Developing a Social Media Program to Accompany a Classroom-based Nutrition Education Intervention

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Background

The AFRI Media Literacy Project, a joint project between WSU Extension and UW, is designed to prevent childhood obesity by increasing healthy eating behaviors among families with children ages 9-14 years. The project will address the influence of media messages through the development, testing, and dissemination of an intervention that includes media literacy and nutrition education.

Introduction & Objectives

Dosage is an important and often limiting factor when undertaking a nutrition education intervention. Research has shown that multi-faceted programs have been shown to have greater impact in terms of stimulating behavioral change, and programs that also include follow-up efforts are also more effective than classroom sessions alone.

The objectives for this practicum were to:
•Research usage of social media in public health interventions
• Identify best practices
•Develop appropriate recommendations for the AFRI Project team

The goals were to identify technologies that can (a) build a sense of community amongst program participants, (b) provide an ongoing connection between educators and participants, and (c) keep participants engaged and active in the areas of media literacy and healthy eating, leading ultimately toward behavior change.

Methods

•Literature review of public health and health promotion interventions that utilized social media.
•PubMed searches included terms such as social media, social networks, nutrition education, health promotion, Facebook, Twitter, text messaging, social networking, and related terms.
•Other sources used for literature review and/or identification of best practices include Google searches, technology websites, social media websites, stores/portals for mobile and web-based apps, and interviews with individuals in the technology and public health sectors.
•Analysis of technology trends, social media adoption, and technology usage.
•Conducted feedback sessions with educators and key stakeholders (and in Spring 2013, with community focus groups) in order to gain additional insights into applicability and feasibility of program recommendations.
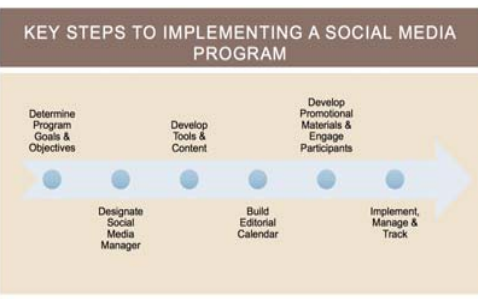
Recommendations for Development of a Social Media Program

Sample Twitter Page

Results & Discussion

•Social media and web-based technologies are increasingly pervasive and important in the field of public health.
•Social media can provide opportunities to extend reach & impact of a dosage-constrained classroom intervention.
•Social media offers a natural & logical extension for a curriculum focused on media literacy.
•More than 80% of the target audience has access to computers, mobile technologies & social media, providing a good fit for implementation.
•Social media has been successfully used in related interventions, including weight management, nutrition & dietary change, physical activity, and adherence to treatment plans. Positive results include increased self-monitoring and self-efficacy, improved communications, and new or changed health behaviors.
•The overall effectiveness & applicability of social media in such interventions merits significant further study.

Conclusions & Recommendations

•Clearly defining objectives are key to program (and intervention) success.
•Development of and staffing for the position of "social media manager" will be important to ensuring program integrity and consistency. Haphazard efforts will likely result in poor results, or worse, biased research that lacks fidelity.
•One single platform should be developed and tested first, before expanding to additional platforms or technologies.
•Social media content should be developed in tandem with classroom curriculum to ensure consistency, integrity & appeal.
•Content should include a variety of different message types, each designed to provide a specific type of information or elicit a particular response.
•Community focus groups should provide initial feedback on platform type and design, message types and content.
•Pre and post-testing should be done in the pilot phase to evaluate the effectiveness of social media at achieving stated goals, before further deployment occurs.

Sample Facebook Group

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