Department of Health, this app includes cool sections such as short videos about access to services, clinic experiences, and consent.

**Condom Pro.** Created by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and distributed via Bedsider, this game is meant for youth over 17, but could be played by anyone. There are two parts to each level: open the package without ripping or tearing the condom, then place the condom on an object (candlestick, carrot, etc.). It gets harder each time you level up.

**My Birth Control.** Created by Planned Parenthood Federation of America in mobile web format, this app is good for youth without smartphones as it can be accessed on regular phones with data plans. Youth answer a few lifestyle and health questions to receive recommendations for birth control methods.  
<https://www.mybirthcontrolapp.org/>

**The Kickback.** Also created by Planned Parenthood in mobile web format, this is an app that helps youth negotiate through common situations at parties, in high school, etc. with alternate endings and consequences.  
<https://kickbackapp.org/>

**Circle of 6.** Created by a team of experts in the field, including the author, and distributed by Tech4Good, Circle of 6 is an award-winning safety app designed to prevent sexual assaults and dating violence and abuse among teens and young adults.

**Crisis Text Line.** Created by DoSomething.org, Crisis Text Line offers teens in a crisis a chance to communicate with a trained counselor about anything from relationships, to safer sex, to suicide prevention, simply by texting START to 741-741.  
<http://www.crisistextline.org>

---

## Conclusion

There's no telling what's next in the world of mobile technology and social media. Given that teens' questions about sex and relationships haven't changed in our lifetime, it should be doable for youth-serving teams to stay on task with medically accurate information provided in a context and format that is comfortable for today's teens. As always, you will be successful if you keep communication open with your younger colleagues, incorporate the passion of youth into the work, and remain agile enough to change with the tech media landscape. ★



### **ACT for Youth Center of Excellence**

Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research  
Beebe Hall • Cornell University • Ithaca, New York 14853  
607.255.7736 • [act4youth@cornell.edu](mailto:act4youth@cornell.edu)

[www.actforyouth.net](http://www.actforyouth.net)

[www.nysyouth.net](http://www.nysyouth.net)

*The ACT for Youth Center of Excellence is a partnership among Cornell University Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research, Cornell University Cooperative Extension of New York City, the Center for School Safety, and the University of Rochester Medical Center.*