

Communicating with youth

Preparation
DO'S
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep it simple: In Holland the average level of education is VMBO (.....). In your communication it's therefore necessary to be complete. Your message should be clear instantly in what it is about and who it is from. Don't make it too complicated. Young people don't take much effort and find it hard to concentrate. Do not however patronize youngsters, approach them like you would an adult.• Meet youngsters: Adolescents do not only go to school, they work as well. They have a great sense of responsibility towards their friends. They also spend a lot of time at home. Subjects of conversations with their parents are: sexuality, the use of drugs, education and also environmental issues.• Vary images and words: Pictures give fuel to imagination. Don't try to copy the slang youngsters use. Instead use the right mix of words and images and pictures.• Connect to the images/pictures young people know: The use of images should connect to the 'image language' of adolescents. On the basis of the images used in communication young people decide at a single glance if they are going to read any further. Choose therefore designers that can sense this 'image language'.
DONT'S
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use the youngster's slang: Use language you would use for grown ups. Show youngsters that your institute – an organization consisting of adults – take adolescents seriously.• A single campaign with the aim to change behaviour: One campaign aimed at behavioural change is not sufficient. A long term approach is necessary. The target group is (literally) still growing and refreshes constantly. Their opinions, hobby's and preferences are subject to change.• Thinking youngsters are not interested in issues concerning the society they live in: Adolescents are involved with issues concerning our society. But they are not per se interested in governmental or non governmental organisations.• Separate approach on immigrants: Do not classify foreign youngsters as a separate subgroup in your communication. Most youngsters speak the Dutch language and make use of all regular media and means.• Forget the people that can influence youngsters: Approach the youngsters First, but do not forget to involve their parents. Adolescents value their attitude and opinion. Other people can also be of influence to young people: teachers, local administrations, idols.

Communicating with youth

Research
DO'S
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make use of (available) research Have or gain an understanding into the youth market, into the perception of their environment. What's hot and what's not? Do not claim to know all this, because you yourself were young one time or because you have children of your own. It's not necessary to follow the latest trends, but they might give you a good lead in choosing your means and media.• Investigate the attitude Before developing a campaign, try to get more inside in the attitude youngster have on your subject. Always try to pilot the communication concepts you have. Only with proof you'll be able to convince. Do not however expect solutions from the youngsters themselves.• Evaluate Try to establish up front the size of your target group and try to gain insight in the range and the ratings you want to achieve with your communication. It is only then that adjustments can be effective.
DONT'S

Means and media
DO'S
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be honest This generation of youngsters are media smart, they grew up in a 24-7 information world. They are professional message receivers that understand precisely how communication and marketing function. Openness and honesty is therefore essential.• Meet youngsters also on the internet Internet is all about interaction and communication. Young people do not look upon the internet as a gigantic electronic library. They think of the internet as a place to meet others day or night (secondlife, hyves, etc.).• Search for possibilities to interact Establish a relationship with youngsters in order to gain two-way traffic in your communication. This generation is not used to reading and reacting instantly. Search for leads on interacting on your subject. This is what they expect. Recognize that the adolescents are not just receivers of your message, but also senders.• Do something with the respons the youngsters give you Interaction is a condition for success. Youngsters expect you do something with the suggestions and opinions they give you. Young people want to explore, experience and discover.• Vary media and means A combination of 'young' and 'traditional' media/means is possible.• Recognize the emotion of a medium A medium/type of means has not just a technical meaning, but also an emotional one. SMS and MSN are means to keep in touch with friends. Keeping in touch with friends is not the same as sending a one time, unasked-for and unwished-for message.
DONT'S
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Using only traditional media Consider using interactive internet applications and events. Bring your campaign close to the young people so it is possible for them to interact. Moreover young people spent al lot of time at home gaming, MSN-ing, watching television or DVD's with friends.

Communicating with youth

Segmentation
DO'S
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Segmentate well Establish which method of segmentation suits your message and the attitude of youngsters towards it best. Do not segmentate on the basis of subcultures (f.i. skaters, gothics, alternative, etc.). That way you only reach a small group of youngsters and moreover, subcultures often exist for a short period.• Connect to the social world youngster live in But do not exaggerate. The social world of youngsters is not at all extreme. In your communication stick close to your own beliefs and be honest. Adolescents respect people with character.• Unambiguous communication Institutes, organizations and/or people with strong character appeal to young people. Youngsters are often insecure themselves and turn to something or someone for support.
DONT'S

Participation of the target group in local projects
DO'S
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know the views youngsters have: Find out what the views and opinions are on your theme/problem. Be aware that they can only tell you this sufficiently when they have access all relevant background information. You might have to 'translate' this information to a level they can understand. • Learn from youngsters: Talk to them to get a better understanding of the themes they are interested in or worried about, and the way they want to be educated on these subjects. • Make sure all people/organizations involved in a project have the same purpose/aim in sight: So for instance not: "Diminishing the inconvenience caused by youngsters in the city". This is an aim from the perspective of a local administration, not the aim of the participating youngsters. • Involve from the start of your project the key people from the target group: 'Employ' them wherever you can. • Role models and peer consulting: Use youngsters as role models in your education. Let young people develop questionnaires, make an inventory of the bottleneck, interview other youngsters, write reports, give presentations, etc. • Give your project time to develop: Participation is an ongoing process. Make sure you have sufficient time for the project to prove it's value. Aim for your goals to be structurally embedded. • Be clear on your goals and your target group: This is necessary with regard to the content and form/shape of your message, as well as with regard to the choice of partners you want to work together with. • Create a chain: Choose, depending on the theme or problem your working on, the right partners to work together with. Choose partners that together complete the chain around adolescents (parents, schools, police, youth associations, social services, etc.) • Approach youngsters with trust, respect en tender loving care: This will motivate them by starting from their strengths and thus empowering them. • Take youngsters seriously: Approach them as your equal. Do not give them the impression they are the troubled target group of your project/action plan. Be open to their views, try to formulate mutual goals, involve them in the development of your plans and give them a part in the execution en evaluation of your project. • Support youngsters: Help them on their first steps in participation. For them often it is the first time people will listen to what they have to say. So support them in doing so. Beware your support does not turn in to steering them. • Offer care afterwards: Offer participating youngsters as much care as you can (one o none if necessary). This will prevent adolescents from dropping out. If necessary provide also support after the project has ended.

- **Challenge and responsibility:** Make sure that what you offer the participating youngster is challenging to them. Give them a (shared) responsibility in the project. This way they will develop or sharpen their competences (learn to formulate an opinion, listening to others, etc.). This will enlarge their self confidence, their engagement en sense of responsibility.

Sources:

- www.communicatieplein.nl: A result of an action program by the Dutch government on how to communicate with different groups. The website consists of several themes: communicating with adolescents is one of them. Examples of others are: communicating with elderly people, with entrepreneurs, with immigrants, etc.
- Participatie – jongeren doen mee. Een praktische handleiding. Uitgegeven door Forum: Conclusions of 10 successfull local projects in which adolescents partipated.
- Results of the Dutch pilot on risk behaviour.
- Results of a meeting with 4 other Dutch prevention institutes to exchange knowledge and experiences on how to approach adolescents in a campaign on risk behaviour, April 18th 2007.