



BRONZE, Government, Public Service & Non-Profit

Campaign Title: The Future Network

Year the campaign took place: 2018-2019



Brand: American Student Assistance (ASA)

Creative Agency: Saatchi & Saatchi-New York

Media Company/Agency: American Student Assistance (ASA)

Research Company: NA

Additional Affiliated Companies: NA

Summary of the marketing challenge, methodology, insight discovered, creative execution and business impact.

We created The Future Network—an entire content network for kids, featuring kids, inspiring kids to explore the practical connections between their passions and potential careers.

This was because, through rigorous research, we discovered that even with the world at their fingertips, when it comes to careers, young people today only dream as big as their own experience. So they find themselves on a path that doesn't always align with their passions.



The Future Network has been hugely successful. In a world of 6-second attention spans, we got millions of young people watching 2+ minute videos. With a minimal advertising spend.

CONSUMER INSIGHT

Even with the world at their fingertips, when it comes to careers, young people today only dream as big as their own experience. So they find themselves on a path that doesn't always align with their passions.

MARKETING CHALLENGE

For the last 60 years, American Student Assistance (ASA), a non-profit organization based in Boston, has been guaranteeing federal student loans. That means when someone takes out a federal student loan, they didn't take it directly from the government, but from ASA, who acts as guarantor. But recent changes to the federal student loans system minimized the role of middlemen organizations like ASA. So, after 60 years of expertise in the field of student loans, ASA had to redefine itself and its mission.

It decided to redefine itself as a non-profit organization that helps Gen Z (ages 13 – 18) connect their passions to their future. Why passions? Because having administered student loans for 60 years, ASA knew that one of the biggest impediments to success is people pursuing a career they think they should be pursuing, rather than those they want to pursue.

This gap between their choices and their passions comes with disastrous consequences. For one, 44% of American college students drop out of college before completing their degree (Harvard School of Education, 2012). This means almost half of college students leave college saddled with debt, but do not benefit from the higher lifetime income that a college degree promises.



Second, even those in careers are unhappy with the choices they made. 50% of American adults are dissatisfied with their jobs (Nielsen, 2018), and a further 67% say they are disengaged with their jobs (Gallup, 2016). A half-hearted workforce is no good for anyone—employers, employees, or the economy at large.

Being a career counseling resource is an immense task riddled with inherent pitfalls. First, a fundamental trade-off between breadth and depth. You can either have deep one-on-one sessions, or broad reach with overly generalized information. That's why most online career counseling websites just consist of a basic personality test that spits out a career option at the end. (You like helping people and being active? You should be a nurse!). It's unimaginative, and minimally helpful at best. Second, people only know what they know. A lot of counseling just tries to give them a path to get where they think they should go. But we wanted to go further, and open up a whole new set of options they had never considered.

So we set out to change the system. We wanted to build a career counseling service that bridges the gap between breadth and depth. That opens up previously unconsidered options and inspires young people to turn their passion into careers.

METHODOLOGY

We carried out three phases of research:

PHASE 1. Online data mining: To determine how best to help Gen Z, we first had to figure out what's on their mind. So we went to the place where Gen Z shares their mind—the internet. Using search and data science tools, including several proprietary systems, we uncovered two major findings. First, they feel uncertain about their futures and second, that uncertainty manifests differently for different people. This lead us to define 4 personas. First—the Reluctant Learner, who feels they have to follow a certain path (typically college) because their parents want them



to. Second—the Settler, who tempers their ambition out of fear of rejection. Third—the Future Tentative, who feels overwhelmed by the sheer number of options they have. And finally—the Wage Earner, who feel constrained by finances.

PHASE 2. Qualitative and quantitative research: With a high-level understanding of the personas under our belt, we now needed to go out and meet them. So we traveled across the country—from New York to California, Florida to Minneapolis. We went to big cities and small towns. Affluent neighborhoods and impoverished ones. We hung out with Gen Zers at home, in malls, and in coffee shops. We talked to 13 year-olds and 18 year-olds, and everyone in between. And most of all we listened. To their passions, dreams, and fears. And wherever we went, we heard the same thing—any future career plans they had were inspired by people they knew personally. If they were from a working class town full of nurses, teachers and policemen, they wanted to be a nurse, a teacher or a policeman. If they ran in social circles filled with investment bankers and movie producers, they wanted to be investment bankers and movie producers. Even though they had access to the wide open world of the internet, when it came to careers, they played it safe. We also talked to the people who influence them—teachers, counselors, and parents—and found the same limitation applied to them. Which lead us to our key insight: Even with the world at their fingertips, when it comes to careers, young people today only dream as big as their own experience. So they find themselves on a path that doesn't always align with their passions. To validate our finding, we then ran a large national survey ($n=1,200$) of Gen Zers and found the same thing—45% of Gen Zers said that the MOST helpful resource for deciding what to do after high school was people they knew personally. This beat out every other option, including Google (20%), and entertainment like YouTube, TV, or social media (7%).

PHASE 3. Quantitative study: So now we knew what we had to do. We had to create a way to help Gen Zers by exposing them to things, ideas, people, and career opportunities that they did not see in everyday life.



We used this unifying thought to anchor our new strategy for ASA as the creator of original mobile-first programming for Gen Z. We validated this approach, as well as show loglines and themes with a proprietary online survey (n=1,500). The data informed the kind of content we created and the appropriate placements. It told us which kinds of shows to create first, what to talk about, how to talk about it, and where to place the shows.

CREATIVE EXECUTION

Our research had told us exactly which themes Gen Z was most hungering for, so now we had to implement them. So we created **The Future Network**, a series of online shows designed to help young people figure out how to turn what they love into what they do.

Unlike all the boring and undistinguishable career counseling available online, The Future Network took a different approach. No meaningless personality tests. No half-hearted quizzes and stock career choices. Instead, we merged breadth with depth, as each show deals with the real challenges Gen Z faces today. And answers the questions they can't find on a stock blog post. From starting a hustle, to finding a mentor, to dealing with failure, each episode of the Future Network strikes a nerve with real Gen Zers across the country.

The network consists of 5 shows:

Hustle: a show featuring young people who have turned their passions into careers.

Shadow: where young people shadow someone who does their ideal job.

Fail: where people with really cool careers talk about the setbacks they experienced along the way to landing their dream career.

Pitch: a show where kids pitch their dream career to their parents and an expert in their field.



Yum: where two kids from different cultures come together to discuss their future plans while cooking together.

We launched it all on September 1, 2018, to coincide with the start of a new school year. And we went where Gen Z already is—YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook. To make sure we got noticed, we partnered with influential young people and adults. We featured them in our shows, and then helped them spread the content through their social channels to increase reach and impact.

We shot all content vertically, and pushed it out live on ASA.org. We then rolled it out week by week via a decentralized content model with supporting social assets. We delivered a second round of content in January, following a similar rollout plan of 2 episodes per month with supporting social posts.

BUSINESS RESULTS/LESSONS LEARNED

So did it work? Are young people actually watching videos from a 60-year old brand they've never heard of?

Yes. And Yes.

Our killer content was rewarded with views and lots of them. It has garnered over 20 million views to date, much of it organic. And engagement with the brand increased by 1800%! All in all, we garnered over 384 million impressions.

And the proof, as they say, is in the watching. To tell whether the content was actually useful, we looked not just at *how many* young people watched our videos, but also *how much* of our videos they watched. And here's what we found—most kids watched 50% or more of our shows. In a world of 6-second attention spans, they stuck with our long form content.



And they didn't just find it useful, they shared it around. Our content spread so organically that our cost-per-view was just \$0.05, which is far more efficient than benchmarks. So much so, that ASA actually throttled back the media spend, and the views still exceeded all expectations.

The network and our content continues to grow, all because we tapped into a real insight about what young people need, and how they want to get it.