



Public Health  
England

Protecting and improving the nation's health

# **Stoptober 2016**

## **Campaign evaluation**

## About Public Health England

Public Health England exists to protect and improve the nation's health and wellbeing, and reduce health inequalities. We do this through world-class science, knowledge and intelligence, advocacy, partnerships and the delivery of specialist public health services. We are an executive agency of the Department of Health, and are a distinct delivery organisation with operational autonomy to advice and support government, local authorities and the NHS in a professionally independent manner.

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## Background

Stoptober is a key strand of the Smokefree marketing programme. It is an annual mass quit smoking calendar event, wholly created through marketing. Stoptober launched in 2012 and entered its fifth year in 2016.

Like all campaigns under the current Smokefree strategy, the ultimate objective is to motivate smokers to make a quit attempt. Stoptober takes a revolutionary approach, using a powerful combination of consumer insight and behavioural economics to reframe the usual call to action from 'quit now' to 'join the 28 day quitting challenge'.

The campaign aims to inspire as many smokers as possible to make a quit attempt from 1 October and maintain it for at least 28 days. Evidence shows that if you stop smoking for 28 days, you are five time more likely to stop for good.

In 2016, competing priorities led to a significant budget reduction for Stoptober. Most notably, media spend was reduced from £3.1 million in 2015 to £390,000 in 2016 (an 87% reduction). Therefore, the challenge was to try to maintain the visibility and noise around the campaign, to drive engagement and participation.

Key target metrics:

- 75% Stoptober brand awareness\*
- 10% reported Stoptober related quit attempts\*

\* Evidenced in Kantar campaign tracking research

Given the lower budget, the strategic approach to delivering the campaign needed to evolve considerably. Key ways in which Stoptober 2016 was different to previous years were:

- **A much shorter campaigning period**  
Prior to 2016, the Stoptober campaigning period had grown year on year to drive an increased number of sign-ups, with weekends being the most effective time to do this. In 2016, there was a much shorter (14 day) period of paid for media activity and PR activity
- **A complete overhaul of media channel strategy**  
For the first time in Stoptober, traditional (more expensive) paid for media (TV, outdoor and radio activity) was completely replaced with digital and social media activity, designed to target the audience with less waste

- **Digital only support**

There was no support for smokers in the form of a (more expensive) physical pack. This was replaced by an offer of digital support

Stoptober 2016 saw a subtle shift from activity to drive sign-ups, towards activity to encourage participation more widely in Stoptober. Asking people to share their contact details in order to be able to access support products, is becoming more difficult, particularly when Stoptober support can be increasingly easily accessed directly through Facebook and an app store.

The data backs this up, showing a trend of smokers participating in Stoptober without signing-up, even if they do choose Stoptober support tools. Moreover, increasing numbers of those participating are using non-Stoptober support including e-cigarettes.

Some tried and tested elements of Stoptober remained consistent. These were:

- public relations (PR) activity was deployed throughout the campaign, with bursts of activity concentrated at campaign launch in September and on start day (1 October)
- wide-ranging partnership support and galvanisation (including pharmacy partners and local authorities)
- stimulation of the PHE marketing campaign database via email

As before, the target audience was all smokers in England, with a focus on lower socio-demographic groups C2DE, as we know that smoking prevalence is higher among these groups.

The 2016 evaluation sought to build on the understanding of the previous four years of activity, and in particular to understand the impact of the change in budget and strategy. Online interviews were conducted with 700 current and recent-ex smokers aged 16 to 74 in England in September, October and November 2016. Additional data from digital media, support tools and web estates was also collected.

## Overview

Given the scale of the budget reduction in 2016, the Stoptober campaign performed well. Due to the smaller scale of the campaign, it was anticipated that many key measures would decline from 2015. However, although the media budget fell by 87%, all key campaign health measures declined proportionally less.

Successes included:

- compared to the 87% decline in media budget, **key campaign metrics, such as visibility and brand awareness**, remained relatively high. In 2016 visibility declined by -44% and awareness by -13% from the previous year
- there was **good uptake of Facebook Chatbot**, which launched in 2016. The 'engagement' rate (% of Chatbot messages that were read) was 67% and the 'helpfulness' (% who agreed that the messages sent via the Chatbot were helpful) rate was 92%; evidence that PHE is able to provide tools that genuinely add value to a quit attempt
- **PR** was very effective and remains a key element of the campaign activity and contributed disproportionately in 2016. While the budget for PR declined by 20%, coverage remained very strong. There were 1,701 pieces in 2016, of which 99.7% were positive and 87% contained at least two key target messages (figures in 2015 were 1,850, 98% and 80% respectively). This is a particularly strong result given the challenge in creating 'new' news for an event in its fifth year
- involvement from **more partners across more sectors**, for example opticians
- **engagement\* from 152 local authorities** (which is comparable with previous years)
- **Reported quit attempts were maintained** at 2015 levels with 16% of all smokers reporting the key action of a Stoptober quit attempt (from November Kantar campaign tracking research)

While the key campaign metrics (such as brand awareness and visibility) have been positive relative to the reduced budget, Stoptober was delivered at a smaller scale with lower absolute levels of visibility and awareness.

If future investment is maintained at 2016 levels the long-term health of the brand and participation can be expected to erode. Alongside lower absolute levels of visibility and awareness, other notable changes in performance measures were:

- reported **success rates** in being Smokefree at four weeks was also down (6% in 2016 from 8% 2015). This is likely to be due to a combination of factors including lower levels of general 'buzz'\*\* around the campaign

- while not all partners fed into the evaluation of Stoptober, information from those who did participate shows that **levels of financial investment were lower**. This was particularly the case with local authority partners. This is significant as partnership marketing activity drives visibility and action at a grassroots level, and there is evidence to show that it reaches those who are underserved by more traditional channels
- **declining base** – fewer current and ex-smokers expect Stoptober to happen every year (50% in 2016, down from 64% in 2015), significantly weakening the Stoptober base in future
- **changing demographic profile** – in 2016, Stoptober attracted a younger, female, ABC1 group, which is likely to be a result of the digital-only media strategy

\* By 'engagement' we mean a local authority taking any action that would indicate they were supporting Stoptober – this could be anything from downloading Stoptober materials through to promoting the campaign through social media and/or local PR activity

\*\* 'Buzz' is based on seeing reduced agreement with a range of statements about volume of conversation and publicity around Stoptober

## Summary

Stoptober 2016 was successful in driving campaign cost efficiency, but this was done at the cost of reduced overall scale. Our modelling estimates that total incremental campaign driven quit attempts were 124,500 versus 385,000 in the previous year, but that three-year return on investment was £4.22 versus £3.42 in the previous year.

The campaign in 2016 has benefited greatly from four years of previous sustained investment. Without this it is likely that brand awareness and other key metrics in 2016 would have been lower.

The results suggest that Stoptober 2017 will start from a lower base of awareness, meaning that, without greater investment in 2017, Stoptober is likely to shrink further and more rapidly.