

Social Marketing for the Digital Age

An Overview for Quitline Programs



Overview

About the Guide

This guide is designed to equip quitline programs with a practical resource for launching a digital social marketing campaign. Its purpose is to help you clarify your digital marketing strategy and ensure each step aligns with your program goals and priority audiences, following best practices in social marketing. Ultimately, this guide aims to help quitline programs of any size implement strategic, scalable, and evidence-based digital campaigns by providing advice and resources on how to get started.

Author and Contributors

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Disclosure of AI Assistance

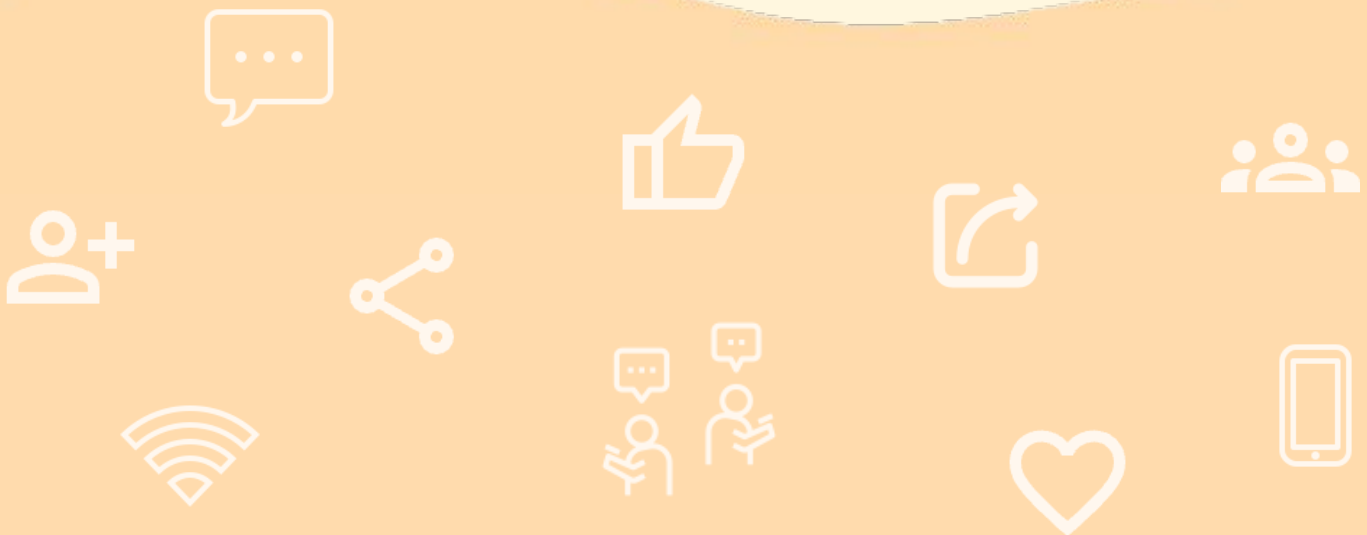
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Introduction to Digital Social Marketing



Introduction to Digital Social Marketing

Social marketing uses the principles of commercial marketing to influence behaviors that benefit individuals and society without a profit motive. Digital social marketing extends this approach to online environments, using tools like social media, search engines, and streaming platforms to create engaging, accessible content that promotes public health. Digital media is a general term for any information that is created, viewed, modified, and distributed in an online setting, including social media, video streaming channels, audio streaming channels for music and podcasts, and online search platforms.

Within the last 15 years, we have seen a rapid shift from ad buying investments primarily in traditional channels like broadcast TV, print, and AM/FM radio, to partial or primary investment in digital marketing. Different demographics may gravitate towards different channels or platforms, but today all groups are online to some degree. When we think of who is online, we usually think of teens (13 to 17 years old) and young adults (18 to 34 years old) using digital media, especially social media, where data show they are online with high frequency each day (Statista, 2025a).

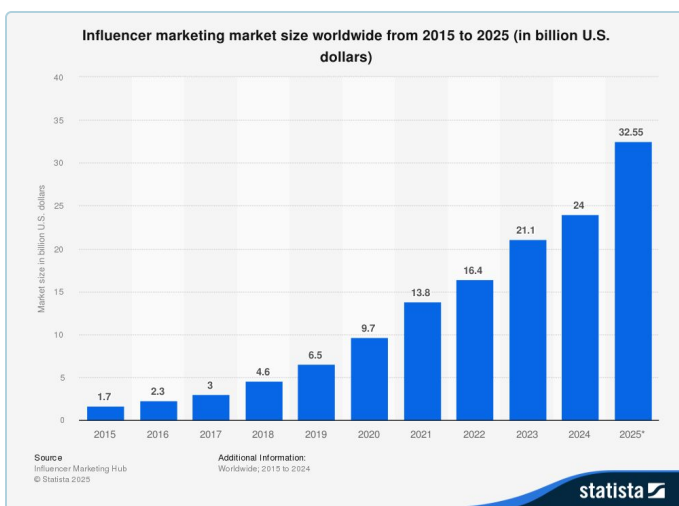


Image: Statista (2025b)

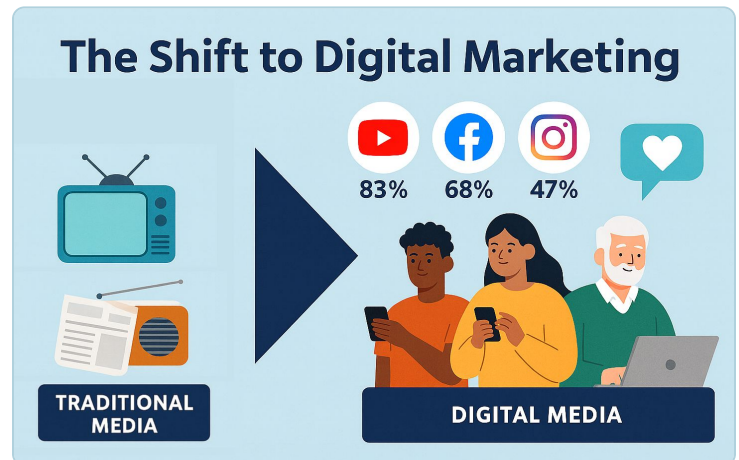


Image: The Shift to Digital Marketing (AI), Data from Pew (2024a)

However, adults 35 years and older are also using digital media (Nielsen, 2025a; Pew, 2024a). In a representative survey, 83% of all U.S. adults reported using YouTube, 68% used Facebook, and 47% used Instagram (Pew, 2024a).

The widespread use of social media means a large receptive audience is accessible with more opportunities for advertising. Audience accessibility and broad representation of the population is a major driving factor for the exponential growth in the global influencer market, with no end in sight (Statista, 2025b). With such a large and diverse audience online, there are increasing opportunities for different types of influencers of all demographics to be successful, making influencer marketing a viable option to invest through paid media. As the “digital native” generation (Millennial and younger) ages, digital and social media use among adults is expected to increase, thereby increasing the need to prepare our social marketing practices for a digital age.

How can public health adjust our practices to meet our audience on digital media? Think of businesses, technologies, and data as part of an evolving, interconnected digital ecosystem. Within the ecosystem, there is increased efficiency when sharing information and content, as well as easier access to resources or products. However, the ever-changing, unstandardized nature of the digital ecosystem makes it difficult to pinpoint marketing strategies guaranteed to reach the intended audience and there is no manual for “what works.” This lack of standardization is partly due to the fragmented nature of the digital ecosystem. Fragmentation in the digital ecosystem refers to increasing division and diversity of channels, regulations, and user behaviors online, resulting in infinite choices and inconsistent access to data to inform marketing decisions.

Despite these challenges, the digital ecosystem offers lots of opportunities for social marketing with synergistic effects for your program. In other words, when planned well, channels can work in tandem to achieve a better result than each would achieve individually. To maximize the impact of social marketing, start with a well-designed strategy using the parts of the digital ecosystem that will be effective in reaching your audience. Rely on research and try to stay informed. This includes reviewing your program data to monitor media performance and adjust your marketing efforts.

By defining the intended audience, their online behavior and preferences, and matching them to relevant channels, you can leverage this ecosystem to meet your audience where they spend their time and place ads that meet your program goals. A note of caution: the digital ecosystem also contains large amounts of misinformation and malicious content (Kanchan & Gaidhane, 2023); as public health practitioners, we have the opportunity to counter those messages and ensure that our audiences are receiving valid health advice and resources (Denniss & Lindberg, 2025; Ghahramani, de Courten, & Prokofieva, 2022; USDHHS OSG, 2021).



Image: The Digital Ecosystem (AI)

Within public health, we utilize digital social marketing to develop campaigns that persuade an audience to refrain from an unhealthy behavior, adopt a healthy behavior, or take another health-related action. For commercial tobacco cessation, we want to increase awareness about quitlines, promote program offerings, and drive users to cessation resources. Table 1 on the following page contains a few examples of how organizations have successfully implemented digital marketing for commercial tobacco education and cessation program promotion.

In this guide, we will cover introductory concepts to help you get started with a digital social marketing campaign, including setting goals and defining your audience, exploring different types of digital marketing, including influencer marketing, and describing what resources you'll need, how to get buy-in from your organization, and more.

Table 1. Examples of Digital Marketing Use by Quitline/Cessation Programs

Program	Smokefree.gov (Prutzman et al., 2021)
Audience(s)	General population, with resources for adolescents, women, military veterans, Spanish speakers, older adults
Digital Media Campaign	Smokefree.gov utilizes a multi-channel paid media strategy with multiple brands and ad campaigns across federal agencies driving traffic to web-based cessation resources.
Reported Metrics	In a one-year period, approximately 7 to 8 million people accessed Smokefree.gov Initiative's multimodal suite of digital interventions.

Example:

Variety of digital ads by Smokefree.gov



Images: Retrieved from Smokefree.gov website and social media pages in 2025.

Program	Illinois Tobacco Quitline (Jackson et al., 2025)
Audience(s)	Adults, with priority audience segments (males, individuals of lower socioeconomic position, and individuals with a mental health diagnosis)
Digital Media Campaign	Mass media campaign utilizing traditional media and digital media focusing on clicks-to-call and conversions (click to enrollment website). Promotion tailored to various audiences.
Reported Metrics	The Illinois quitline demonstrated high levels of social media engagement including clicks, likes, and comments (13.1 million total during promotion periods). Metrics showed that engagement stemmed from Gifs to increase attention, and click-to-call/enroll ads to increase accessibility.

Example:

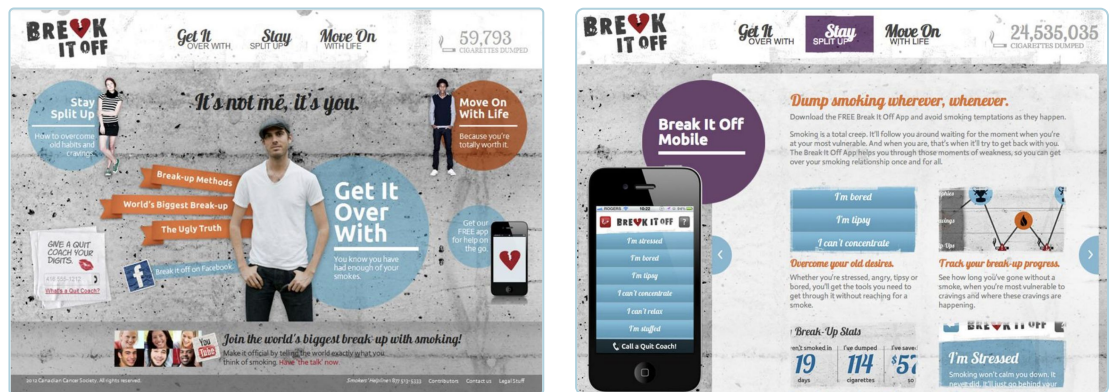
Four still frames from a 5-second Gif ad. Paired with post copy, "Nicotine addiction can take more away than you realize. Quitting helps you regain control. Call 1-866-QUIT-YES to get cigarettes off your mind now."



Images shared with exclusive permission from Rescue Agency; do not replicate or copy.

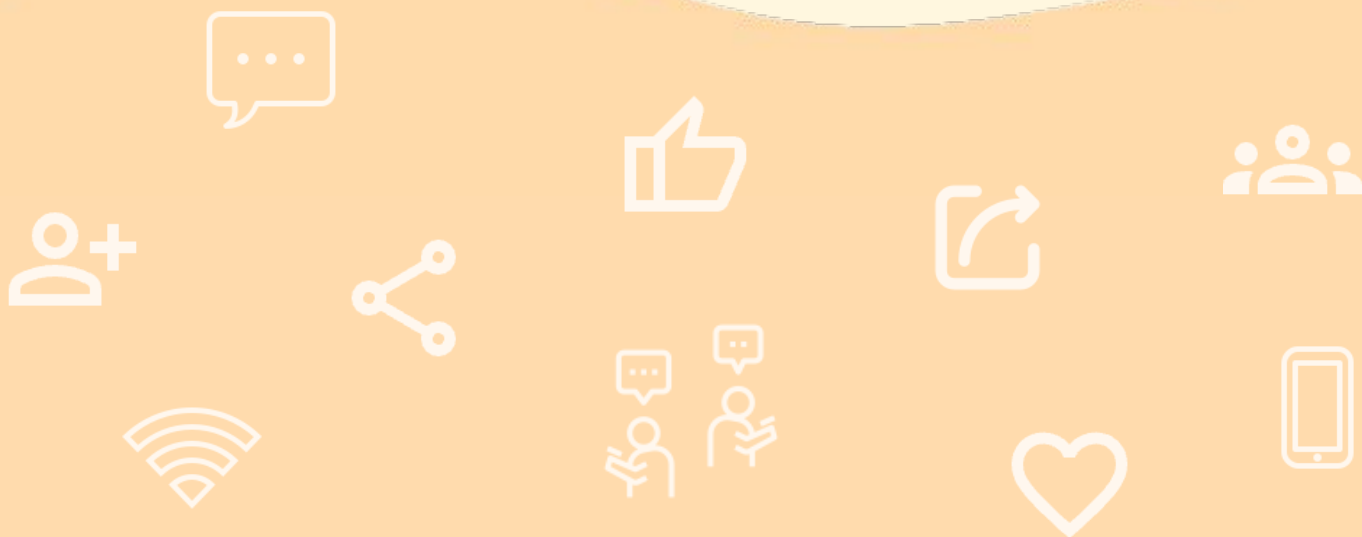
Program	Break It Off (Baskerville et al., 2016)
Audience(s)	Young adults in Canada
Digital Media Campaign	Comparing Break It Off (BIO)'s tailored paid social media campaign with messages comparing quitting smoking with ending a romantic relationship, to Smoker's Helpline (SHL), a general population paid and earned media campaign with referrals from health organizations and professionals. Dates: January 2012 to March 2012.
Reported Metrics	There were 44,172 visitors to BreakItOff.ca with 37,325 unique visitors. The average user viewed 2.47 pages during their visit. There were 3,937 installations of the mobile app, and 339 visitors interacted by posting content with the social media components (Facebook and YouTube). Of n = 102 study participants at follow-up, 78% visited the BIO website two or more times with 18% visiting six or more times. In comparison, SHL reached 488 young adults who smoke. Of n = 136 SHL study participants (19 to 29 years old) at follow-up, 68% received two or more telephone calls for counselling with 10% receiving six or more calls.

Example:
Break It Off website



Images from Baskerville et al. (2016); Campaign has been sunsetted and content is no longer available online.

Key Terminology



Key Terminology

The table below contains key terms that are commonly used to refer to digital marketing practices and tools, many of which will appear in this document.

Table 2. Terminology	
Term	Definition
A/B Testing	General population, with resources for adolescents, women, military veterans, Spanish speakers, older adults
Amplify/amplification	Smokefree.gov utilizes a multi-channel paid media strategy with multiple brands and ad campaigns across federal agencies driving traffic to web-based cessation resources.
Analytics	Using different channels and media tactics (see “Tactic” below) to promote your content with the goal of increasing its reach and visibility.
Audience segment	Tracking performance using metrics such as reach, engagement, and conversions, to optimize strategies.
Asset	A portion of your intended audience that has specific interests, characteristics, psychographics, demographics, use behavior, etc. For example, within the intended audience of teens who are at risk for smoking, there is an audience segment of teens who like playing online games.
Brand	The foundational, ready-to-use and/or reusable pieces of creative material like images, videos, or text used to build content for a campaign.
Brand safety	Describes the identity of your campaign or effort. Brand guidelines can help define the visuals that make a brand recognizable and the personality that will evoke who and what your brand represents.
Campaign	Practices that are used to keep a brand separate from inappropriate content that could damage its reputation. For example, a campaign with a teen audience would not want to place their ads on a liquor store’s website.
Channel	An organized, strategic media effort with a defined goal.
Comments	The medium that delivers a message. Some common channels include social media, digital video, television, and out-of-home advertising (e.g., billboards), among others.
Content	Responses to social media posts. Comments typically share users' thoughts about the content and can include text, emojis, memes, and gifs. Measures may include the number of people who responded to a post and/or the sentiment (i.e., positive or negative attitude) expressed.
Content creation	A general term for any advertising product that is distributed. Assets are the foundational, reusable pieces (like images, videos, or text), while content is the specific, finished product (like a blog post or social media post).

Content creator	Someone who produces various forms of digital media for an audience. The content can be educational, entertaining, or promotional, and is designed to engage and connect with a specific audience.
CTR (Click Through Rate)	Measures the percentage of individuals who click on a specific link or advertisement after viewing it. CTR is used to assess the effectiveness of online marketing campaigns across various platforms, including search engines, social media, email, and display advertising.
Digital media	A general term for any information that is created, viewed, modified, and distributed in an online setting, including social media and streaming channels. Essentially, it's anything you access or interact with through a computer or similar device.
Digital marketing	The use of online channels and technologies to promote products or services and reach potential customers. It encompasses a wide range of activities, including search engine optimization (SEO), social media marketing, email marketing, and paid advertising, all aimed at connecting with audiences and achieving marketing objectives.
Earned media	When others spread awareness, news, feedback, or other information about your organization or program. When others are sharing or promoting your program information without paid support, social media can fall into the earned media category. Earned media can often be negotiated with notably large media buys, called "added value."
Engagement	Interaction with social media. Traditional engagement metrics include likes, comments, and shares. Digital media platforms are releasing new ways of engaging with content, such as voting, swiping up, using a filter, or a mix of actions.
Engagement rate	The proportion of individuals who engage with a post compared to the impressions. The engagement rate is the proportion of times a post is engaged compared to the post's total number of impressions.
Feed	A continuously updating stream of content on social media, typically displayed on a user's profile or homepage. It shows posts, updates, and other content from accounts a user follows, as well as suggested content based on their interests. The feed acts as a primary way for users to engage with content and other users on the platform.
Following/followers	The number of accounts that choose to subscribe to the content of a specific social media account. When a user subscribes to an account, they become a part of the account's "following;" "followers" are the users who have subscribed to the account.
KPI (Key Performance Indicator)	A specific, measurable metric used to evaluate the success of a campaign in achieving its objectives.
Impressions	Measure of the total number of times an ad is presented to your audience, regardless of whether an individual actually saw, heard, or engaged with it.
Influencer	A person who has a following on social media beyond their personal friend group and family, with success building out their personal brand and can sway the opinions of others. All influencers are content creators because you can't influence an audience without having something to show them. However, not all content creators are influencers.
Influencer Marketing	Collaborating with social media influencers to expand reach and credibility.
Intended audience or audience	The defined group that you want to reach with a media campaign.

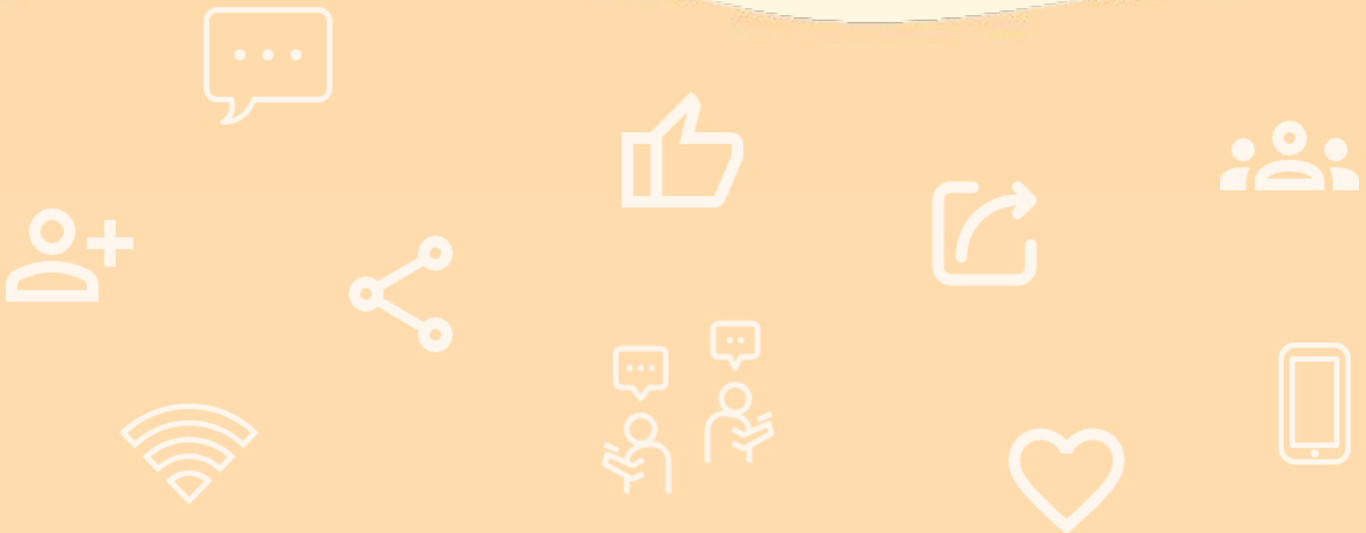
Likes/reactions	Clickable emojis available on a platform for users to quickly show their approval or feelings about content on social media platforms. Likes are a simple, one-click way to show you appreciate or agree with a post. Reactions, on platforms like Facebook, expand on this by offering a range of emojis (like love, haha, wow, sad, angry) to convey more nuanced emotions.
Messaging	The actual information and ideas conveyed in an advertisement to persuade the audience to take a desired action. Messaging encompasses both the words that are used and the framing (e.g., emotional, fear-based, hopeful).
Optimize	To continually improve campaign performance by adjusting strategies, content, targeting, or budgets based on data and results.
Organic media	Content shared on platforms without paying for promotion, like websites, regular social media posts, engaging with followers, and participating in conversations. Content is seen by users who are already following you, those who are served your content through the platform's algorithm based on their interests and engagement, or those who find your content through hashtags and shares.
Owned media	Channels owned by your organization that are managed internally. Examples include websites, blogs, and social media accounts.
Paid media	Content shared on platforms using direct financial investment to reach an audience and amplify a message beyond organic reach. Paid media allows targeting of specific demographics, interests, and behaviors; provides data to track performance; and increases reach and visibility.
Platform	A technology-based environment that enables users to create, share, and interact with content, as well as conduct transactions or engage in other digital activities. Platforms are categorized as social media platforms, content platforms, e-commerce platforms, knowledge platforms, financial platforms, service-oriented platforms, etc. In the context of campaign planning, we typically refer to platforms as the external brand identity that consumers recognize, such as Instagram and TikTok.
Psychographics	The psychological characteristics of a population that influence their health-related behaviors and responses to health campaigns. It goes beyond demographic data (like age, gender, location) to understand the "why" behind health choices. Includes interests, hobbies, pastimes, media consumption habits, day-to-day activities, values, attitudes, lifestyles, and personality traits.
Reach	The number of unduplicated people who have been exposed to your content. While impressions count every time content is displayed, reach measures the number of unique individuals who have seen the content. For example, if the same person sees an ad three times, that would be impressions but only one reach.
ROI (Return on Investment)	The value or impact gained relative to the resources spent on a campaign. While ROI is commonly thought of in financial terms in commercial settings, public health campaigns typically focus on social impact, health outcomes, and healthcare cost savings rather than profit.
SEM or Search Engine Marketing	Purchasing ads on search engine platforms based on key terms or phrases relevant to your program. The advertisement shows up in the search engine results usually at the top and marked with the designation "sponsored." Organizations may use a combination of SEM (advertising) and Search Engine Optimization (SEO).
SEO or Search Engine Optimization	A web development and communications strategy that improves search results without paying for ads. SEO involves improving your website's content, structure, and overall visibility to rank higher for specific keywords and attract organic traffic.

Shares	Measure of the number of times a social media post was forwarded by users to other users.
Talent	Actors and other people paid for their skills, such as acting and modeling.
Traditional Media	Encompasses established forms of communication that existed before the internet age, primarily including television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and books. Traditional media also includes large, outdoor billboard advertising structures, typically found in high-traffic areas, that display static advertisements to passing pedestrians and drivers, called out-of-home (OOH) advertising. These channels typically involve one-way communication, delivering content from a central source to a broad audience.
Video Views	Measure of the number of times a video has been watched. Each platform may define video views differently. Some platforms count a view as watching the video for at least 3 seconds but not to completion, whereas others count the number of views to completion (i.e., Video Completion). A platform may force video views to completion, like streaming sites that require ad views to resume content.
Video View Rate (VVR)	The proportion of individuals who view a video compared to the number of initial viewers. The rate is the proportion of times a video is considered viewed by the platform to the video's total number of impressions. VVR could also be expressed as Video Completion Rate (VCR) or Video-Through Rate (VTR).

Sources and Additional Terminology Resources

- [Food and Drug Administration Center for Tobacco Products](#)
- [Public Affairs Council](#)
- [Digital Marketing Institute](#)

Developing Your Digital Social Marketing Strategy



Developing Your Digital Social Marketing Strategy

A comprehensive intended audience definition and clear goals will guide your decision making. You may want to define or redefine your audience as a first step or simultaneously with goal development. Below is some guidance on how you might approach audience and goal development within a digital social marketing campaign, starting with your intended audience.

Defining and understanding your audience

As you navigate the digital landscape, it is important to understand how your audience(s) are utilizing digital media and the extent to which it is part of their media consumption. As a result of this research, your digital marketing campaign may stand on its own and rely solely on digital media to accomplish stated goals. In other cases, digital media may be a part of your overall outreach or communication strategy to achieve your goals. The strategy could include traditional media, such as cable or broadcast television, or in-person community events. Your choice to run a digital media campaign should be based on whether you can successfully reach your audience and convey your message through digital media.

A search of publicly available media use reports can provide some perspective on media use broken down by demographics such as gender, age, race/ethnicity, education, and income. Examples of publicly available reports include Pew Research Center, Nielsen, Data Reportal, Statista, and some academic research studies with large representative datasets. Of note, the digital environment changes quickly and audiences may shift away from certain platforms and new ones may emerge. Data can become outdated quickly in this context and it is important to keep a pulse check on your audience's digital media consumption even after a successful implementation.



Image: Audience Research (AI)

Other factors, such as psychographics or behaviors, can help to inform message development and media targeting. If you have the resources, consider conducting your own audience research to understand motivators and barriers related to the health behavior, or perceptions and usability of your services. You can try using [Google Scholar](https://scholar.google.com/) to search and peruse research studies on messaging strategies or approaches, either at the population level or within specific audiences. Meta-analysis, literature reviews, and studies with large population representative datasets are likely to be most useful because they summarize trends across multiple studies. Much of the academic research you find may not be relevant to your specific context or audience, and by the time it is published, it can be quickly outdated. Be cautious when relying on secondary research, especially in a field like digital marketing that is constantly changing.

You may feel that you already have a solid understanding of your audience(s). Keep in mind that when you incorporate digital media into your strategy, you will need to consider your audience's digital behaviors and preferences. Which channels will reach them successfully? Which platforms? What content do they like online? How might other parts of their online profiles translate to media targeting options? You might also consider audience segmentation. As an example, you may have a wide age range within your audience, such as all adults 18 years and older. Therefore, consider segmenting your audience further into age groups and/or identifying priority audiences that your program may not currently be reaching effectively. Digital marketing can reach broad audiences, but you must first define your priority audience and purpose.



Image: Audience Segmentation (AI)

Defining your goals

Prior to starting a social marketing campaign, pause and make sure you have a clear communication goal in mind. Goals can help you prioritize how to spend your resources, which is important as programs are often working with strapped budgets and limited time.

Common goals within public health tend to be related to increasing awareness or changing a behavior (either initiating, preventing, or changing it). Your goals will help you to define the purpose of your campaign and what outcomes you will measure. Too many goals can spread resources thin across multiple strategies, reducing impact and efficiency.

To help define your goals, you can start by asking these questions:

- What would my program want to promote with a campaign? A new resource? An app? Specific quitline services? An upcoming community event?
- Who is my intended audience? (e.g., ages, locations, health behavior profile, genders, relevant segments, interests, media consumption, etc.)
- How will I assess if I achieved my goals?
- What budget would be required to achieve my goals? (Keeping budget in mind can help you stay realistic.)



Image: Defining your digital social marketing goals (AI)

Some example goals for cessation or quitline programs include:

- Increase program, brand, or campaign awareness (i.e., to reach more people in your audience or to keep your program top of mind)
- Promote resources or program services to increase utilization (i.e., a new e-cigarette cessation resource, an app for tracking quit dates, free personalized counseling, increased quitline calls, etc.)
- Increasing engagement with your brand or message (i.e., increase interactions or connection with audience, build community)
- Increasing credibility or trust in an organization, brand, campaign, or message (i.e., be a trusted source of information and resources)
- Improving attention to campaign message(s) (i.e., increasing memorability or time spent with the message)

SMART Goals Framework

Consider using the S.M.A.R.T. framework to guide the development of well-defined, actionable goals that will help with planning and performance measurement.

S		Specific Clearly states what will be achieved
M		Measurable Includes quantifiable indicators
A		Achievable Realistic given available resources
R		Relevant Aligns with broader campaign goals
T		Time-Bound Specifies a clear deadline

SMART Goal Examples for Quitline Programs

Increase Promotional Reach: “By September 30, the campaign will generate 1 million impressions and 50,000 clicks on digital ads targeting adults aged 25–44 in rural counties.”

→ *This goal is specific (impressions, clicks, and audience), measurable, achievable within budget, relevant to reach expansion, and time-bound.*

Boost Treatment Reach: “By December 31, the quitline will achieve a 15% increase in new online registrations (from 2,000 to 2,300) originating from digital media channels.”

→ *This goal targets specific channels (digital media), uses a measurable percent increase, appears achievable, is relevant to service uptake, and specified to end-of-year.*

Improve Engagement Metrics: “Within three months, increase social media engagement rate by 10%, raising average post engagement from 3% to 3.3%, by testing two new creative formats weekly.”

→ *This goal is specific (engagement increase and timeframe), measurable (%), achievable (small improvement), relevant to content resonance, and time-bound (3 months).*

Once you have an understanding of your goals and your audience, you can move on to addressing which channels and platforms to use to reach your audience.

Your digital ecosystem

As you consider your program's digital marketing approach, it's important to understand the media options that are available to you. There are three primary categories of marketing channels used to reach audiences: paid, owned, and earned media.

Paid media refers to advertising that you pay for. When you pay for media promotion, digital media platforms have capabilities to reach specific audience segments through a process called "targeting." There are many paid media options available, and they continue to change as technology grows. A big advantage of paid media is that you can set goals within the platform, like getting more views or clicks, and the platform will try to show your ad to the people you're trying to reach.



Image: Paid media (AI)

Example Paid Media Channels

Social Media: Sponsored (i.e., paid) posts on social media; Ad formats: image, carousel, video, stories, reels

Display: Banner ads on websites or apps; Ad formats: static images, animated graphics, interactive ads

Video: Pre-roll, mid-roll, or post-roll ads on YouTube, streaming services, and streaming devices

Search Engine Marketing (SEM): Paid search ads

Streaming Audio: Ads served in-between music and podcasts; Ad formats: short audio spots, often paired with companion display ads

Programmatic: Automated ad buying across multiple sites/apps; Includes display, video, mobile, and audio

Owned media includes all the digital spaces your organization controls, like your website, email newsletters, or social media pages. You decide what content goes on these channels. You can also use paid strategies to boost your owned media, like paying for Google ads or search to help bring more people to your site, or putting paid support behind a social media post so more people see it.



Image: Owned media (AI)

Earned media is publicity you don't pay for directly. This might include unpaid social media mentions, community members sharing your content, or a local news story about your event. Sometimes, when you work with media buying agencies, they include earned media as added value (e.g., free ad placement on a relevant website), but it also occurs naturally when others share your work.



Image: Earned media (AI)

On the following pages we provide deep dives into how you can use paid, owned, and/or earned media via influencer marketing and partnerships.

Deep Dive: Working with Influencers

Influencer marketing is a type of digital marketing called a **sponsorship**, in which you pay someone to advertise your brand or message. Influencer marketing is a promising paid media tactic for delivering health information (Gupta, Dash, & Mahajan, 2022; Hudders, De Jans, & De Veirman, 2021; Merchant, South, & Lurie, 2021). An increasing number of studies demonstrate the ways in which working with both influencers and content creators can increase awareness of an issue or brand and lend credibility to your effort (Ahmed et al., 2025; Bonnevie et al., 2021; Kostygina et al., 2020; Powell & Pring, 2023).

Influencers are typically defined as people who have a following on social media beyond their personal friend group and family, with success building out their personal brand. Work with an influencer might include finding someone with a significant follower base who you hire to post content related to their personal quit journey.

Content creators usually develop and produce unique content based on a skill or passion and in their particular style. Creators can also be considered influencers when they have a notable following (typically over 1k followers, see Influencer Categories image below) and influence. In other words, all influencers are content creators, but not all content creators are influencers. Work with a creator might include hiring someone who gives advice about personal growth to develop content related to the personal benefits of quitting smoking.

In both cases, the influencer or creator would post the content on their own accounts, and you could also boost posts with paid media to increase reach and frequency.

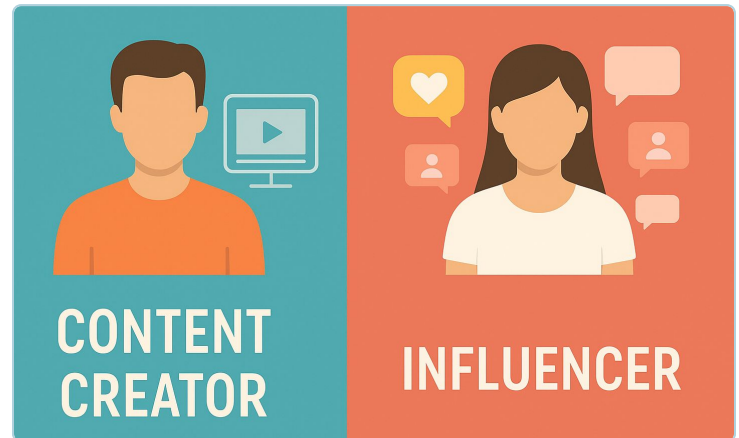


Image: Content Creator vs. Influencer (AI)

How do you know if influencer marketing is right for your program? Go back to your goals. What are you trying to achieve? Will working with an influencer help you achieve that goal? Working with influencers might be a good fit if your audience is engaged in social media and their interests are aligned with an identifiable influencer.

Additionally, consider whether there is a specific message to promote or action to demonstrate that can be authentically communicated through someone else's voice or experience, and/or you need help connecting to your audience online. Some of the most common questions about working with social media influencers are:

Is it expensive to work with influencers?

How do I find influencers to work with?

How do I get organizational buy in?

Is it expensive to work with influencers?

Cost for working with influencers depends on a few factors, including the number of followers the influencer has on social media and what you are asking them to do (Geyser, 2025). Some influencers are well-known national or international celebrities, whereas others may have a smaller local or niche audience.

For example, asking a nano influencer to post about your program can cost as little as \$25 (See Influencer Categories image below for an overview of common influencer categories). Sometimes when influencers are passionate about the topic or have a personal story to share they are willing to lower or waive their fees for a nonprofit or government agency.

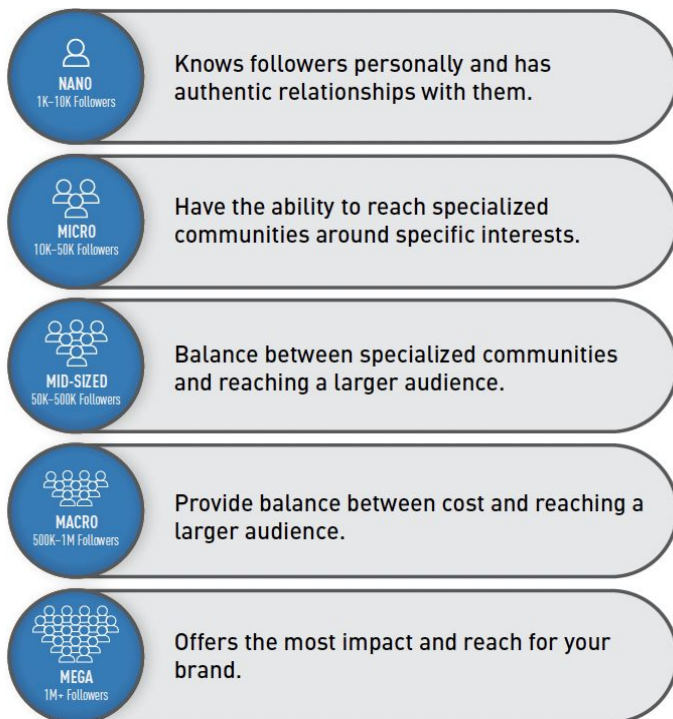


Image: Influencer Categories graphic from FDA Influencers 101 (2023)

How do I find influencers to work with?

There are two primary ways to identify potential creators to work with. First, you can search social media with keywords and hashtags that are relevant to a brand or topic. For example, you can look for general terms like #quitsmoking, #vapefree, #quitting, #tobaccofree, etc. to find creators who may be trying to quit, recently quit, or have a personal story about how commercial tobacco use has affected them. Look for influencers who appear in search results and scroll through their feeds, or collections of posted content, to see if their content generally aligns with your program and messaging.

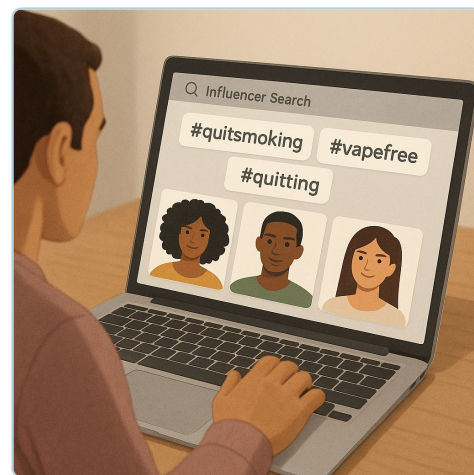


Image: Influencer Search (AI)

A second way to identify influencers is through an influencer management system license, such as CreatorIQ, Upfluence, Traackr, or InfluencerIQ (current as of 2025). Management systems use filters to help identify influencers based on specific criteria.

Common criteria filters include: audience interests, lifestyle, and online behaviors; influencer profile attributes like platform, follower count, niche, language, and indicators related to brand safety; performance metrics such as reach, engagement rate, video views, and post frequency; audience authenticity indicators such as follower credibility and family behavior history; and past brand or public health collaborations. These systems usually charge a licensing fee which would come from your program promotion budget.

How do I get organizational buy in?

First, demonstrate why influencer marketing is a good fit for your program based on your audience and goals. Your justification can be strengthened by citing some of the many examples of how influencers can positively impact public health efforts. We provide examples on this page and the following page:

1. General Facts About Influencers and Influencer Marketing

- As public health continues to evolve in the digital age, the role of influencer marketing is set to grow Statista (2025b). This means rethinking traditional approaches and embracing the potential of influencers to drive meaningful change.
- Influencers, especially micro and nano, can significantly amplify reach, build authentic trust, and support positive health behaviors (Scaccia, 2024).

The Food and Drug Administration's award-winning report called [Influencers 101: Best Practices and Practical Approaches for Public Health Campaigns](#) contains specific guidance for navigating each stage of working with influencers from goals to risk mitigation, including templates for outreach to potential influencers, example language for organizational buy-in, editorial calendar template, and how to develop vetting criteria or guidelines. It is an excellent resource for those considering working with social media influencers as part of their digital social marketing efforts.

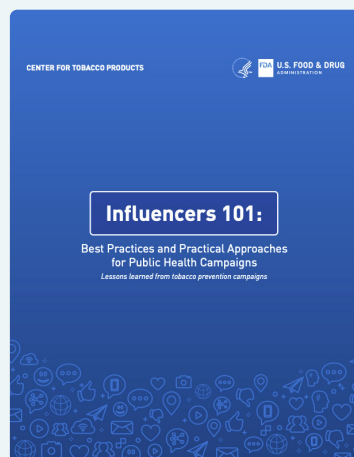


Image: Influencers 101 Cover
(FDA, 2023)

2. Real-World Examples from Academic Literature

- [Ahmed et al. \(2025\)](#) investigated how medical professionals on X (formerly Twitter) served as health influencers to promote accurate information about N95 respirators during the COVID-19 pandemic. By analyzing over 251,000 tweets using social network analysis and content analysis, the study demonstrated that these professionals were not only able to amplify evidence-based public health messaging, but also helped shape public perception and potentially influence policy conversations through their credibility and network reach.
- [Bonnevie et al. \(2021\)](#) describe a large-scale, influencer-led flu vaccine campaign during the 2018–19 and 2019–20 seasons, designed for African American and Hispanic communities. Micro-influencers (with 1K–50K followers) shared one vetted, science-based flu vaccine message in their unique voice. Across two seasons, content reached over 17 million users, generated more than 220,000 likes/shares, and around 4,600 comments, with approximately 94% of public responses being positive, demonstrating that influencer-based health promotion can enhance awareness and potentially shift social norms.
- [Kostygina et al. \(2020\)](#) evaluated how Twitter messages about the truth® campaign by both social media influencers and non-influencers boosted health messaging reach and engagement. By analyzing over 308,000 tweets from 225,000+ users, the study found that content crafted and shared by influencers generated significantly higher daily tweet volumes, campaign hashtags, and audience reach compared to non-influencer sources.

3. Real-World Examples from Media

- [Olivia Rodrigo](#) worked with The White House to promote youth vaccination and [posted about her experience](#).
- Truth Initiative's [#ThisIsQuitting Campaign](#) worked with [TikTok influencers](#) to promote its [EX Program](#).
- The Oregon Health Authority's (OHA) Native Quit Line worked with Buffalo Nickel Creative (BNC) to increase local awareness and engagement via Native influencers in Oregon, who [posted culturally relevant quitline content](#) on their own social media feeds.
- [Selena Gomez](#) posted about The World Health Organization's (WHO) [#SafeHands Challenge](#) on [Instagram](#).
- The Food and Drug Administration Center for Tobacco Products has published [eight unique case studies describing influencer marketing campaigns](#) from FDA's The Real Cost, Fresh Empire, and This Free Life (FDA, 2023).



9:54 AM · Jul 14, 2021

Image (above): Olivia Rodrigo at White House posted on MSNBC's X Page; Publicly available

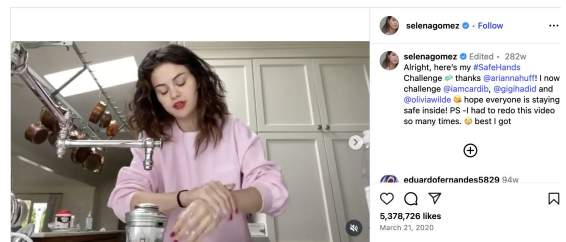


Image (above): Selena Gomez for WHO; Publicly available

Second, recognize that use of any media can present risks to your organization. Examples include: a security breach, cyberattack or brand impersonation; reputation damage from negative reviews or posts; and legal and compliance issues such as infringing on copyrights, data privacy concerns, violating content rules. Most of these can be managed with careful planning, but you may also want to seek legal advice to ensure you are meeting statutory obligations for your state or locality. For general information, see this article from [Sprout Social on Social Media Risk Management](#).

To mitigate risks related to influencer marketing strategies, ensure you develop a comprehensive plan that includes, at minimum:

- A comprehensive vetting process to find influencers who are the right fit.
- Written guidelines for influencers working with your program as well as an agreement or memorandum of understanding (MOU).
- Dates and expectations for content delivery, including the number of rounds of feedback from your program and anticipated timeline.
- What you will do if an influencer doesn't follow your brand guidelines.

A Note on FTC Requirements

Influencers are not spokespeople for your organization and they are not viewed as such within the marketing industry. The [Federal Trade Commission \(FTC\)](#) requires that influencers disclose all paid relationships in respective posts, which helps to make it clear that the relationship is based on an agreement. Treat influencer marketing as another media tactic in your communications plan. An influencer simply provides a platform for audience reach and/or content amplification.

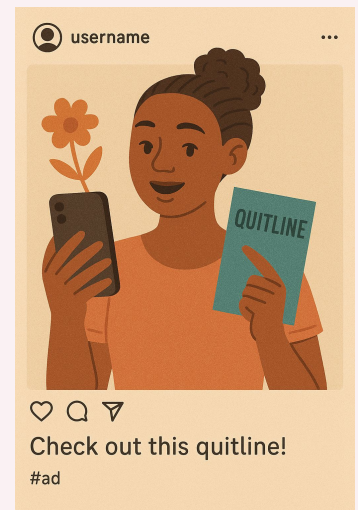


Image: Sponsored ad (AI)

Deep Dive: Using Partnerships to Amplify Messages

Another type of digital marketing is a partnership, in which two or more organizations work together to achieve mutual goals. Each party typically has an equal level of control and are jointly responsible for the content they create. This could involve sharing resources, collaborating on marketing campaigns, or integrating services.

A core strength of digital social marketing is its scalability and collaborative potential, especially when working with state and local partners. Working with partners to amplify messages on social media means to collaborate with another organization, agency, or brand to increase the visibility, reach, and impact of your content. Tobacco control programs, coalitions and affiliated organizations, and local public health departments can play a vital role in amplifying your messages, expanding reach, and tailoring content to resonate with regional audiences. Rather than relying solely on your own accounts and audience, you can leverage the partner's channels, credibility, and followers to extend the life and scale of your campaign at no additional cost. Leveraging these assets can significantly increase message visibility and credibility, especially for priority populations.



Image: Digital partner amplification (AI)

Amplification involves strategies like:

- Sharing or reposting your organization's content on the partner's social platforms.
- Tagging or mentioning your organization on social media to cross-pollinate audiences.
- Boosting your organization's messages through paid promotion (e.g., the partner funds or runs digital ads using your materials; you can also put paid support behind the partner's posts on social media).
- Creating co-branded content that aligns with both organizations' voices and audiences.

Specifically, with partnerships you can:

- Promote quitline services by putting paid support behind regional ads on YouTube and Instagram.
- Distribute content from influencers to rural or underserved communities.
- Run campaigns during state fairs or regional health observances/events, with geo-targeting to those specific zip codes.
- Provide partners with customizable digital toolkits for them to share on their owned media channels (e.g., branded graphics, captions, hashtags) they can adapt to fit local contexts.
- Reduce duplication in local partners running simultaneous paid media, increasing the cost-efficiency of your campaign.
- Create shared metrics of success by aligning on KPIs like impressions, video completions, click-through rates, or traffic to cessation resources. Sharing dashboards or simple performance reports helps maintain transparency and foster a sense of shared achievement.

Real-World Examples of Amplification Through Partnerships

My Life, My Quit

Rescue Agency developed assets and content to promote National Jewish Health's My Life, My Quit program to teen audiences. To support awareness of the campaign launch, Rescue Agency created a guide to share with local partners describing what it means to "amplify" content along with sample assets to create social media posts. The guide included post images (left) and post copy (right), as well as guidance on audience, how to post, where to post, etc.

Objective: Announce the campaign

Use one of the following assets* with the copy provided on next slide



MLMQ-FLAG-41 MLMQ-FLAG-37 MLMQ-FLAG-25
MLMQ-FLAG-47 MLMQ-FLAG-45

RESCUE *Use the associated asset ID#, above each image, to locate them in the NJH fileshare. They are available in Facebook and Instagram sizing. **MY LIFE MY QUIT**

Objective: Announce the campaign

Social Media Post Copy Options:

"A new digital ad campaign called 'End the Cycle' has launched in [state] that provides messaging and resources to teens to help them to quit vaping nicotine. The campaign is part of the My Life, My Quit program and aims to show teens that a nicotine addiction is not something they can control and that My Life, My Quit can help them stop vaping. Visit [FB: mylifemyquit.com](https://mylifemyquit.com) for details."

IG: @mylifemyquit

"[State] is currently implementing an ad campaign promoting 'My Life, My Quit', which is a program for teens who want to quit vaping nicotine. The program offers judgment-free support, 1:1 guidance, and easy-to-follow tips from expert coaches. Visit the resource pages on [FB: mylifemyquit.com](https://mylifemyquit.com) to get more information on how you can help teens in your community."

IG: @mylifemyquit

RESCUE Links within Instagram (IG) captions are not clickable, so replace website urls with "@mylifemyquit". IG user will be directed to the MLMQ IG profile vs FB user who will be directed to the website. **MY LIFE MY QUIT**

Image(s): My Life, My Quit Amplification Guide. Images shared with exclusive permission from Rescue Agency; do not replicate or copy.

New York State Quitline

Below are three examples of local partners amplifying state quitline content for New York State (NYS) Quitline, which is operated by Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center. In the first image, the local partner shared NYS Quitline's original post. In the second image, the local partner posted a clickable ad that drives people to the partner's own website, where there is information about NYS Quitline and a link to sign up for the quitline's online challenge. In the third image, the local partner posted a link to the NYS Quitline to promote the new website.

TFAC - Tobacco Free Action Communities in Columbia & Greene - Follow
June 25

Thanks for the awesome work you do in our communities, New York State Quitline! Summer is a fantastic season to focus on you and your health, so please share with the communities you serve, 18 y/o and up. We are thrilled to partner with the NYS Quitline these past 25 years, and it's a huge win for community health to celebrate this anniversary with them as part of TobaccoFreeNYS! Nicotine Ninja RN Columbia-Greene Community College

Quit-and-Win
Commit to 25 Days
Cigarette and Vape-Free,
Win \$2,500!*

Take the challenge!
Learn more and enter to win:
nysmokefree.com/contest

New York State Quitline - Follow
June 24

Commit to being smoke-free or vape-free for the first 25 days in August. You could win \$2,500 or one of ten \$250 prizes! Learn more and enter to win, visit nysmokefree.com/contest

Essex on Lake Champlain - Follow
July 31 at 5:00 AM

The New York State Quitline (NYS Quitline), in commemoration of its 25 years of public health service, has an added incentive this summer to encourage people who smoke or vape to become tobacco-free. Through a "quit-and-win contest," one randomly selected grand prize winner will receive \$2,500—10 additional winners will each receive \$250. Those who are willing to commit to becoming and staying tobacco-free for the first 25 days in August must register at.....

Win \$2,500!*

Take the challenge!
Sign up online by July 31, 2025 and commit to being

[ESSEXONLAKECHAMPLAIN.COM](https://essexonlakechamplain.com)
Quit-and-Win Contest Offers Prizes for Going Tobacco-free
The New York State Quitline (NYS Quitline), in commemoration of its 25 years of public hea...

Chenango County Health Department - Follow
April 29

New Website at nysmokefree.com

Check out the redesigned nysmokefree.com! The New York State Quitline's website has a fresh look, streamlined content, and – most importantly – mobile-first navigation. More than 80 percent of people who visit us online do so through their phones rather than through a desktop or laptop computer. The new nysmokefree.com experience ensures smooth and accessible browsing from any device.
https://www.nysmokefree.com/?utm_source=nysmokefree...

Home - NY Smoke Free
Quitting is hard. Our services are based in science and can help...

[Send message](#)

Image(s): Publicly available Facebook posts; located by searching posts and "state quitline"

A Note on Paid Partnerships

Partnerships are not limited to unpaid agreements and resource sharing. A paid partnership between a public health organization and a brand or private company involves a short-term agreement where the brand/company receives compensation (money or other valuable consideration) for collaborating with the organization on a specific project, often involving content creation and promotion. These partnerships are sometimes referred to as co-branding. The goal is typically to leverage each other's resources and audience reach to achieve mutual benefits, such as brand awareness or lead generation. For example, you could partner with a digital health app, a healthcare system, or even a relevant website. Partnerships are a good paid media option if you have the budget.

Real-World Examples of Paid Partnerships

The Oregon Health Authority's (OHA) Native Quit Line contracted Buffalo Nickel Creative (BNC) to help increase quitline campaign awareness and engagement. OHA and BNC partnered with PowWows.com and had them boost Facebook posts targeted to Oregon, place an ad in their dedicated Newsletter, add a website banner, and post Instagram stories and posts.

The Food and Drug Administration Center for Tobacco Products' The Real Cost youth e-cigarette prevention campaign released a 30-second video ad centered on the fact: "Vaping can deliver metal particles, like nickel, chromium, tin, and aluminum in your lungs." The ad and associated digital content launched on digital platforms in 2020, including social media (i.e., Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, and Twitter).

The Real Cost also partnered with Rick and Morty, a popular animated show among teens, and Adult Swim (AS), a programming block on Cartoon Network which includes Rick and Morty. Two custom social media video ads were created featuring one of the main characters, Rick. In the co-branded ads, Rick is shown executing a plan to forcibly extract the metals from e-cigarette users' lungs with a giant magnet. These ads were shared on Adult Swim and Rick and Morty social media pages during an agreed upon time period in 2021, which helped extend reach through a trusted messenger.



Images: Publicly available images of The Real Cost logo (FDA),
Rick & Morty Season 1 DVD Cover (Wikipedia.com)

Recap and Best Practices

Developing Your Digital Social Marketing Strategy

Define your audience and goals within a digital marketing context. Adjust with new information.

Lower resource Focus on 1 to 2 clear goals; Utilize public datasets, secondary research, or internal knowledge

Higher resource Set layered goals, which is the practice of setting either multiple goals simultaneously or a series of stepwise goals designed to achieve a comprehensive media strategy (e.g., awareness + engagement + web traffic increase), rather than focusing solely on a single goal (e.g., web traffic increase only); Conduct original audience research, such as formative research, audience segmentation, or psychographic research

Decide how you will leverage paid, owned, and earned media.

Lower resource Focus on owned and earned media, and use low-cost paid social posts to increase visibility

Higher resource Use paid and organic media together to drive traffic to owned content, use a multi-channel strategy

Explore how sponsorships and partnerships can increase reach, authenticity, and/or impact for your program.

Lower resource Work with one or two influencers/creators, conduct grassroots outreach; Partner with local organizations and create co-branded content

Higher resource Build out an influencer program, license a platform to help find and vet influencers; Develop or partner with statewide collaboratives, create shared dashboards to track metrics and KPIs; Utilize paid media partnerships

External Resources Linked in this Section

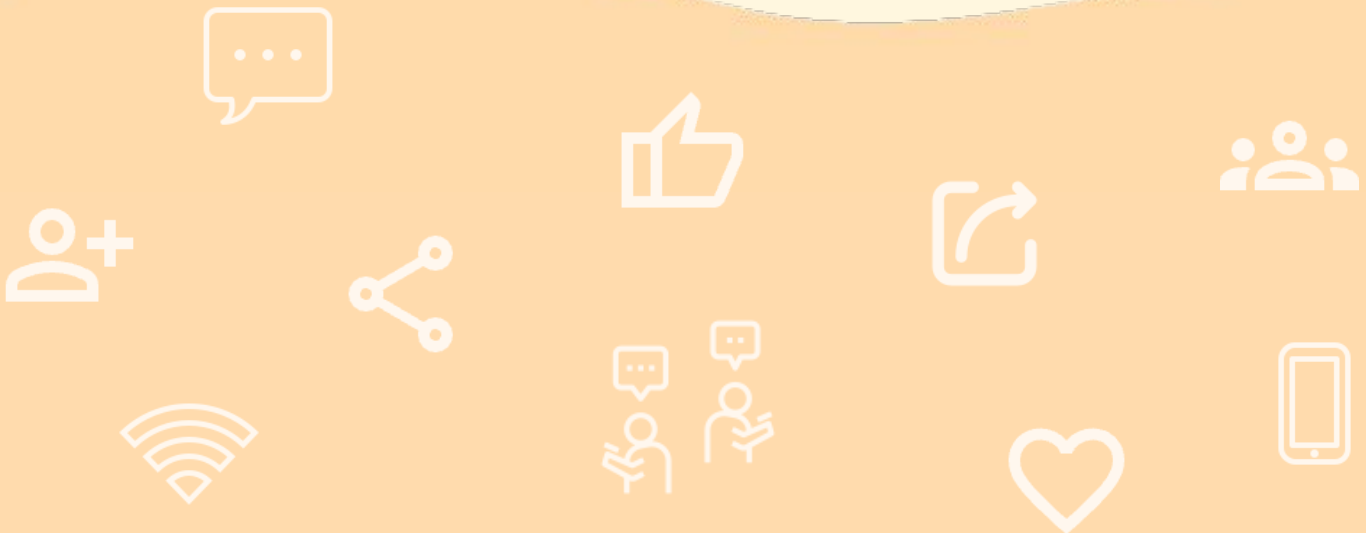
[Sprout Social on Social Media Risk Management](#)

[Federal Trade Commission \(FTC\) Influencer disclosure overview](#)

[Influencers 101: Best Practices and Practical Approaches for Public Health Campaigns](#) by FDA

- Guidance for navigating each stage of working with influencers from goals to risk mitigation
- Templates, language, and examples for: outreach to potential influencers, organizational buy-in, editorial calendar, influencer vetting form, and brand guidelines

Planning For Your Digital Social Marketing Campaign



Planning For Your Digital Social Marketing Campaign

A well-thought out plan for your digital social marketing campaign positions you to deliver impactful, equitable, and sustainable public health communication across digital channels, no matter your resource level. Planning a successful campaign requires more than a great media strategy; it begins with an internal readiness check. Programs must assess their available staffing, expertise, funding, and organizational support. This section outlines essential planning considerations and offers scalable recommendations when deciding how you will set up your organization for success.

Assessing internal resources

Overall, when considering resources available for a digital media campaign, consider staff time, existing social media and web presence, paid media budget, and the goals of the campaign to determine which resources are needed.

Staffing

Staff time is one of the most critical resources in any digital social marketing campaign. You will need someone to lead the project who understands digital media and has access to your platforms. If you are creating content in-house, you will also need someone who can design and produce posts, videos, or graphics, which can take a lot of time and creative energy.

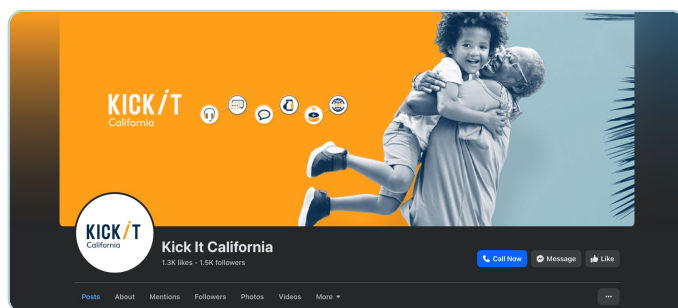
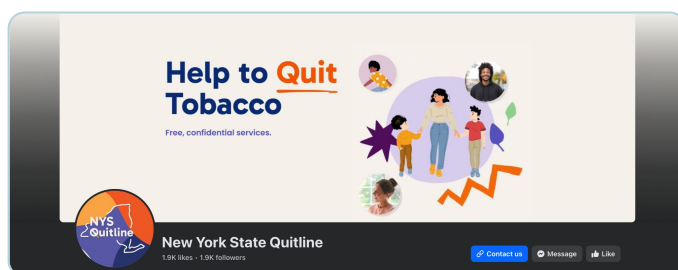
Social media

If your organization already has social media accounts, think about whether they are the right fit for your quitline's media campaign. In some cases, you might want to create a separate account to reach a specific audience or help build trust, but growing a new page takes time and effort. Consider whether you have the ability and resources to build a following on social media; otherwise it may not be worth developing a new page and you can post paid social media ads without a dedicated page by linking to other owned media. To the right are two examples of quitline-branded social media accounts.

Website

Make sure your website supports your campaign goals. Ask yourself if your current site works for this purpose or if you need a separate, quitline-branded site. For example, your current site might be a page on a public health department website and/or might not be user-friendly. Either way, once people visit your site from a digital ad, the goal is to keep them engaged or encourage them to take action, like signing up for free services. Similar to a social media page, consider whether you require a new website or if you can work with what you already have. On the following page are examples of quitline website.

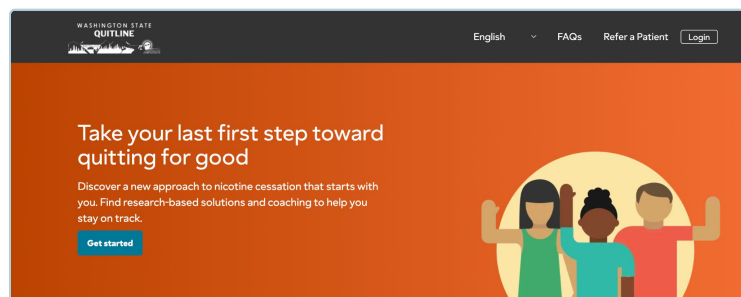
Example Quitline Social Media Accounts



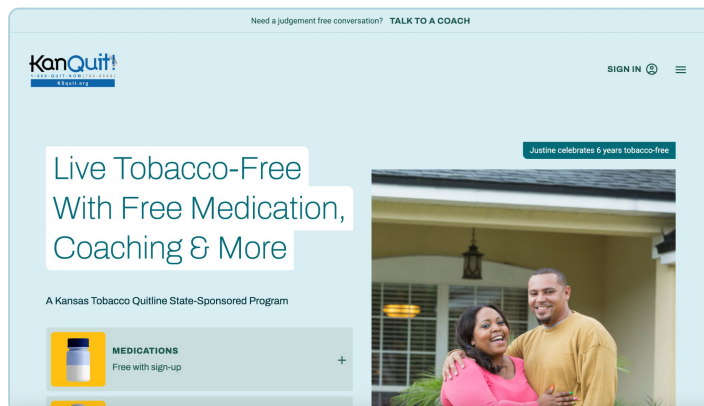
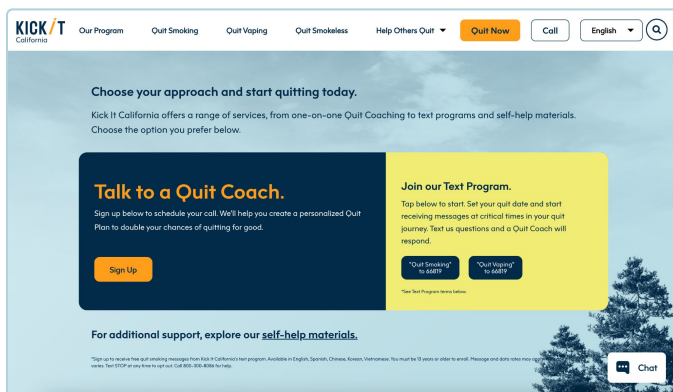
Image(s): Publicly available Facebook pages from California and New York State quitlines; located by searching “state quitline” pages

Example Quitline Websites

The **Washington State Department of Health** website contains information about the state's quitline program (left). Washington State Quitline also has an audience-facing website (right).



The **California Smokers' Helpline** is branded Kick It California (left) and **Kansas State Tobacco Quitline** is branded KanQuit (right).



Image(s): All publicly available websites; located via search engine using the phrase "state quitline website."

Budget

Your paid media budget will influence virtually every aspect of your campaign, from platform selection to content quality and overall reach. But you don't need a big budget to run a campaign. You can start small, like boosting a single post or someone else's post. You can focus on certain channels like paid search with Google or working with a select group of influencers to reach a priority audience. To plan your spending, ask yourself:

- What do I want to achieve?
- Can paid ads help me reach my goals?
- Who am I trying to reach, and where are they online?
- How much can I spend on paid media?
- Will seasonal costs affect ad prices?
- What results (like clicks or enrollments) will I track?

Having clear goals and a well-researched audience can help even a small budget go far.

Deciding whether to hire a contractor

Outsourcing certain campaign functions by hiring a contractor can improve efficiency and bring in specialized expertise, particularly when internal resources are limited. A contractor can be useful if you don't have enough staff to run a digital media campaign on your own. They can also bring skills your team may not have and use their own tools or connections to help the project succeed. With a contractor's help, your team can focus on big-picture tasks like setting goals and reviewing the content.

There are several types of contractors to consider (see Table 3). It's important to determine whether you require full-service support or targeted assistance in specific areas, and to ensure the scope of work aligns clearly with your campaign goals.

Table 3. Types of Contractors

Creative Agencies

Design branding elements, video, infographics, or other campaign visuals

Social Media Managers

Create content calendars, post content, monitor engagement, and adjust tactics

Media Buyers

Develop media strategies based on your goals and audience; Manage and optimize paid advertising on digital platforms

Influencer Marketing Specialists

Vet, contract, and coordinate with trusted messengers

Communications or PR Firms

Craft press releases, manage crisis communication, or pitch stories to media outlets

To figure out if your budget can cover hiring a contractor, try these steps:

- Search online for agencies or consultants who work with your topic or target audience.
- Reach out to the ones that seem like a good match to ask about their prices, timelines, and what services they offer.

Alternatives to hiring agency contractors include working with local freelancers, interns, or forming in-kind partnerships with institutions such as universities. Marketing and design departments in academic institutions often look for projects that give back to the community and students can support campaign execution as part of their coursework or practicum. If you have a large budget and plan to use several channels and platforms for your campaign, hiring a contractor is a smart choice. They can help manage the many moving parts that come with a large and complex strategy.

Hiring a Contractor	
Pros	
→	Brings specialized knowledge (e.g., influencer marketing, ad optimization)
→	Frees up internal staff time for strategy and oversight
→	Potential for quicker execution and higher-quality deliverables
Cons	
→	Costs may be prohibitive for low-resource situations
→	Requires strong oversight to ensure alignment with public health values
→	Contractors may not understand local context or audience nuances
→	RFP writing, onboarding and contract management can create delays

Deep Dive: RFP Writing Advice

If you decide to hire a contractor, you will most likely need to develop a Request for Proposal (RFP). The RFP should include specific information about your goals, intended audience(s), services required, and expectations for evaluation within a digital social marketing context. Below are some areas to consider as you develop your RFP.

1. Start with Clear Campaign Goals and Objectives

Define what you want the campaign to achieve. Align your goals with your program's mission and ensure they are measurable. For quitlines, common digital marketing objectives include:

- Increasing awareness of the quitline among target populations
- Driving traffic to quitline websites or click-to-call numbers
- Promoting new services or digital tools (e.g., apps, text support)
- Reaching underserved or priority populations (e.g., rural, LGBTQ+, BIPOC populations)

Be specific. Instead of "raise awareness," say "increase awareness of the quitline among adults in rural counties by 20% over six months."

2. Define Your Audience

Describe your intended audience clearly in the RFP, including demographics, psychographics, behaviors, and digital media use. This helps vendors propose appropriate strategies and targeting methods.

Example: "Primary audience - Adults aged 18–44 in low-income ZIP codes with high commercial tobacco use prevalence. Secondary audience: Spanish-speaking parents aged 25–50. Digital platforms must align with usage data (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Google Search)."

3. Outline Required Services

List exactly what you're asking the vendor to provide. For quitline campaigns, this could include:

- Message testing and audience research (if applicable)
- Content creation (graphics, video, copywriting)
- Paid media buying and optimization
- Social media account management or support
- Influencer recruitment and coordination
- Analytics and performance reporting
- Development of digital toolkits for partners

Specify if the contractor will work in collaboration with your internal team or other stakeholders.



Image: RFP Writing (AI)

4. Include Evaluation and Reporting Expectations

Explain how campaign success will be measured. Identify required reporting metrics (e.g., impressions, click-through rate, video completion, conversions) and how often you expect updates (e.g., bi-weekly dashboards, monthly summary reports). Also, clarify:

- Required tools or platforms, if known (e.g., Google Analytics, Meta Ads Manager)
- Outline compliance requirements for state or federal reporting standards, if applicable
- Any specific KPIs (e.g., reach among priority populations)

5. Provide Context About Your Quitline and Partnerships

Include a brief background section about your organization, the quitline services you offer, existing branding or creative assets, and any known challenges (e.g., declining call volume, regional disparities). Also mention whether state or national campaigns are running concurrently as this helps vendors tailor strategies that complement, rather than duplicate, ongoing efforts.

6. Specify Proposal Evaluation Criteria

Describe how proposals will be evaluated and what elements are most important to you. This might include:

- Experience with digital health and/or digital public health campaigns
- Proven reach with diverse or underserved communities utilizing digital media
- Creative samples or portfolio relevance
- Team qualifications and management plan

Additional Tips

- Use existing templates. Refer to past public health RFPs (e.g., from state health departments) that utilize digital social marketing.
- Avoid jargon. Use plain language, especially when describing your program, goals, and desired services.
- Make audience reach goals explicit. If your campaign includes reaching special populations or traditionally underserved groups, state it clearly so vendors can build it into their strategy.
- Encourage innovation. Allow vendors to propose new ideas or approaches that align with your goals, even if they go beyond the scope.

Digital Campaign RFP Checklist

- ☒ Clear goals and objectives
- ☒ Detailed audience definition
- ☒ Required services vs. internal or stakeholder responsibilities
- ☒ Evaluation and reporting expectation
- ☒ Program context
- ☒ Proposal evaluation criteria

Deep Dive: Managing Public Relations

Public relations (PR) for your program plays a vital role in building trust, securing media coverage, and shaping public perception. To maximize its impact, integrate PR early in the campaign planning process, especially if the launch coincides with high-profile events or national health observances (e.g., Great American Smokeout or World No Tobacco Day). It is important to proactively prepare messaging that addresses potential risks or community concerns, particularly when working on sensitive topics such as commercial tobacco use among populations with higher use rates or who have been traditionally underserved and historically marginalized. Additionally, aligning public relations with community engagement strategies and influencer partnerships can help unify your campaign voice and ensure consistent, credible messaging across all channels.

While PR is not a required element of your campaign, it can be useful if you have a goal of maximizing attention on your program, demonstrating your program as a trusted resource, or if your organization would like to receive recognition for its efforts. In some cases, you may be concerned that PR could draw a broader audience to your campaign when you are trying to reach a more specific group of people.



Image: PR (AI)

PR doesn't have to be grandiose. Efforts can be as simple as engaging local news outlets and leveraging existing partners' channels to amplify campaign messages by asking partners to share or post your organization's updates. PR can include press releases, social media mentions, or shared blog content. If you want to build a strong PR component, you can also consider full-service PR firm support and implement strategic influencer outreach to increase visibility, manage reputation, and coordinate media relations across platforms.



Image: Public health PR illustration (AI)

Facilitating buy in within your organization

If you have decided that a digital media campaign is right for your organization and your goal(s), you may need to get buy-in from others in your organization. It is common to need to get buy-in when you are trying a digital media campaign for the first time or when people in your organization are not familiar with digital media campaigns.

Buy-in will likely need to happen early in the process, before you've had the chance to do extensive planning. To build support, demonstrate how the campaign's goals align with your organization's mission or strategic plan. Use data or case studies from similar digital campaigns to illustrate potential impact and effectiveness. Engaging leadership, communications teams, and program staff early in the planning process fosters a sense of ownership and enthusiasm. Additionally, emphasize how digital campaigns can measurably extend your program's reach, especially to underserved communities or new audience segments that may not be easily reached through traditional channels.

Programs operating with limited resources may need to emphasize cost-efficiency of digital marketing and the potential for community impact when seeking organizational support.

Highlighting how a digital social marketing campaign aligns with existing program or organizational goals can also build internal credibility. In higher-resource settings, presenting anticipated healthcare cost-savings and the long-term value of digital marketing for advancing public health outcomes can be a persuasive strategy to secure buy-in from leadership and stakeholders.



Image: Digital campaign planning (AI)

Getting Buy-In

- ✓ **Align with mission**
Show how campaign goals connect directly to your organization's mission or strategic plan
- ✓ **Demonstrate impact**
Use data or case studies from similar campaigns to highlight effectiveness
- ✓ **Engage stakeholders**
Involve leadership, communications, and program staff early in the planning process
- ✓ **Highlight reach**
Emphasize how digital campaigns can reach underserved or new audiences beyond traditional methods

Below and on the following page we provide points that may be useful in your digital campaign justification. Be sure to look for the most up-to-date sources for your effort.

General Facts About Digital Media and Digital Marketing

- Digital marketing isn't just for big organizations – any group can use it, even with a small budget.
- Digital marketing is often cheaper and more efficient than traditional marketing like print or mail.
- Most people get their information online. In 2020, 86% of U.S. adults used digital devices for news, and over half preferred digital over print or radio (Pew Research Center, 2021).
- Digital media helps you reach people where they already spend time—online. In fact, 96% of U.S. adults use the internet, across all age and demographic groups (Pew Research Center, 2024b).

Digital Channel and Platform Use

- Of all U.S. adults 83% report using YouTube, 68% use Facebook, and 47% use Instagram (Pew Research Center, 2024c).
- Adults are using multiple social media platforms – 74% of adults 18 to 30 years old use at least five of the platforms asked about, as well as 53% of 30 to 49 year olds, and 30% of 50 to 64 year olds (Pew Research Center, 2024c).
- Research also shows that social media, especially YouTube, is an efficient method of sharing quitting resources and advertisements (Jawed & Hogan, 2024).
- YouTube is a top platform for TV watching. In 2025, YouTube pulled ahead of all other media distributors, including Netflix, Fox News, and NBC, with the highest percentage of TV viewership for that month (Nielsen, 2025b). Viewers 18 to 64 years old were a majority of the audience (60.8%), about evenly split between Generation Y (21%), Millennial (19.4%), and Generation X/Boomer II (20.4%) subgroups.
- Connected TV (CTV) is outperforming traditional TV among viewers 18 to 49 years old with 78% using CTV and 58% using traditional TV (Thiessen, 2024). Connected TV refers to delivery of programs through an internet-connected device, such as Roku, Firestick, etc. These platforms deliver ads through streaming content or directly on the main menus.

Recap and Best Practices**Planning For Your Digital Social Marketing Campaign**

Assess and define internal resources, like staffing and paid media budget, to set your campaign up for success.

Lower resource Assign tasks and responsibilities within existing roles, cross-train staff, leverage resources within your peer network; prioritize organic social media strategies and leverage partnerships with community organizations to amplify reach at low or no cost, use low-cost paid social posts to increase visibility

Higher resource Hire full-time digital media coordinator or team, invest in formal staff training or hire consultants; use multiple paid media channels, reach multiple audience segments

Consider whether hiring contractors would make the most sense for your organization.

Lower resource Work with local freelancers, interns, or form in-kind partnerships with institutions such as universities; Work with an influencer management company on a pilot project with one influencer

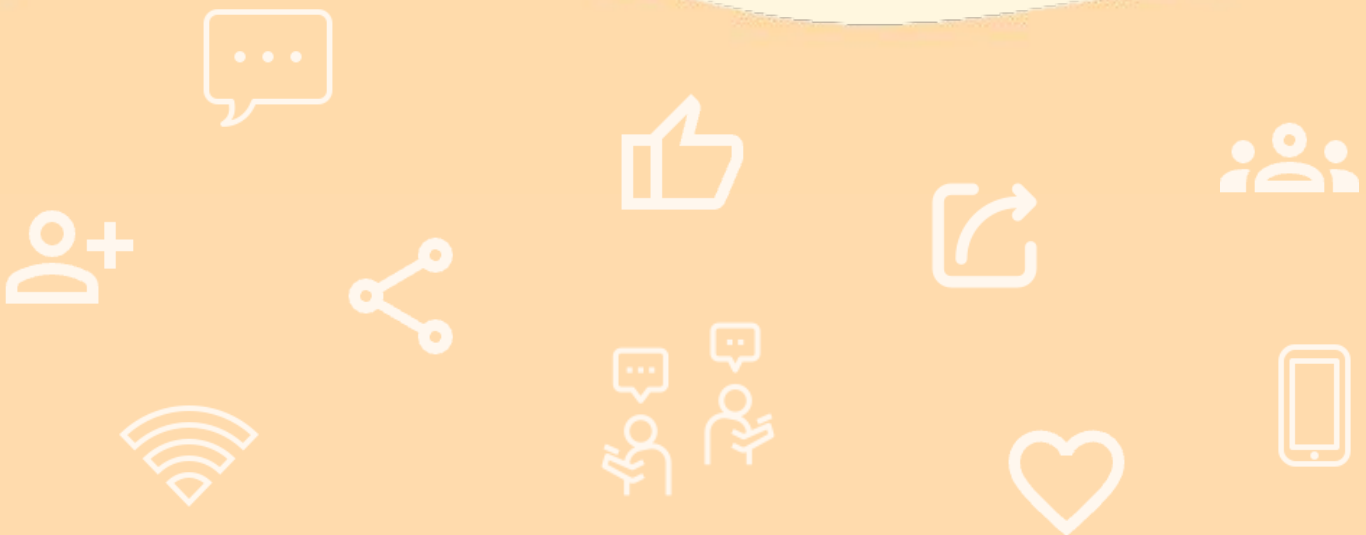
Higher resource Integrate a full-service agency to design and implement campaign creative and media

Build a plan to facilitate buy-in within your organization that reflects concerns and issues that are relevant to your organization.

Lower resource Emphasize cost-efficiency and the potential for community impact; Highlight how a digital social marketing campaign aligns with existing program or organizational goals

Higher resource Present anticipated healthcare cost savings based on ROI analysis and the long-term value of digital media for advancing public health outcomes

Managing Your Digital Social Marketing Campaign



Managing Your Digital Social Marketing Campaign

Launching a digital social marketing campaign in public health requires aligning content, platforms, and management strategies with your audience and goals. This section provides guidance on managing your campaign starting with developing accessible, audience-centered content, selecting the right digital channels, and using audience targeting and media buying effectively. Together, these components support a cohesive, impactful, and responsive digital campaign.

Content and asset development

Developing accessible, audience-centered content is at the heart of any successful digital public health campaign. Content should not only inform but also motivate action and foster trust. Key best practices include:

- **Prioritize accessibility:** Ensure all assets comply with accessibility standards, including alternative text for images, high contrast visuals, readable fonts, and captioned videos.
- **Use plain, inclusive language:** Avoid jargon and use culturally appropriate, audience-specific messaging. Ensure materials reflect the communities you aim to reach.
- **Focus on message clarity:** Make sure your intended message is clearly stated and is delivered early in the content.
- **Design for mobile:** Most users access social content via mobile devices. Format graphics, videos, and calls to action accordingly.
- **Keep media placement in mind:** Keep media type and placement in mind as you create content. For example, channels and platforms will have formatting and size requirements, and not abiding by them will impact asset display and effectiveness.
- **Create a visual identity:** Branding is important for the longevity of a campaign. Maintain consistent branding across platforms to build recognition and trust. The first time someone sees your ads they may not be ready to quit, so having consistency across ads will build awareness and help keep the quitline top of mind.
- **Maintain a consistent voice:** As part of branding, it is important to decide which voice you will be using in your creative. Is it a public health organization communicating the message? Or do you want it to be an entity that will stand on its own with its own?
- **Test and iterate:** Monitor engagement and adjust content types, formats, and messaging based on real-time feedback and analytics.
- **Avoid flagged content:** Develop a thorough review process to ensure language and imagery doesn't explicitly or implicitly glamorize, promote, or encourage tobacco or vaping. Each platform (social media, ad networks, etc.) has its own guidelines regarding tobacco/vaping content and age targeting. Familiarize yourself with these guidelines. For an example, see [Meta's standards for Tobacco and Related Products](#).

Content Development Resources

Resources such as [Accessible Social Media for Public Health \(PHCC\)](#) and [ASTHO's Social Media Toolkit](#) provide helpful guidelines and suggested tools for developing content.

The [National Cancer Institute's Making Data Talk: A Workbook](#) also contains practical advice for communicating about health-related scientific data.

Real-World Examples

Vermont Department of Health

Social media assets created by Rinck Advertising for 802Quits paid social media campaign aiming to increase visitors to the 802Quits website and their intent to enroll. Ads were designed to reach different audience segments.



Image(s): Images shared with exclusive permission from Rinck Advertising; do not replicate or copy.

North Carolina DHHS Tobacco Prevention and Control

Digital display ads, created by Clean Advertising and Design for QuitlineNC, sharing “survivable” health conditions caused by smoking with the alternate option to “quit and live.” Ads were produced in English and Spanish.



Image(s): Retrieved from CDC’s Media Campaign Resource Center in 2025.

Illinois Tobacco Quitline

Social media assets created by Rescue Agency for Illinois Tobacco Quitline’s paid media campaign. Using business account features, you can choose an ad format like “Click-through” where users click the image and land on the quitline website to enroll in services. The image, post copy, and ad-type work together to create a clear call-to-action.



Image(s): Images shared with exclusive permission from Rescue Agency; do not replicate or copy.

Choosing channels and platforms

A channel is the way you deliver a message. Common digital marketing channels include paid search, social media, and email. A platform is the digital environment where a message is delivered; sometimes we refer to a general platform like “Over-The-Top” within the streaming TV channel, and sometimes we refer to a brand identity like Netflix, depending on the level of specificity needed.

Before selecting digital channels and platforms, review your campaign’s primary goals and intended audience. Ensure that the selected channel-platform aligns with your audience’s media consumption habits and they can realistically and reliably be reached with your messaging. See Table 4 for examples of channels and platforms (current as of 2025).

Table 4. Digital Media Channels and Notable Platforms for 2025

Channel	Definition / Use	Notable Platforms
Digital (Non-Video)	Ads that show up on websites or apps, often as banners or pop-ups. Can include images, text, or animation. Have a url attached so when you click it will take you to a webpage or another app.	News websites, game apps (like Zynga), Twitch
Online Video (OLV)	Short video ads shown before, during, or after videos on websites or apps.	YouTube, videos on news or entertainment sites
Streaming TV	Ads shown while streaming shows or movies on internet-connected devices. Includes: Over-the-top (OTT) - content that is streamed online and Connected TV (CTV) - an internet-connected device	Over-The-Top (OTT) - Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime, Disney+, NBC’s Peacock CTV - Xbox, PlayStation, Roku, Amazon Fire TV, Apple TV
Streaming Audio	Ads that play during music or podcast streaming.	Spotify, Pandora, iHeartRadio, YouTube Music
Social Media	Platforms where you can post and promote content, engage with users, and run ads.	Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, YouTube
Paid Search (SEM)	Paid listings that show up when people search online.	Google, Bing
Direct Marketing	Targeted emails or texts sent to people who signed up to hear from you.	Mailchimp, Hubspot

Table 5 contains some potential goals and corresponding channels you may consider for an adult audience 25 years and older. Note: these examples are not a substitute for consulting experts or learning for yourself. The descriptions and examples in the table below are oversimplified for the purposes of defining the process.

Table 5. Digital marketing goals and potential channels

Goal	Potential Channel(s)
Getting people to interact with your program or message	Social Media, Online Video, Paid Search, Direct Marketing (emails or texts)
Promoting a new tool or service	Online Video, Digital, Social Media, Streaming Audio, Paid Search, Direct Marketing
Raise awareness about your program	Online Video, Digital, Social Media, Streaming Audio

Once you've chosen the channels you want to use, the next step is picking the specific platforms for your campaign. Your decision about which platforms to use is based on a few key things:

- Who you're trying to reach
- What you're trying to achieve
- How much money you have
- Whether the platform can target your audience effectively



Image: Digital platforms (AI)

Look at data to find out where your audience spends time online. Different platforms work best for different goals and reach different groups of people. Also, think about what you can afford. Some platforms cost more than others. Table 6 on the following page contains examples of how major social platforms are being used in 2025.

Before confirming your choice of platform(s), investigate whether its media targeting capabilities will enable you to reach your intended audience. Media targeting limitations may influence your final decision about which platforms and channels to use. In other words, you will narrow down the choice of platforms based on where your audience is, but you need to ensure you can actually identify your audience using the platforms' targeting capabilities to reach them with your messaging.

You can typically find targeting capabilities and limitations on platform websites, e.g., [Meta \(Facebook/Instagram\)](#), [X \(Formerly Twitter\)](#), [YouTube](#), [Google](#).

Make sure you review the appropriate guidelines regarding age targeting for tobacco and vaping related advertising.

If the targeting capabilities do not allow you to narrow in on your audience, you may not reach as much of your audience as you hoped, making your campaign less cost-efficient and less impactful.

Platforms may offer detailed targeting capabilities based on:

- **Demographics:** Age, gender, location, language
- **Interests and behaviors:** e.g., smoking cessation, health awareness, parenting
- **Contextual:** Content relevant to your audience on an app or website
- **Lookalike audiences:** Users with similar profiles to your known audience
- **Retargeting:** Showing ads to people who have already interacted with your content

Table 6. Notable Social Media Platforms & Characteristics for 2025

Platform	Audience	Ad Formats	Content Types
Facebook	Largest global user base; Strong presence among Gen X and older adults	Short videos (especially Live, seeing 3× more engagement), carousel images, and “swipeable” image albums; text links less engaging	Ideal for storytelling, community updates, event promotions, and news; most-used platform for obtaining news
Instagram	Highly popular with Gen Z and Millennials; 89% of Gen Z use it	Short-form vertical videos (Reels), visually-driven posts, carousels, Stories; strong tools like filters and in-app editors	Great for lifestyle visuals, infographics, behind-the-scenes previews, and influencer-generated content; high organic engagement
TikTok	Primarily Gen Z and young adults; 54 min/day average usage in the U.S. Note: At time of publishing, new U.S. based accounts are not permitted.	Short-form, vertical videos (up to 10 min); fast-paced, engaging, trend-driven clips	Entertaining, relatable, and emotional content that aligns with trending sounds or challenges; nearly half of top-performing ads use emotional triggers
Snapchat	Teens and young adults	Vertical full-screen videos for Spotlight, Stories, and AR lenses/filters	Ephemeral, authentic, casual content such as reactions, daily moments, AR-enhanced visuals; best for spontaneous and creative messaging
Reddit	Text-focused discussions; popular among Millennials	Text-based posts, community Q&A, infographics, Ask Me Anything (AMA) sessions	In-depth discussions and community input; effective for health education, myth debunking, and gathering audience insights
X (formerly Twitter)	News-oriented users; 60% male audience	Short text threads, image-based posts, link sharing, and real-time updates	Ideal for public announcements, news sharing, expert commentary, and connecting with journalists or professionals
Google Ads/Search	Users seeking immediate information or solutions (e.g., “quit smoking help”)	Text ads in search results, display banners on Google’s partner sites, and YouTube video ads	Intent-driven, solution-focused messages (e.g., “call quitline now”), optimized with clear calls to action

Purchasing digital media

Digital media buying is the process of paying to place your ads or promotional content on digital platforms like social media, search engines, websites, or streaming services to reach your intended audience. Instead of relying only on free (or "organic") posts, media buying allows you to pay for platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Google, or YouTube to show your message to the right people, based on who they are, where they live, and what they're interested in. With paid media, your content doesn't just go out to followers; it can reach new people who are likely to benefit from your program or service (e.g., a quitline or health resource), even if they haven't heard of it before. If you will manage media buying internally, there are free training resources like [Google Skillshop](#) (includes YouTube) or [Meta Blueprint](#) that can help your team get started.

Some important considerations as you set up your paid social media campaign on a platform

Getting started: You will want to set up a business account (versus a personal account) on the platform. A business account has more capabilities for tracking and measuring outcomes. Facebook and Instagram are both owned by Meta, and you can link accounts to track them together. Google and YouTube are owned by Alphabet, Inc. Management of YouTube ads is done through Google Ads, alongside Google Search, Display, and more.

Setting media goals: As part of your buy, you will be prompted to identify what you want to achieve with your ad campaign within the particular platform. The platform will track ad performance against your goals. When setting your goals, refer to your campaign goals and be specific. For example, instead of saying, "I want more clicks," aim for something measurable like, "I want XX click-to-call conversations." Don't forget to ensure the goals and metrics you are tracking will ultimately support your measurement plan (see the next section Measuring Performance and Outcomes of Your Digital Social Marketing Campaign).

Defining your target audience size: The platform will walk you through audience sizing based on your intended audience and targeting parameters. Try to narrow your audience definition to achieve higher relevance and ensure you are reaching your intended audience, but be careful not to make it too small. A small audience size means your ads might not reach enough people to generate meaningful results, and your content might not gain much traction. This can lead to lower engagement, limited brand awareness, and potentially wasted ad spend.

Deciding the number of ads you are running: Lean on your goals and audience definitions to help you decide which ads you are running and how many. Too many different ads on the same platform may be confusing or clutter your audience's feed, and can affect your budget. To maximize resources, consider starting with a smaller number of ads and change them out if they are not performing well. On the other hand, prioritize your high performing ads with paid media boosts.

Determining how often you want your ads shown: Typically you want your audience to see your ads multiple times to increase memorability, remind them of your services, and/or inspire them to enroll. If you are trying to increase awareness, your campaign may benefit from higher frequency, while click-driven campaigns might aim for lower frequency to avoid waste and irritation. Additionally, small, narrowly defined audiences (e.g., specific ZIP codes) mean ads are shown more often to the same users, increasing average frequency. Larger target sets broaden reach while reducing frequency.



Image: Buying media (AI)

Many platforms report average frequency automatically so you can keep track. If you find that your audience is disengaged, they could be overexposed to your message; it helps to refresh your creative and rotate messages to minimize fatigue. Some platforms let you set maximum exposures per user (e.g., 3 impressions per day). Platforms such as Meta and Google Ads, and specialized software utilized by ad buying agencies support frequency capping to prevent overexposure and ad fatigue.

Setting your budget and schedule: You will provide the platform with a budget per day. Start with a small budget and scale as you see results to avoid spending down your budget too fast.

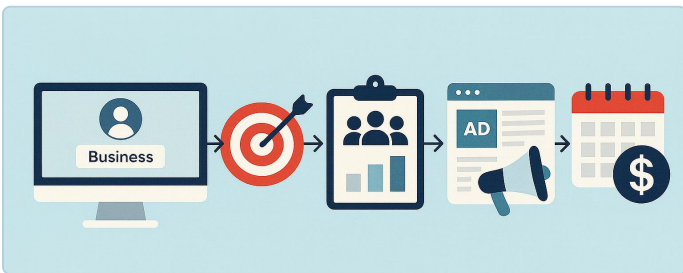


Image: Setting up a paid social media campaign (AI)

Managed services vs. self-managed

When buying media outside of social media and YouTube, such as connected TV, display networks, podcasts, or niche websites, complexity increases. Additionally, paid media can be purchased directly with an individual platform or publisher, as is most frequently done with social media, but larger buys are typically purchased with third parties that can place ads across individual platforms using software and algorithms to find the right digital advertising space. This is called programmatic advertising. In these cases, it's wise to engage a media buying contractor or agency. Agencies that manage programmatic buying and media are called Managed Service Providers (MSPs).

A contractor or agency can help you with strategic placement using the optimal buying method, maximizing budget through premium placements and discounted rates, smooth execution with technical checks, and ongoing optimization using real-time data insights.

For simpler campaigns limited to social feeds or YouTube, a self-managed approach may suffice. As the complexity of your media strategy increases and involves a broader digital inventory, expert media-buying skills are critical to achieving your campaign goals. These articles from [EMarketer](#) and [War Room](#) provide information about programmatic advertising and managed vs. self-service programmatic buying.

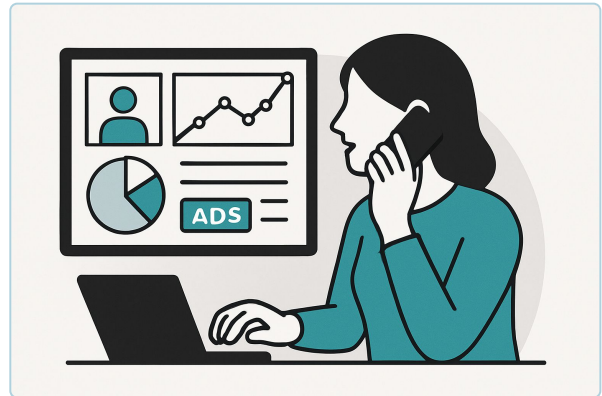


Image: Paid media management (AI)

There are technical resources online that outline how you can set up your paid social media campaign, such as:

- [FHI360's Using Social Media for Health Behavior Change: Technical How-To Guide](#)
- [Semrush Social's Paid Social Media Advertising: A Beginner's Guide](#)
- [Mastroke's How to Create Your First Social Media Campaign](#)

Campaign management

Once your digital social marketing campaign is launched, strong campaign management is essential to ensure it runs smoothly, reaches the right audience, and achieves your intended outcomes. Managing a campaign involves more than just posting content, it requires structured planning, real-time responsiveness, and continuous performance evaluation.

- **Editorial Calendar:** An editorial calendar helps teams plan what content will be published, when, on which platforms, and for what purpose. Editorial calendars can be created using spreadsheets, project management tools like Trello or Asana, or built-in features within social media scheduling platforms like Hootsuite or Buffer.
- **Scheduling posts:** Using social media scheduling tools such as Hootsuite, Buffer, or Meta Creator Studio allows teams to plan and automate posts across platforms, reducing manual workload and ensuring consistent presence.
- **Monitoring:** Daily monitoring of platform performance and audience responses enables campaign managers to make data-informed adjustments, address engagement opportunities, and respond to emerging issues or trends.
- **Team management:** Clearly assign tasks such as content creation, community moderation, and data tracking to team members to improve accountability and efficiency.
- **Engagement:** Engagement metrics are critical indicators of how well your campaign is resonating with the target audience. Metrics such as likes, shares, comments, saves, video completions, click-through rates (CTR), and time spent on content help gauge effectiveness. Strong engagement often reflects content relevance and can enhance the credibility and reach of public health messages. It can also be a flag if content is not resonating or you are reaching the wrong audience.

Applying CDC Media Exposure Best Practices to Digital

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that public health media campaigns, especially in tobacco control, should aim to reach approximately 75–85% of the target audience every quarter, with a frequency of around 15 exposures per person per quarter (CDC, 2018). Reach refers to the percentage of your intended audience (e.g., adults who smoke in a region) who see campaign messages, and frequency refers to the number of times they see your campaign messages.

The CDC's recommendation stems from traditional mass media (e.g., TV, radio) and is measured using Gross Rating Points (GRPs), which were designed for broadcast scheduling. Digital platforms report a variety of different metrics, such as impressions, unique reach, frequency, CTR, and video completions. Not all platforms report all metrics and their calculations for reporting may vary. Digital platforms also operate on real-time user behaviors and targeting capabilities that change exposure patterns, making direct replication of traditional measurement standards problematic. In other words, digital channels require different approaches to reach and exposure planning due to varied targeting, content formats, and user experience. Using the "75/15 rule" may help set aspirational targets, but it is not evidence-based or validated for digital platforms. Campaign planners should instead:

- 1) Use platform-specific analytics (e.g., impressions per user, reach, engagement, frequency),
- 2) establish SMART objectives based on digital behavior, and
- 3) incorporate user-level frequency caps and optimize based on real-time performance feedback.

While all of this information may seem daunting or overwhelming, we hope you see that digital social marketing offers flexible entry points for programs of all sizes and budgets, whether you're working with a modest team or a full digital campaign infrastructure.

Recap and Best Practices

Managing Your Digital Social Marketing Campaign

Customized, accessible, audience-centric content is key.

Lower resource Use free design tools like Canva with accessibility features; Adapt and localize existing public health assets or toolkits; Create short, mobile-friendly messages using plain language and community-relevant visuals; Use available assets from similar campaigns and customize

Higher resource Hire a creative agency or content team to develop fully custom graphics, animations, and videos tailored to specific audience segments; Conduct message testing or focus groups to ensure relevance and clarity; Design a cohesive visual identity package (logos, templates, fonts, etc.) for cross-platform consistency

Keep your audience and goals in mind as you buy paid media.

Lower resource Focus on paid social media; Target broad or priority demographics using platform-recommended audience presets; Use free training tools like Meta Blueprint or Google Skillshop to manage campaigns internally

Higher resource Partner with a media buying agency to run a multi-channel, multi-platform plan (e.g., YouTube, Meta, streaming audio); Conduct audience segmentation and persona development to guide targeting; Optimize spend through real-time data analysis and platform-specific strategies

A successful digital social marketing campaign requires active management and tracking from a campaign manager.

Lower resource Assign campaign responsibilities to an existing staff member who can use tools like Hootsuite or Meta Creator Studio to schedule and monitor posts; Maintain a simple editorial calendar using Excel, Google Sheets, or Trello; Track engagement and reach through free platform analytics dashboards (e.g., Facebook Insights, Google Analytics); Meet monthly to review progress and adjust the schedule or messaging based on results

Higher resource Hire a contractor to serve as digital campaign manager and oversee content, performance management, partnerships, and reporting; Use integrated project management and analytics platforms (e.g., Sprout Social, Airtable, Tableau); Conduct weekly or real-time optimization of ads based on KPIs like impressions, CTR, video completions, or quitline conversions; Implement formal campaign evaluation plans with built-in reporting milestones and outcome metrics

External Resources Linked in this Section

[Meta's standards for Tobacco and Related Products](#)

Content Development: [Accessible Social Media for Public Health \(PHCC\)](#) / [ASTHO's Social Media Toolkit](#) / [National Cancer Institute's Making Data Talk: A Workbook](#)

Paid Media Targeting: [Meta \(Facebook/Instagram\)](#), [X \(Formerly Twitter\)](#), [YouTube](#), [Google](#)

Media Buying Trainings: [Google Skillshop](#) (includes YouTube) / [Meta Blueprint](#)

How-To Set Up a Paid Media Campaign: [FHI360's Using Social Media Technical How-To Guide](#) / [Semrush Social's Paid Social Media Advertising: A Beginner's Guide](#) / [Mastrok's How to Create Your First Social Media Campaign](#)

Programmatic Media and Buying: [EMarketer](#) / [War Room](#)

Measuring Performance and Outcomes of Your Digital Social Marketing Campaign



Measuring Performance and Outcomes of Your Digital Social Marketing Campaign

Evaluating the outcomes of your digital social marketing campaign is essential to understanding its effectiveness and ensuring your resources are being used efficiently. Success can be measured through a combination of digital and social media metrics, which provide insight into how your content is performing, how well your audience is engaging, and whether your campaign is moving people toward desired actions, such as calling a quitline or visiting a cessation resource.

Tracking campaign success

Digital media platforms offer a wide range of metrics, including impressions (how many times your content was delivered), reach (the number of unique people who received your content), click-through rate (CTR), video completions, and engagement metrics such as likes, comments, shares, and saves. These data points help you assess not only how widely your message is being seen (promotional reach) but also how people are responding to it (engagement and intent).

For quitline campaigns, it's important to distinguish between promotional reach (how many people saw the message) and treatment reach (how many people actually used the service, such as calling the quitline or enrolling in support). Together, these digital and service metrics illuminate both short-term visibility and long-term impact, supporting continuous campaign improvement and stronger public health outcomes. For standardized definitions of reach terms, refer to [North American Quitline Consortium \(NAQC\) Glossary](#).

Digital metrics that provide evidence of promotional reach

These metrics help you evaluate how effectively your digital campaign is raising awareness among smokers or proxy audiences.

- **Impressions, reach, and frequency** – Metrics demonstrating the number of users reached and how often by platform; common in paid digital campaigns
- **Click-Through Rate (CTR), Click-to-Call ad clicks, or general click rates** – show how many people clicked through to campaign or quitline website landing pages, or called a quitline from your paid media; to document how paid media efforts are increasing reach, look for increases in access during paid media periods compared to non-paid periods
- **“How Heard About” (HHA) reports** – Incorporate user self-report data, linking impressions to actual quitline inquiries; tracking HHA trends can demonstrate media campaign impact over time
- **Form completions** - Includes overall website registrations or webform completions attributed to campaign links; again, look for increases in access during paid media periods compared to non-paid periods



Image: Promotional and treatment reach (AI)

Digital metrics that provide evidence of treatment reach

These metrics measure actual engagement with evidence-based services (e.g., counseling or medication).

- **Quitline registrations** – the number of unique commercial tobacco users registering for quitline services via phone call, website, text, or app
- **Registrations for digital tools** – the number of registrations for texting programs, web-based cessation services, cessation apps, etc.
- **Treatment-choice breakdown** – the number of users selecting counseling and/or FDA-approved medication versus self-help only via website, text, or app

Monitoring and optimizing

Monitoring metrics during and after a campaign also supports continuous quality improvement. By comparing the performance of different messages, visuals, or targeting strategies, you can identify which are most effective for reaching your intended audience. For example, if one video has a much higher completion rate, that may signal an opportunity to scale similar content. Regularly analyzing your metrics allows you to optimize audience reach and engagement and make informed adjustments to improve outcomes throughout the campaign's duration.

- **Define Goals & Metrics:** The [CDC's Social Media Campaign Evaluation Job Aid](#) may be a helpful resource for setting campaign objectives and metrics that align with your goal.
- **Collect Data:** You can build dashboards to expedite reporting by using tools like [Google Looker Studio](#) (free) or [Sprout Social](#) (paid).
- **Monitor and Act:** Review data, optimize underperforming ads, rotate creative assets based on top metrics, increase or decrease spend appropriately. [6sense](#) offers some straightforward advice on optimization for beginners.

Program evaluation

While digital metrics are useful for tracking progress and optimizing performance, there are important limitations in understanding their effectiveness for behavior change. Digital metrics typically cannot be linked directly to individual-level behavioral data, such as self-reported commercial tobacco use, without complex data integration or consent protocols. Therefore, metrics are best viewed as supporting data within a broader program evaluation framework. They help tell the story of campaign efficacy as a complement to other forms of evaluation, such as surveys, quitline usage reports, or community feedback, to fully understand the impact. Additionally, digital metrics can help validate self-report data related to awareness and engagement.

*Real-World Examples***Changes Timed with Digital Media Campaign Launch**

A longitudinal study across three states (Minnesota, Oklahoma, Florida) tracked quitline registration and participant outcomes before and after new digital campaign launches. Researchers observed significant increases in both treatment reach (number of callers enrolling in services) and quit attempts, which they attributed to enhanced digital marketing and promotion efforts (Keller et al., 2020).

Aligning Self-Reported Awareness and Engagement with Digital Metrics

An analysis of three cross-sectional online surveys during digital campaign periods was completed by adults who currently smoke and/or had a past 12-month quit attempt in Illinois. Self-reported media campaign awareness and online engagement were associated with commitment to quitting, intention to quit in the next 12 months, and intention to use quitline services. Researchers validated self-reported data by sharing over-benchmark campaign media metrics related to awareness and engagement, as well as high performing campaign ads (Jackson et al., 2025).

Example evaluation frameworks

Your media campaign evaluation efforts do not need to be resource intensive. Rather, the idea is to leverage digital metrics, such as impressions, engagement rates, and click-through rates, combined with program goals to measure campaign performance. These two papers offer frameworks, practical guidance, and examples on how to do this:

Chan, L., O'Hara, B., Phongsavan, P., Bauman, A., & Freeman, B. (2020). Review of evaluation metrics used in digital and traditional tobacco control campaigns. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 22(8), e17432.

<https://doi.org/10.2196/17432> (free download at link)

Chan et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review and noted a lack of consistency in metrics reported across campaigns, which hampers cross-study comparisons. To address this, the authors proposed a conceptual framework to guide the selection and organization of digital-media metrics for campaign evaluation, emphasizing the importance of linking early-stage process indicators (e.g., digital reach and engagement) with outcome measures (e.g., service uptake and behavior change) to strengthen the rigor and usefulness of evaluations.

Process evaluation	Impact evaluation				Outcome evaluation
	Awareness	Proximal impact I: Engagement	Proximal impact II: Priming steps	Distal impact: Trial-ing behaviors	
<i>Delivery of campaign</i>	Seen the campaign and perception of the campaign	Showing interest in the campaign or message by taking an action	Priming steps of behavioral change	Initial trialing behaviors and antecedents of behaviors	Desired behavioral change
Delivery of • Television ads (Target Audience Rating Points [TARPs] or Gross Rating Points [GRPs]) • Digital video ads (digital GRPs or impressions or video views)^a • Digital banner ads (impressions or exposures) • Other	• Campaign recall (including frequency) • Media channel attribution (where campaign was viewed)^b • Campaign response (eg, relevance, perceived effectiveness, believability)^b	• Campaign website visits • Engagement on social media (eg, likes, comments, shares, follows) • Click through rates (on digital ads or social media posts) • Information-seeking action on the internet (web search) • Other action (eg, download mobile app, sign up to campaign)	• Knowledge and beliefs • Attitudes: about smoking, tobacco industry, etc • Attitude: intention to quit • Information-seeking action offline (spoke with health care provider)	• Contact smoking cessation service or registrations to service • Quit attempts	• Sustained quit attempts • Population smoking prevalence rates (For nonsmokers): Conversation with family or friend about smoking cessation

^aAll italics indicate metrics and measures that relate to digital media platforms.

^bIn this review, media channel attribution and campaign responses were measured through both digital platform evaluation methods and traditional evaluation methods.

Image: Chan et al., (2020), Pg 4, Table 1

Teo, A. R., Rice, S. P. M., Meyer, E., Karras-Pilato, E., Strickland, S., & Dobscha, S. K. (2024). An approach to evaluation of digital data in public health campaigns. *Digital Health*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20552076241291682> (full text at link).

Teo et al. (2024) tailored CDC's structured six-step framework for evaluating public health campaigns to a digital media context: (1) engage stakeholders; (2) describe the program; (3) focus the evaluation design; (4) gather credible evidence; (5) justify conclusions; and (6) ensure use and share lessons learned.

Authors guide practitioners through the process of defining campaign goals with proximal digital metrics (e.g., impressions, clicks, engagement rates) and distal outcome measures (e.g., service use, behavior change), using a case study of a suicide-prevention mass media initiative. Authors also share a campaign logic model as an example:

Inputs	Activities	Short- and Mid-term Outcomes	Longer-term Impacts
• Overall Suicide Prevention Program goals, funding, and other resources • Marketing team's expertise and resources • Researchers, other subject matter experts, and evidence base • Veteran, caregiver, and provider input and partnerships	• Landscape review of characteristics of target audiences: What messages do they respond to? What platforms do they use for communication? How do subgroups differ in their needs? • Create targeted communications and disseminations strategy • Build campaign materials, including paid, earned, and owned media • Build and implement social media campaign(s) • Develop and implement evaluations strategy to	• Audiences have opportunity to be exposed to campaign messages; messages reach intended audiences (<i>process</i>) • Audiences <i>aware of and engage in</i> messages • Change in emotional and cognitive state associated with firearms safety (<i>proximal impact—priming</i>) • Increased intention of Veterans, caregivers, and providers to promote firearms safety (<i>proximal impact—intentions</i>) • Changes in caregiver or provider behaviors related to supporting Veterans with firearms safety (<i>example of distal impacts</i>)	• Increase in safe firearms storage behaviors among veterans • Increase in veteran help-seeking/accessing resources related to firearms safety before a crisis • Shift in veteran/caregiver culture reflecting increasing awareness of importance and value of firearms safety • Shift in provider culture reflecting increasing awareness importance and value of firearms safety; changes in provider behaviors
	assess opportunities for exposure, reach, engagement, attitudes, behaviors, fidelity, cost-efficiency, and to inform future campaigns and segmentation needs	• Changes in Veteran firearms storage behaviors, before and during crisis (<i>outcomes</i>) • Campaign adheres to original strategy/efficiency (<i>fidelity</i>)	• Reduce veteran suicides by firearms

Image: Teo et al., (2024), Figure 1, Logic Model for Keep It Secure Campaign

Recap and Best Practices

Measuring Outcomes of Your Digital Social Marketing Campaign

Track and analyze digital metrics regularly.

Lower resource Use built-in platform analytics (e.g., Meta Insights, Google Ads dashboard, YouTube Studio) to track basic metrics such as impressions, reach, CTR, and video views; Export data into a simple spreadsheet weekly or monthly for review.

Higher resource Use a centralized analytics platform (e.g., Sprout Social, Google Looker Studio) to automate data collection across multiple channels, customize dashboards, and visualize performance trends in real time; Assign a dedicated team member or analyst to interpret findings and guide optimization.

Refine your campaign based on what is working.

Lower resource Conduct simple A/B tests using different headlines, images, or ad formats; Rotate content manually and observe which versions generate higher engagement or click-throughs using free tools like Meta Ads Manager or Google Ads.

Higher resource Partner with a media buying agency or in-house strategist to implement dynamic A/B testing and real-time optimization; Use granular audience segmentation and behavior-based retargeting to fine-tune campaign delivery for maximum effectiveness.

Integrate metrics into your broader program evaluation.

Lower resource Align digital campaign timelines with quitline usage reports or existing evaluation cycles; Document anecdotal trends (e.g., spikes in web traffic or calls following ads) and summarize campaign metrics in evaluation reports to support qualitative findings

Higher resource Work with an external evaluator or research partner to develop an integrated evaluation framework that includes digital analytics, survey data, and treatment outcomes; Use data modeling, audience surveys, or controlled exposure studies to assess message recall or behavioral intent

External Resources Linked in this Section

[North American Quitline Consortium \(NAQC\) Glossary](#), including promotional and treatment reach definitions

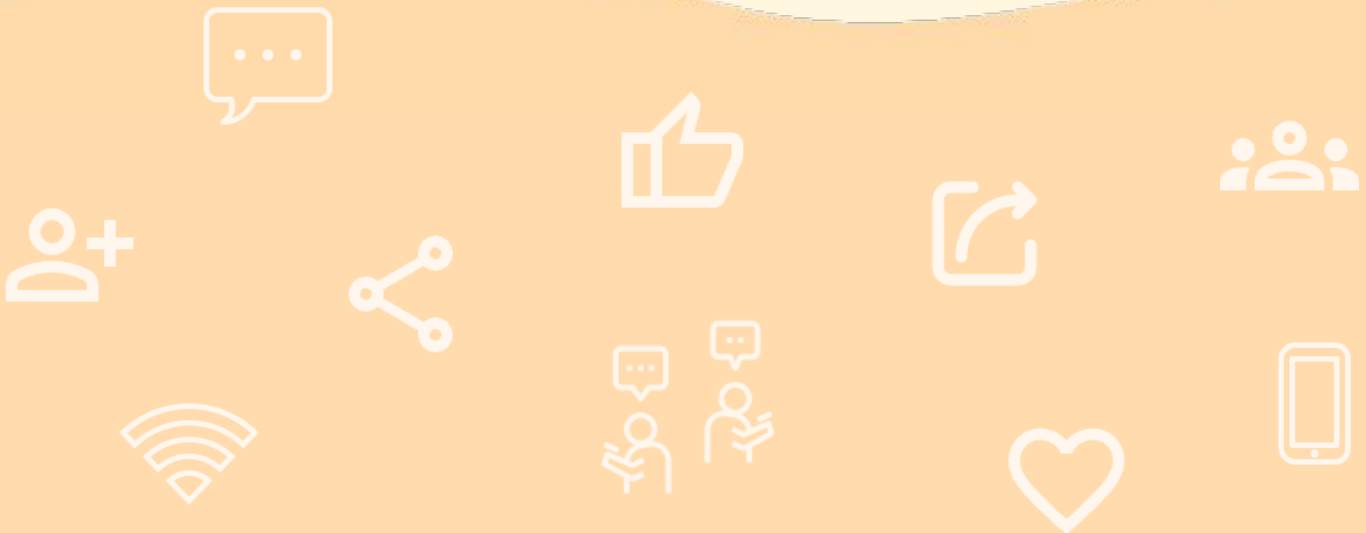
[“How Heard About” \(HHA\) reports](#) by CDC

[CDC’s Social Media Campaign Evaluation Job Aid](#) for setting campaign objectives and metrics that align with your overall goals

Tools for Building Reporting Dashboards: [Google Looker Studio](#) (free) / [Sprout Social](#) (paid)

Campaign Optimization Advice from [6sense](#)

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