

Ohio turns teens into anti-smoking activists with an integrated, grassroots marketing campaign.

Ashes

BY BRIAN NEWBERRY

A July, 2006, report by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention contained disturbing news: After several years of steady improvement, the rate of teen smoking in the United States stopped declining between 2003 and 2005.

But at least one state, Ohio, has bucked the national trend and reduced teen smoking significantly in the past four years. The reason: A program that combines advertising, grassroots marketing, community outreach, public relations and the web to turn teens into empowered anti-smoking activists.

When we began working with the Ohio Tobacco Prevention Foundation (OTPF) in 2001, Ohio ranked fourth in adult tobacco use in the United States. Statistics for kids were even worse—the smoking rate for Ohio kids in grades six through eight was 68 percent above the national average, and smoking by Ohio high school students was 12 percent above the national rate.

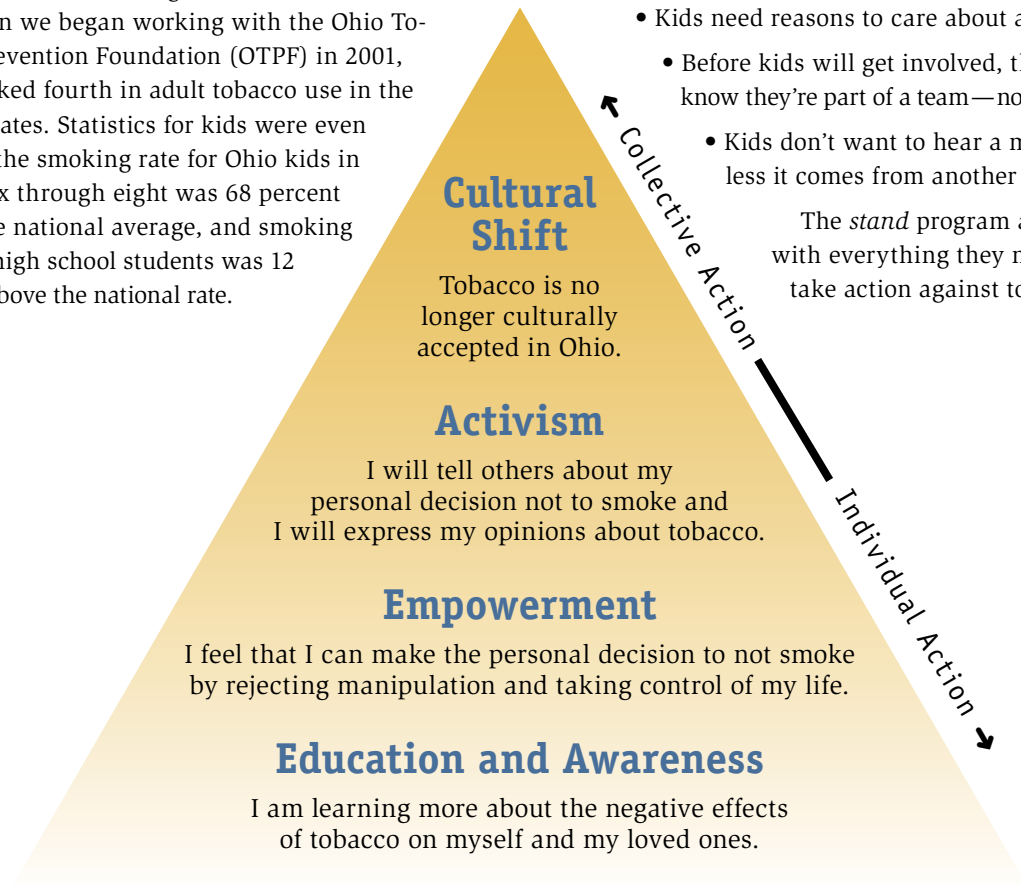
How could a marketing program inspire kids—a group known for total cynicism about marketing—to change not only their attitudes, but also their behavior? And how could we do it with a modest, four-year budget of \$50 million—when tobacco companies would spend about \$1.7 billion promoting their products in Ohio during the same period?

OTPF needed a *counter-marketing* program with strategies and tactics designed to change attitudes and behavior as well as offset Big Tobacco’s messages.

Research revealed important insights that are the bedrock of the campaign and brand we call *stand*:

- Smoking is a “marked” behavior; therefore, *not* smoking needs to be marked—or *badged*—to make it a part of one’s identity.
- Kids are interested in protecting others.
- Kids need reasons to care about a cause.
- Before kids will get involved, they need to know they’re part of a team—not in it alone.
- Kids don’t want to hear a message unless it comes from another kid.

The *stand* program armed kids with everything they needed to take action against tobacco use.



to Ashes

The beauty of the program—and a reason it's been more successful than others—is that we put kids in the driver's seat and constantly developed new ways to keep them there.

OTPF launched the *stand* message in 2002 through advertising via kid-calibrated cable TV and print and in postings wherever kids gather. In one disruptive, disturbing spot, a mother inhales tobacco and her young daughter exhales the smoke.

In another commercial, a teen speaks about a man who died from second-hand smoke; then another teen tells a story; and then another. As the spot ends, the camera reveals an endless line of kids waiting to tell more stories.

All of the creative carried a striking *stand* logo—an open hand with the word “stand” written across the palm. Public relations, grassroots events (e.g., a “stand up, sound off” music tour) and the standonline.org web site, helped localize and personalize the message. By the year's end, awareness had reached 82 percent.

Since then, an integrated campaign has empowered and motivated kids to take action against tobacco use. For example:

- Through a statewide *stand* petition drive, kids put pressure on MTV for airing videos that glamorized smoking. So far, *stand* teams have collected more than 63,000 signatures.
- A *stand* 53k bracelet giveaway program symbolizes the 53,000 non-smokers in the U.S. who die each year from the effects of second-hand smoke.
- To keep interest high, OTPF challenged kids to write commercials, speak out at local city-council meetings and persuade local politicians to wear *stand* 53k bracelets. The incentive was a chance to win a trip to New York City.



Among the results:

- Forty-nine percent reduction in tobacco use in Ohio.
- Ninety-three percent awareness of the *stand* program's anti-tobacco message.
- Expansion of *stand* teams from nine to 78.
- More than 1,000,000 individual activist-actions in 2005 alone.
- Distribution of more than 100,000 *stand* 53k bracelets in 95 Ohio cities; one *stand* team even got Ohio

Governor Bob Taft and his wife to wear bracelets.

- Ohio has dropped from fourth to 15th in per capita tobacco use nationwide.

“In four short years, through the *stand* brand, we have established a prevention campaign that resonates with our youth, empowers them to

act and effectively reduces the number of kids trying tobacco,” says OTPF executive director, Mike Renner.

The Ohio Tobacco Prevention Foundation was so encouraged by the success of *stand* that it extended the program into 2006. The latest integrated effort gives teens the tools to *debunkify* damaging myths about tobacco use (e.g., “most people smoke” and “second-hand smoke isn't deadly”).

You can learn all about the *debunkify* campaign at www.debunkify.com. ■



BRIAN NEWBERRY is vice president/general manager of **Northlich**, where he oversees programs for Ashland, the Ohio Tobacco Prevention Foundation and the Ohio State University Medical Center. Brian can be reached at (614) 545-3151, bnewberry@northlich.com.