GOLD, Government, Public Service & Non-Profit
SILVER, Best Brand Transformation
Campaign Title: The Truth About Opioids
Year the campaign took place: 2018

Brand: truth
Creative Agency: 72andSunny, Haymaker
Media Company/Agency: Assembly
Research Company: Crux Research, CommSight
Additional Affiliated Companies: missing pieces, Ad Council, Office of National Drug Control Policy

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

For the past 20 years, truth has focused exclusively on fighting tobacco use among young people. truth’s challenge was to leverage our brand equity and experience in tobacco prevention to address an emerging national crisis: the abuse of opioids among young people. Formative research showed that young people were aware of the opioid crisis and its consequences, but they did not necessarily feel empathy towards opioid users or feel that opioids could affect them, or the people close to them. The creative response to this insight was a multiple ad campaign,
revealing the true stories of Kyle and Rebekkah. In-market research showed that the campaigns successfully increased empathy by destigmatizing addiction and treatment, caused young people to feel that opioid misuse is relevant to them, and compelled them to take actions to influence others.

**CONSUMER INSIGHT**

Awareness of the opioid crisis isn’t enough; to make young people care, you have to make it personal.

**MARKETING CHALLENGE**

Opioid addiction claims a life every twelve minutes and is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States. Truth Initiative realized that not enough is being done to combat this issue and that the consequences of opioid addiction greatly affects our core youth audience. We felt a deep responsibility to use our unique position as a trusted brand among youth to do our part to combat what is perhaps the most consequential public health crisis of our time.

truth is a well-established brand that combats misinformation and empowers young people to make sensible choices relating to tobacco use. We tasked ourselves with the challenge of expanding our brand into a new sphere by applying it to an urgent and deadly new crisis. This required doubling our efforts to include opioids without sacrificing any of our efficacy or resources on our tobacco work.

We faced steep marketing and organizational challenges in our quest to address the opioid crisis:

1. While we have always promoted truth to be a brand that is about youth empowerment, **we had never strayed far from our original mission relating to tobacco prevention**. The opioid crisis represents a significantly different marketing challenge, and we
needed research to help us understand which elements of our tobacco work would be relevant to opioids and how our brand could be transformed to take on a new issue.

2. **Truth Initiative needed to take on the opioid crisis without any additional resources.** We could not add staff or budget. Our opioid approach had to be efficient and research had to point the way.

3. Because we were resource-limited, **we needed to work with other organizations to make this happen.** Agencies had to take this work on at little or no cost, media had to largely be donated, and our external partners had to rally around our approach. Having research evidence would help us motivate a coalition. Our path to obtaining necessary resources was opened by our research findings.

We needed to learn how the truth brand could apply to opioid misuse and addiction. Research showed that the opioid marketing situation is very different than the challenges we face with tobacco. Opioids are a growing problem, while tobacco use is in decline. Opioids affect a slightly older age group. Our opioid target has likely grown up seeing our tobacco ads. Importantly, the causes of opioid misuse are nuanced from the point of young people. Unlike tobacco, opioids provide relief and comfort to many legitimate users, and in the eyes of young people there was no singular cause of the problem.

Despite the marketing challenges we faced, our formative research gave us confidence that the core elements of our brand (youth empowerment, honesty, edginess) would play well in opioid prevention.

**METHODOLOGY**

Our research plan was created to 1) establish and formulate our strategic approach, 2) test creative concepts before production, 3) pre-market test
final TV executions before airing to ensure they addressed desired strategies, and 4) track our in-market success.

1. Establishing/formulating our approach: We needed to quickly learn all that we could. We started by interviewing opioid crisis experts including treatment and recovery specialists, addiction researchers, and government officials. A literature review helped us identify attitudes and beliefs associated with addiction and opioid use stigmatization. We then moved to formative research among current users, individuals in recovery, and young people aware of the opioid crisis. Questioning through online surveys and in-person focus groups allowed us to ascertain our target audience’s beliefs around opioid use. This formative research gave us confidence that the truth brand could be transformed to address opioids and that employing an approach centered on destigmatizing opioid addiction would compel young people to change their attitudes and behaviors.

2. Testing our Creative Concepts Before Production: We initially tested a number of creative concepts (including the concepts that became Know More and Rebekkah) using an online bulletin board methodology. This method allowed us to brainstorm potential solutions to the growing opioid epidemic with young people. This qualitative research showed that a focus on empathy and de-stigmatization could work, and that our specific creative idea of first shocking to grab attention and then showing someone undergoing a public detox was appropriate. Perhaps most importantly, we learned that truth’s more typical “anthem-style” messaging was not perceived as appropriate given the topic – our opioids campaign had to take on a style and approach that was unfamiliar for our brand. We then showed storyboards to participants in traditional focus groups to have a deep dive discussion on the creative concepts. The creative concept that eventually became Know More and Rebekkah were clear winners in these groups, but we needed quantitative research to be sure.
3. **Pre-market test final TV executions before airing:** We pre-market tested the creative concepts behind Know More and Rebekkah in an online copy test. This final stage included pre-market testing with 300 young adults (18-24 years) per ad of almost fully-produced ads. While we tested multiple ads with other real-life opioid addicts, Rebekkah stood out as being the most relatable, and garnering the most empathy. The research results were used to help us optimize the ad and get it ready to air.

4. **Track our in-market success:** At this point we faced a Catch-22 type dilemma. To compel our partners to donate media time to the campaign, we needed to demonstrate in-market success with Know More and Rebekkah. But, to obtain the in-market success, we needed our partners to provide substantial donated media time. To address this dilemma, we first established a continuous in-market tracking study that covered the entire nation. This study was put into place about a month before ads aired and continues to interview 300 young people weekly. This helps us establish benchmarks and track our success nationally. In addition, we established a heavy-up pilot test with the State of Rhode Island. Rhode Island agreed to provide resources to greatly expand our media plan, and we conducted a pre-post quantitative research study. This study would provide the evidence we needed to demonstrate the level of media spending necessary to make a difference.

**CREATIVE EXECUTION**

The aim of *Know More* was to shock and get attention while the aim of *Rebekkah* was to challenge commonly-held notions of opioids and show the truth: casual opioid use is far from harmless and that addiction is a medical disease. Our four-step creative approach challenged young people to view the opioid crisis differently:

1. **Reveal the real, shocking truth about opioids and its effects:** We brought the idea to life with real, yet tragic stories of opioid
dependence. Prior to Rebekkah launching, we aired the Know More ads that showed a variety of ways young people have been innocently introduced to opioids — injury, surgery, experimentation, sharing a prescription — and encouraged them to learn the truth about opioids by providing them with facts and resources. We addressed the knowledge gap by putting real stories on screen — their innocent introduction to the drug, an admission that they weren’t aware of its true dangers, and the shocking reality of how far they’d go to get more.

We then brought viewers face-to-face with the truth about opioids by capturing 26-year-old Rebekkah’s experience with opioid addiction and her journey to recovery. We made her detox public with a multiscreen installation in NYC. This brought young adults into the crisis by placing them inside a treatment room as they observed a real, medically-supervised detox. Using groundbreaking technology, we created the illusion that the traditionally private detox room had no walls, giving passersby a visceral education of the realities of addiction. We made sure not to over-exaggerate or demonize addiction and took a sympathetic approach, using real and vulnerable stories of opioid dependence with a clear call to action: "know the truth, spread the truth."

2. **Make it personal to inspire action:** Our ads used vivid imagery, sharp sound effects, and stark language to underscore the dangers of addiction. The aim of our ads wasn’t to exaggerate or sensationalize the consequences of opioid use. Rather, we wanted our audience to empathize with individuals, understand their desperation, and realize addiction can happen to anyone – including themselves. Instead of leaving the viewer with a sense of defeat or hopelessness, we sought to inspire a call to action, spread accurate information about addiction and treatment, and prevent young people from engaging in risky opioid use.
3. **Arm young people with hard facts:** Truth has historically built trust with young audiences by consistently being a source for unbiased facts in a world where transparency and impartiality are almost non-existent — this campaign was no exception. Not only did we bake objective facts into our television, digital, and social communications, we then used those channels to drive young people to opioids.thetruth.com where young people could unlock a wealth of knowledge, hear more about the people portrayed in the ads, and find resources and ways to help join the fight.

4. **Make the truth about opioids more visible and easier to access than ever before:** We worked with the Ad Council, Office of National Drug Control Policy, and the US Surgeon General to get this important message in front of as many high-profile media outlets as possible. Their partnership and efforts led to several donated media placements on major networks such as Viacom, Turner, NBCUniversal, Google, Facebook, YouTube and Amazon and national coverage in the press.

**BUSINESS RESULTS/LESSONS LEARNED**

From our in-market testing, we demonstrated that there was a **statistically significant decrease** from 8 weeks pre-campaign launch to 6 months post-campaign in:

- **Intention to misuse opioids**
- **Acceptance of misusing opioids**
- **Stigma associated with people with opioid use disorder**

Our marketing strategy was designed to appeal to teens and young adults to shift attitudes around opioid use and misuse. Our evaluation of the campaign in Rhode Island showed that result of this strategy paid off:

- **Addiction knowledge increase:** Young people who saw the ad in Rhode Island were more likely to agree that “Opioid dependence can happen in just 5 days” than those who did not see the ad.
- **Addiction stigma decrease:** Those who reported seeing the ads in Rhode Island were more likely than those in the baseline group
to agree that “Someone like me could become dependent on prescription opioids.”

- **Perceived risk of misuse increase:** Fewer people responded that use of prescription opioids “just for the experience of feeling they cause” carried no risk.
- **Willingness to seek and spread information increase:** We saw an increase over baseline in reported likelihood to “Look up information about the opioid epidemic” and to “Talk to a friend or loved one about the opioid epidemic.”

We also succeeded in leveraging limited resources for maximum impact in the national campaign.

- **Rapidly-increasing campaign awareness:** Our campaign received 1,060 earned media placements resulting in 700+ million impressions in the first week after launch. Within six months of our launch, awareness of the campaign surpassed our 50% goal.
- **Motivated to action:** The campaign drove over 3.2 million social engagements, 95.5 million digital video views, 1.5 Billion impressions across TV, Digital and Social, and a 14.7% conversion to our website. We had a lift in search terms where, after seeing our ads, 18-24-year-olds were over 600% more likely to search for the terms “opioid epidemic” and our campaign tagline, “know the truth.”

Our success with opioids, as demonstrated through research, has allowed our organization to renew its commitment to this issue. We expect our research results will enable us to garner more donated and earned media in the future as well as attract more funding to the effort. We are excited that by transforming our brand we have been able to do our part to combat such a pressing national issue, and market research has been a central part of our success thus far.