Advertising Approaches for Substance Abuse and Related Behavioral Studies

Shanna Babalonis, Ph.D.
University of Kentucky
College of Medicine
Department of Behavioral Science
Center on Drug and Alcohol Research
For human behavioral and drug abuse studies, we have to engage the public to find our research participants.

Occasionally, we can recruit patient populations (patients who are inpatient or outpatient drug abuse treatment centers); however, the majority of our studies enroll participants who are healthy and not currently in treatment.

The majority of our participants are recruited through our advertisements or through word-of-mouth referrals.

Thus, we spend quite a bit of time and money on advertising tactics to recruit our participants, which are often comprised of difficult-to-reach populations.
Recent Populations of Interest

Over the past 5 years, we have recruited several different populations for our research studies (some examples):

- Cocaine users who were seeking treatment
- Non-physically dependent opioid users
- Physically dependent opioid users seeking treatment
- Physically dependent opioid users not seeking treatment
- Heavy marijuana smokers
- Heavy marijuana smokers seeking treatment
- Normal, healthy participants with no recent histories of drug abuse or pain conditions
- Heavy cigarette smokers

Overall, our general population across studies is healthy adults, ages 18 – 50 with out serious/uncontrolled medical or psychiatric issues, no history of violence
Screening Methods

Initial phone interview:

- Interested individuals obtain our phone number from our advertising materials
- Trained research staff (HIPAA, GCP, HSP) describe our ongoing studies (time commitment, study drugs, payment structure) and determine which study/studies are of interest
- After obtaining the caller’s permission, a brief phone interview is completed
- The phone interview is designed to capture basic inclusion/exclusion items (age, current drug use, etc).
- Study investigators review the information and make a decision to invite the caller in for an in-person screen or to disqualify
- On average, approximately 20% of our calls are invited in for a screening visit (this varies quite a bit from study to study, also varies on our advertising methods)
Screening Methods

In-person screening
- Sober informed consent is obtained by trained staff
- Due to the nature of our screening assessments and participant population, we obtain a Certificate of Confidentiality from the Food and Drug Administration to allow us to freely discuss drug use, illegal transactions, legal history
- A thorough screening appointment is conducted
  - urine drug screen (often an observed sample)
  - literacy assessment
  - drug use history
  - medical history
  - legal history
  - psychiatric assessments
  - medical assessments (labs, ECG)
- If participant continues to meet all of the inclusion criteria, they are invited back for at least one appointment in order to collect additional urine samples, complete physical exam and etc.
Recruiting Approaches

Because we are recruiting individuals who may be engaging in illegal activities (e.g., using drugs) and may be socio-economically disadvantaged, we have to be sensitive to these issues and tailor our ads accordingly.

In our study ads, we do not to:
- glamorize drug use (no pictures of joints, bongs, marijuana leaves)
- demonize drug use (no pictures of needles or anything derogatory)
- include the amount of compensation (generally not permitted by IRB; coercive)
- imply that all callers/interested parties will qualify

We do include:
- all calls to our office are completely confidential
- a toll-free number so that people can call from a pay phone or a friend’s phone without incurring any charges

All advertising materials must be approved by the UK Public Relations Department and the IRB before being posted/displayed.
Recruiting Approaches

We have tried many different kinds of advertising techniques. We have found that some work very well, while others generate very little interest.

We will start with the venues/techniques that have been generally successful for us.

Will follow with those that have not worked as well:
- this may help other research groups avoid our same mistakes
- they may work well for other groups recruiting different populations
Successful Strategies
Flyers

We post flyers in Lexington and the surrounding area and try to target locations where our study population will see them.

It requires staff time to post flyers, but are essentially free (printing, paper)

- smoking shops
- tattoo parlors
- laundromats
- coffee shops
- discount cigarette shops
- bars
- libraries
- per diem employment office
- bus stops
- grocery stores
- skate park

Not permitted in certain locations (unemployment office, Amazon.com)

Are You a Frequent Marijuana Smoker?

• If you currently smoke marijuana to get high, you may qualify for our research study.

• We are looking for people who smoke marijuana on a regular basis.

• The purpose of this study is to learn more about the strength and effects of medications in marijuana smokers.

• If you are interested, call us for a confidential phone interview. Call toll-free:

  1-866-933-4UKY

• Participation will require multiple visits across 8 weeks
  • You will be paid for your participation
JOBS Magazine

JOBS is a free, once-weekly publication available to the public. These magazines are often located in newspaper receptacles at grocery stores and gas stations and advertise local job openings.

The cost for a medium size ad is approximately $1,600/month.

These ads generate a high call volume, but the population responding to the ads is generally not as healthy those responding to some of our other advertising methods.
Craigslist is an online source for all kinds of things! We advertise our studies under various categories – labor, miscellaneous jobs, food/hospitality industry, temporary jobs, gigs, etc.

Craigslist used to be free, but has recently moved to a pay-to-advertise system.

It is approximately $15 per post, per category, per month.

These ads generate a high call volume and generally provides us with a population that is more likely to qualify for our studies.

Smokers Needed for Research Study (Lexington, Ky)

You may qualify if you are:
-- between the ages of 21 -- 60
-- in good health
-- currently smoking cigarettes
-- not trying to cut back or quit smoking

The purpose of this study is to learn more about how a medication affects smoking.

If you are interested, call us for a confidential phone interview. Call toll-free: 1-866-933-4UKY

You will be paid for your participation.

- Principals only. Recruiters, please don’t contact this job poster.
- do NOT contact us with unsolicited services or offers
Information Tables

We have set up information tables in the local community with two staff members distributing flyers and answering questions for interested people who visit the booth.

- Big bowls of free candy, chips, cookies, snacks and soda-pop are on the table along with our flyers.

- Kroger locations, Wal-Mart, William T. Young library, The 90 student cafeteria, UK Clinic and other locations on campus.

- Best for recruiting healthy populations or cigarette smokers (we generally do not advertise our drug abuse studies at these types of venues).

- UK Physical Plant will provide free set-up and take-down of tables and chairs anywhere on campus.

Cost: We have purchased tables, tablecloths and chairs for off-campus activities (<$100) and buy goodies for the events; staff time also needed, but generally inexpensive

Benefit: It is a good source of calls for us and we have had several people qualify from these events. It is also a nice way for us to engage with the public and answer questions.
Online Match Services

ResearchMatch.com: Interested individuals sign up on the website and are then notified if they meet the general criteria for a study and then are contacted by study investigators. This is a free venue and has provided us with quite a few referrals (approximately 100 for a study recruiting healthy volunteers). The CCTS offers helpful training on how to use it.

Studykik.com: Similar to ResearchMatch, but is a pay-to-advertise system. It is approximately $550 per month. Our recent post for smokers generated quite a few hits in the first 48 hrs of the post.
Kiosks: The CCTS clinical research team (Roxane Poskin) post flyers at kiosks located in the UK Hospital and Clinic. This is a free service and we receive calls from employees, patients and patient families. This is a good resource for all types of studies.

Online: These ads are also posted on the CCTS website. Depending on the study, we post under different categories (Drug Abuse and Addictions, Healthy Volunteers, Smokers). Those interested can either call or send us an email with their contact information.

The online portion works best for our non-drug abuse studies. We have received approximately 50-75 responses for our healthy volunteer study over the past 6 months.
Word-of-Mouth

For hard to reach populations, word-of-mouth referrals are priceless. We have had great success with former and current participants informing their friends about our studies.

Because we do not disclose any inclusion/exclusion criteria to our volunteers at any stage of their participation, there is not much worry that these referrals are misrepresenting themselves to gain entry into the study. We also have several screening strategies to guard against this.

Respondent driven sampling – a technique used to find difficult-to-recruit populations. A qualified individuals (“seeds”) are given numbered coupons to distribute to folks who may be interested in participating. If the referred individual qualifies for the study, the seed is paid (ex: $10 per qualified person referred).
Non-Successful Strategies
Bus Ads

**Interior ads:** These ads are placards placed on the bus interior above the bus windows.

Cost: Approximately $1,200 per month for approx. 50 buses

Benefit: We have advertised for different types of studies and have received very few calls (<20 total). However, this is such an unpopular method of advertising that cards are sometimes left up for years at a time!

**Exterior Ads:** These ads are placed on the rear end of the bus (easily visible while driving behind buses or stuck in traffic). These are high visibility ads that reach a large portion of the local population.

Cost: $1,950/month for 4 buses

Although plenty of people see these ads, they have not generated many calls for us (<5 for our current smoking study).
Billboards

We used a billboard to advertise for our marijuana treatment trial last year. It was posted along Versailles Rd. near the intersection of Red Mile Rd. in a plaza with a tattoo and smoking shop.

Cost: $2,000 for one month. The billboard company (Lamar) was difficult to work with and repeatedly tried to sell us the worst locations because they had been unable to sell the space.

Benefit: We received one call from this billboard that was displayed for 2 months. We received plenty of calls from other sources for this study.

Do you want to STOP smoking marijuana?

1-866-933-4UKY
ACCENT@uky.edu

Qualified persons will be paid.
Other Unsuccessful Methods

**Radio ads:** We have advertised on commercial radio stations for several studies and have also tried the independent student-run radio station (88.1, WRFL) for a marijuana study.

Cost: The commercial radio spots were expensive:
- $650/week for non-peak hours (7pm to midnight)
- $1500/week for peak commuter times (morning, afternoon rush hours)

WRFL ran our add free of charge.

Overall, this is not the best resource for recruiting participants. We received some calls for an opioid treatment study, but it was not our best resource. We received minimal calls for our marijuana smokers study (3-5 calls).

**Reddit:** Free online website with sections (subreddits) for local interests and have not had many calls for any of our studies.
Other Unsuccessful Methods

Herald Leader Classified Section

Cost: A medium-sized classified ad costs approximately $1,800 for 3 weekdays, $2,900 for 3 Sundays.

Benefit: We have tried this tactic for several of our studies with not much response. We are going to try a medium-sized ad in the news section of the paper (non-classified ad) this week to see if it works.

Kentucky Kernel Student Paper

Cost: $30-$40 per day for a classified ad

Benefit: We have used the classified section for several of our studies (including marijuana studies) without much return.
Ideas to Pursue

Facebook: We have been rejected several times from placing an ad due to using terms such as “opioid” or “marijuana” in our ads (which is against their rules). We are going to pursue it for a new cigarette smoking study.

Job sites, CareerBuilder, Monster: We have not tried this yet, but are going to explore it for our healthy volunteer studies.

Local TV news stations (online): Local news websites such as WKYT, Lex18, Fox 56, and ABC 36 sell online ads that are posted on their home page (banners and ads displayed to the side of the news stories and videos). Prices range between stations, but WKYT is $500 for 100,000 displays to Lexington residents (ad creation cost included).
Recruiting Data

We have had some unexpected experiences recruiting for some of our studies.

**Smoked Marijuana Study**
- For heavy marijuana smokers (e.g., daily users) who were not interested in quitting. Our goal was to obtain 12 completers.

- Study obligations: Complete 8 once-weekly outpatient sessions, each session lasting about 8 hrs. Participants received doses of oral cannabidiol and smoked marijuana.

- We thought recruitment and enrollment would be quick and uncomplicated

Across approximately 1 year:
- 710 phone interviews were completed, 205 (29%) qualified
- 76 people completed a Screen 1 (32 were disqualified)
- 25 people completed a Screen 2 visit (8 were disqualified)
- 17 participants enrolled
- 7 completed the study (1% of phone calls)
Marijuana Treatment Clinical Trial
- For heavy marijuana smokers who interested in cutting back or quitting.

- Study obligations: Twice weekly visits (1 hr each) for 12 weeks; participants were randomized to placebo or n-acetylcysteine treatment

- Many members of the community warned us on the difficulties of recruiting a sample of marijuana smokers who wanted to quit

- This study was even panned on High Times – they thought that no one would want to join the study because no one wants to quit

In approximately 1 year:

- 302 participants were enrolled across all 6 sites

- 37 participants were enrolled at our UK Site

- Retention was relatively high
Summary and Conclusions

- Overall, the best techniques that we have found to recruit drug abusing and hard-to-reach populations:
  - flyers posted in the community
  - JOBS magazine
  - Word-of-mouth referrals
  - These are effective for reaching populations that do not have computer/smart phone access
  - Craigslist

- To reach a healthy population (those with time/need of extra money), we have had success with:
  - information/recruiting tables
  - online match services
  - CCTS online flyers/self-referrals
  - flyers in the community
  - Craigslist

- Our productivity and rate of data collection are directly tied to our ability to recruit participants. We are always trying to find new and innovative ways to advertise our studies and are open to new ideas/suggestions.
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