
Strategy Lab Research – November 2014

Asking the question:

**Why do
teens/youth
drink & drive?**

Methodology

We picked six different locations all over Saskatchewan. From a high school in Regina, to a day-time program in Prince Albert. We talked to an inner-city high school in Saskatoon, and a Narcotics Anonymous summer camp on a First Nations Reserve. We visited rural high schools and mid-sized city high schools all over Saskatchewan. We had a diverse student population and share information is one thing they loved to do.

We had a set of questions we'd ask once the students were comfortable with sharing their opinions. We knew we could just come right out and say, *"hey, so really, why is it that students every now and then think it's ok to drink and drive?"* We had to be much smarter than that.

Some of the questions we'd ask would be:

Which do you watch more of, YouTube, Netflix, Cable?

Who do you look up to more, Celebrities, Athletes or Musicians? (Why?)

What do you use your phone for, top three things?

Which one do you like more?

Facebook or Twitter? Instagram or Vine? Snapchop or Instagram?

What's the easiest way to communicate a message to a pre-determined audience?

What do you think of these ads? (drinking and driving ads)

What do you think of anti texting and driving ads?

How would you stop drinking and driving if you absolutely had to?

The Three Things we learned:

Get to them younger, you can't tell kids anything, if you have to 'tell' kids, don't, 'show' them instead.

1. Get to them younger

Highschool students (especially grade 12s) have already made up their minds. You may inform them about a potential fatal decision that they're going to make but actually changing their behaviour? Not likely. By grade 12 you've made up your world view, you're not a fan of authority in your life, and the last thing you want to do is listen to "what's good for you". As soon as we realize that at this stage in life (grade 12 in particular) is a relatively bad time to convince anyone of behavioural change. We need to get to them first, before the social norms of high school get them.

If you don't believe me, try to remember what you were like in grade 12. Were you open to other people's ideas? Did you listen to authority? Did you always do what was right for you? If you answered yes to any of those questions you're either lying to yourself or you didn't have much fun in highschool. We don't need to convince the students who aren't a problem, we need to convince the hardest to reach.

2. You can't 'tell' kids anything

Well if you want them to listen. "Telling" people to do something or the perception of "telling" people never goes over well. This remains true throughout life, adults generally don't like to be told what to do either.

Create behavioural change by educating early on and allowing kids to make their own decisions (even if they're wrong), helps learn life lessons in a much more surreal and memorable way.

The problem with drinking and driving is you can't let kids make even one mistake, because all it takes is once behind the wheel and it could be fatal. Making younger kids more aware of the situations they are going to face when they get older, and the difficult decisions they're going to have to make will only help in preparing them.

You'll never eliminate it completely, but you can attach a stigma to it at a young age that deters kids from even trying it.

This is precisely what happened to smoking. Advertising and propaganda around smoking used to be "cool". Many governments (including Canada) passed laws (<http://www.smoke-free.ca/filtertips04/tobacco%20act%20provisions.htm> limiting tobacco companies the amount of advertising they were allowed to do and where they were allowed to do it. Making a much better chance a kid doesn't see James Dean on a billboard in downtown smoking a dart. Present day (Sept 2014) smoking is on the decline (obviously not for all populations of society, I'm making an over simplification). But there is an argument that once something isn't deemed "cool" society has a lovely way of reducing the "uncool" behavior.

They younger they are when they realize that "drinking and driving is not cool" the odds that they do it when they are older go down.

Every grade 9 class should have to put a campaign together on how to stop drinking and driving. Putting the messaging up in the school, implementing the best ideas that come up, throughout the year the students in grade 9 become the Champions of reducing drinking and driving incidents. They grade 12s vote on the best campaign and a cash prize is awarded for the best project and the most influential school. (I'm completely offering my services if you want to get this off the ground, I think it could work great helping students educate students on drinking and driving).

3. Don't tell kids, show kids...

When it comes down to major decisions that we make in life, whenever we're on the fence, we'll generally look to people similar to us and see what they did in the same situation before we make our decision. The psychological term is social proof. I first read about social proof in Robert Cialdini's Influence The Psychology of Persuasion.

Social proof is gaining in popularity as our world gets more confusing, more going on, demanding more of your attention, you have to make better decisions faster. For years we've used social proof. Before we take a look at a new car we ask a neighbor about theirs and what they like about it. If we look up to that neighbor we're even more likely to take their opinion as the truth.

Social proof is a powerful influencer. In a world where it's very simple to see where people live, what they drive, who they interact with, what they wear and what they do for fun, we don't need to look far to get ideas on what to buy. A simple stroll through Instagram will show me a lot of information on what you care about, what you spend your money on and where you spend your time. I don't have the answer on how to use social proof to curb drinking and driving, I do however have a couple ideas.

You need the students that other students look up to to be the ones making it very uncool to drink and drive. I say I don't have the answer because I think I'd rather ask the students what would work, and get ideas from them.

A project at the grade 12 level creating a campaign or project answering the question: "how do you reduce drinking and driving?" again offering up a cash prize for the winner. Make it a part of a class; make it a major part of the curriculum. If you get students creating amazing campaigns addressing the negatives of drinking and driving in a new creative or different or interactive way, in time they will convince themselves it's a bad idea.

Think about it, the more research you do in a subject area the more the information you're uncovering will affect you. This happens all the time. Why couldn't it work for kids and drinking and driving?