



Public Health
England

Protecting and improving the nation's health

Stoptober 2018

Campaign evaluation

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Stoptober 2018 evaluation

Background

Stoptober is a key strand of the Public Health England (PHE) tobacco marketing programme. It is an annual mass quit smoking calendar event, wholly created through marketing.

Stoptober launched in 2012 and entered its seventh year in 2018. Like all campaigns under the current tobacco 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 5 times more likely to stop for good.¹

Each year the campaign seeks to offer refreshed approaches to generate awareness, interest and engagement among smokers with a message that has now been running for several years.

Context

Each year, the campaign is fully evaluated internally, and learnings are applied to the following year’s campaign.

Based on our headline key performance indicators, the 2017 campaign was a success – the campaign generated reported quit attempts among 16% of all smokers, with sustained quit attempts² increasing to 8% from the previous year (6%).

However, there were some key findings from the evaluation of the 2017 campaign that warranted consideration for the 2018 campaign strategy.

First was that 39% of smokers agreed that e-cigarettes are equally or more harmful than normal cigarettes, which may be a reflection of the population-level confusion of whether or not e-cigarettes are safer than tobacco cigarettes³.

¹ R West and J Stapleton, ‘Clinical and public health significance of treatments to aid smoking cessation’, (*Eur Respir Rev* 2008; 17: 110, 199–204)

² % of smokers reporting a quit attempt related to Stoptober and still not smoking after one month

³ *Trends in electronic cigarette use in England*, Smoking Toolkit Study, Updated October 2017

Second was the trend in falling self-efficacy, with only 49% of smokers saying they were confident they could give up smoking if they tried (down from 52% in 2016 and 52% in 2015).

Third was that the majority of smokers (55%) who made a quit attempt did so without support.

Fourth was that 28% of smokers reported that they did not know what the main message of the TV advert was. Since further messages were added to the 2017 TV advert, it was likely that we were simply trying to communicate too much in one 30-second advert.

Strategy

To address the key findings from the 2017 campaign, the 2018 campaign sought to do several things differently. First, to move smokers away from quitting ‘cold turkey’, the campaign aimed to deliver a simplified, more single-minded message around encouraging smokers to use a support tool in their quit attempt instead of willpower alone.

Second, to counteract the trend towards falling self-efficacy and drive more engagement, the campaign provided further support for smokers by introducing the Personal Quit Plan (PQP). The PQP is a free online tool that makes it easier for smokers to find the right support by asking 3 simple questions to recommend the tools most relevant to their personal needs.

Implementation

The 2018 campaign ran from 20 September to 31 October 2018 on TV, radio, and digital, and had a PR component. In addition, the campaign was supported by a range of commercial and public sector partners who amplified the campaign’s reach. The total media budget in 2018 was £1.2 million, which was the same media budget as 2017.

Evaluation methodology

The 2018 evaluation sought to build on the understanding of the previous six years of activity and in particular assess:

- campaign scale: reach and visibility (campaign and brand recognition)
- engagement and interaction: degree to which people engage with different elements of Stoptober, across all aspects of participation
- outcomes: actions and behaviours Stoptober has generated

A range of data sources were used in the evaluation including: market level data and surveys, such as the Smoking Toolkit Study⁴ and a bespoke quantitative advertising tracking survey of 700 current and recent ex-smokers⁵, consistent with the approach taken in previous years.

The evaluation also takes into account a range of digital media diagnostics, support tools and web data. To assess the impact of the PQP, 2 elements were implemented – a pop-up survey which comes up as soon as the user completes the tool to capture ‘in the moment’ feedback and a recontact survey in November to capture more detailed feedback from users.⁶

Key performance indicators and targets against each were set as follows:

- campaign recognition: 60%
- likelihood of quitting using willpower alone rather than with a support tool (targeting a reduction in this indicator)⁷: 40%
- reported quit attempts: 16%
- reported sustained quit attempts (% of smokers reporting a quit attempt related to Stoptober and still not smoking after one month): 8%
- knowledge that using support tools in your quit attempt increases your chances of success⁸: 61%
- supported quit attempts (% of smokers reporting a quit attempt related to Stoptober and used a support tool): 14%⁹

The above targets are based on all smokers in England.

In addition to these headline indicators, further performance indicators were set that provide additional context to our understanding of the campaign’s performance.

⁴ The Smoking Toolkit Study is a national research programme run by University College London that tracks key indicators of smoking and smoking cessation. This evaluation uses data from the Study largely to improve understanding of the broader market context.

⁵ This is measured through pre and post campaign online tracking surveys with 700 current and recent ex-smokers (aged 18+) in England. This quantitative work is carried out by Kantar Public, an independent market research agency.

⁶ The pop-up survey was conducted with 2,894 PQP users and the recontact survey was conducted with 83 PQP users. Both surveys were also carried out by Kantar Public.

⁷ Measured in the tracking survey as agreement with the statement: “If I was trying to quit smoking I would be most likely to use willpower alone rather than use a tool such as e-cigarettes or NRT”

⁸ Measured in the tracking survey as agreement with the statement: “You are more likely to be successful in your quit attempt with a tool such as e-cigarettes or NRT”.

⁹ This is equivalent to 88% of those who made a quit attempt reporting that they used a support tool.

Findings

Summary of findings

The 2018 campaign performed well, delivering against the campaign recognition and quit attempt targets. Positively, most of those who made a quit attempt with Stoptober did so with support. However, the campaign fell short in driving shifts at a population level in attitudes towards using support, and approaches to driving support use will need to be carefully considered in 2019 Stoptober planning.

Performance against targets

	Target	Achieved
Campaign recognition	60%	58%
Likelihood of quitting using willpower alone	40%	41%
Reported quit attempts	16%	19%
Reported sustained quit attempts	8%	8%
Knowledge that using support tools in your quit attempt increases your chances of success	61%	55%
Supported quit attempts	14%	18% ¹⁰

Findings in detail

Campaign recognition

Recognition of Stoptober continued to build in 2018, with 83% of smokers recognising it. This has been improving continually since the campaign low of 2016 (67%) where there was no TV spend, suggesting that TV plays a role in driving recognition. Recognition of Stoptober is now back to peak levels which have not been achieved since 2015 (80%).

Top level understanding of Stoptober also remains strong – 70% associate it with ‘stop smoking’ messaging, with incorrect references remaining a relatively small minority (although there is some evidence of a slightly greater generic stop smoking understanding compared to specific 28 day / month long quit messaging).

There were no signs of serious ‘wear out’ for the campaign, with only 23% of smokers reporting being ‘fed up with hearing about Stoptober’, which is in line with expectations and is similar to the level seen in 2015 (22%).

¹⁰ This is equivalent to 95% of those who made a quit attempt reporting that they used a support tool.

58% of all smokers recognised the 2018 campaign materials, in line with 2017 results (58%), reflecting the similar media strategy employed, which was led by TV and supported by radio and digital.

A wide range of commercial and public sector partners helped to amplify the reach of the campaign. 7,500 pharmacies supported the campaign this year, reaching an estimated 1 million people on the high street each day. And for the first time, Amazon created a centralised hub for the Stoptober campaign that showcased a range of quitting aids.

Advertising diagnostics and messaging

Response to the new advertising creative in 2018 remained broadly in line with similar diagnostics in 2017, given a broadly similar creative approach. In 2018, 57% found the ads relevant (60% in 2017), 41% thought the ads stood out (46% in 2017) and 32% agreed that people were talking about the ads (30% in 2017).

The messaging around support has not landed as well as has been hoped. Despite the continued focus on support tools in Stoptober since 2017, there has not been a corresponding improvement in the association of the Stoptober campaign with support tools.

After the campaign, a similar proportion of smokers compared with before the campaign agreed Stoptober helps them understand the best way to quit smoking (36% compared to 39% pre-campaign), and that there are lots of ways to quit smoking with Stoptober (46% compared to 48% pre-campaign).

Forty-eight percent of smokers took out a general stop smoking message from the TV advert. However, there are signs that there is still more to be done to simplify advertising messages. Only 18% pulled out a campaign-specific message and a similar proportion of smokers this year, as in the previous year, reported not knowing what the main message of the TV advert was (24% in 2018 compared to 28% in 2017). Further, there was some evidence among a minority of smokers of confusion around the PQP being an app.

Attitudes

The campaign did not shift perceptions of the value of support tools, with no significant pre to post campaign shift on agreement with the statement that 'you are more likely to be successful in your quit attempt with a tool such as e-cigarettes or NRT' (58% in the post-wave vs 55% in the pre-wave). The lack of shift may in part be explained by the creative execution which focused on the message around finding the right support tool (through the PQP) rather than the benefit of using support tools.

Campaign engagement

There were 91,135 completions of the PQP during the 2018 campaign, demonstrating that there is some demand in the marketplace, particularly among the segment of smokers who are engaged with the idea of quitting, for a tool that helps smokers find the best way to quit. Positively, 9 in 10 PQP tool users agreed (in the pop-up survey immediately after use) that they were likely to take the advice provided by the tool (90%), and a similar proportion agreed they would recommend it to someone else looking to quit (92%).

Partners helped drive use of the tool by embedding it on their own websites, generating 13% of total tool completions.

The 2018 campaign generated a greater volume of digital engagement in 2018 compared to 2017 with 276,703 website visits (an increase of 36% from 2017) and 51,786 app downloads (an increase of 41% from 2017). The increase in digital engagement is likely to be due at least in part to the strong online call-to-action which drove smokers to use the PQP.

Quit attempts

The 2018 campaign met its targets for quit attempts and sustained quit attempts.

Nineteen percent of smokers reported making a quit attempt as a result of the 2018 Stoptober campaign. This figure is broadly in line with the figure achieved in 2017, which is encouraging given the overall trend in declining confidence in quitting among smokers. In 2018, only 43% of smokers agreed with the statement, 'I am confident I could give up smoking cigarettes if I tried', down from 50% in 2015.

The campaign this year continued to attract younger smokers, with 34% of all smokers aged 25 to 34 participating in the campaign (compared to 12% of those 35 and older). The campaign also attracted lighter smokers, with 30% of all smokers who smoke less than 10 cigarettes per day participating.

The proportion of smokers making a sustained quit attempt has also been maintained in 2018. Eight percent of smokers in 2018 reported that they were still not smoking after 4 weeks, the same as the figure achieved in 2017 and similar to that achieved in 2016 (6%) and 2015 (8%). The first 2 weeks of the period are critical, with 50% of those who failed their quit attempt relapsing during this period.

Conclusion

The results from 2018 overall demonstrate a clear case for continuing the campaign in the future.

Even after having run for 7 years, Stoptober continues to effectively drive a sizeable proportion of smokers to make a quit attempt. In 2018, the campaign generated quit attempts among 19% of all smokers and recent ex-smokers (broadly in line with 16% last year). Eight percent of smokers reported that they were still not smoking at 4 weeks (also in line with 8% last year). It is encouraging that we were able to sustain the proportion of quit attempts despite the trend in declining confidence among smokers.

Further, we saw a return to peak levels of smokers recognising Stoptober (83%), which we last saw in 2015 (80%). Engagement levels improved this year with website visits increasing by 36% and app downloads increasing by 41% year-on-year.

In 2018, the campaign provided a new way to help smokers find the right support through the PQP and aimed to be more single-minded in its messaging to encourage smokers to quit with support. The PQP was a welcome addition to the suite of products offered by the campaign. The results this year show that there is demand in the marketplace for a tool that helps those smokers who are looking to be more successful in their quit attempt find the best way to quit with over 91k completes of the tool during the campaign and 90% of users saying they were likely to take the advice given by the tool.

Positively, 18% of smokers made a campaign-related quit attempt with support. However, the evaluation has shown that there remains a sizeable proportion of smokers (41%) who would still likely use willpower alone if they were to make a quit attempt. Moreover, in the population more broadly we've seen an increasing trend towards e-cigarette confusion and that usage of e-cigarettes as a quitting aid has plateaued¹¹.

Moving forward, further consideration must be given to determine the best approach for encouraging those smokers who remain unconvinced about support to consider using support tools in their quit attempt.

¹¹ Trends in electronic cigarette use in England, Smoking Toolkit Study, Updated 11th January 2019