



## TECHNICAL DOCUMENT

# Effective use of digital platforms for HIV prevention among men who have sex with men in the European Union/European Economic Area

An introduction to the ECDC guides

December 2017

**ECDC TECHNICAL DOCUMENT**

# **Effective use of digital platforms for HIV prevention among men who have sex with men in the European Union/European Economic Area**

An introduction to the ECDC guides



This report was commissioned by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), coordinated by Teymur Noori, and produced by Terrence Higgins Trust (UK) and SOA AIDS (Netherlands)

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## ECDC digital guide

Online and digital/social media are increasingly important communication channels for reaching audiences in a targeted and cost-effective manner. Gay and bisexual men have long been early adopters of technology and the use of the technology by gay and bisexual men, and other men who have sex with men (MSM) has often been the subject of research. However, many HIV organisations lack the experience and knowledge needed to use this online digital/social media effectively for STI/HIV prevention.

This series provides comprehensive guides to the effective use of digital platforms for STI/HIV prevention among MSM in the EU/EEA. The guides, created in collaboration with the Terrence Higgins Trust (THT) and STI AIDS Netherlands (SANL), incorporate the expertise of stakeholders from EU/EEA Member States, scientific literature relating to social media and digital platforms, commercial sector best practice and engagement with the platform companies themselves.

The guides will help users to understand:

- the digital platforms available and how to use them for effective HIV prevention;
- the costs associated with a successful advertising campaign and how to distribute budget accordingly;
- how digital platforms have been successfully used by others;
- how to reach MSM populations;
- how to optimise content for maximum impact;
- how to measure the success of outreach and apply the experience to future work.

### Choosing your approach and platform

Each module within this guidance can be used on its own or as part of a wider online strategy. Before getting started, it is important to decide on the platforms and approach that best meet your objectives. The tables below outline the differences, and the strengths and weaknesses of each platform.

#### Facebook

**Popularity:** Facebook has more active monthly users (1.23 billion) than any other platform.

**Multimedia:** Fully supports all multimedia content including text, image, and video.

**Targeting:** Versatile targeting options include age, gender, location, spoken languages and interests.

**Affordable:** Cost-effective and generally produces cheaper engagements than most other platforms.

**Diverse:** Facebook has a broader range of active users than any other platform.

**Pay-to-play:** The algorithmic timeline adopted by Facebook means unpaid content may not be seen widely, but a small amount of money spent on advertising can go a long way.

**Audience:** People of all ages use Facebook. Teens and millennials use Facebook in high numbers but may prefer other platforms for interactions with their friends and peer group.

**Competitive:** Facebook's cheap and effective advertising means it is an extremely attractive option.

#### Twitter

**Real time:** Although Twitter does use a timeline, tweets are still displayed in real time so you can arrange live interactions, such as question and answer sessions.

**Trending:** Hashtags and trending topics enable you to join relevant discussions in real time.

**Interaction:** Provides excellent opportunities to engage with other organisations, influencers and individuals.

**Lifespan:** Content lifespan is very short compared to the other platforms.

**Limited reach:** Other platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, have many more users.

**Frequency:** The fast moving nature of Twitter means an active twitter presence requires a lot of content.

**Limitations:** Tweets are limited to 140 characters and videos are limited to 140 seconds.

**Costly:** More expensive than platforms such as YouTube & Facebook.

## Instagram

**Integrated:** Facebook & Instagram are integrated so adverts can use both platforms simultaneously.

**Young demographic:** Popular with teens and Millennials (demographic cohort from early 1980s to early 2000s), more than 90% of users are under 35.

**Growing:** Instagram has a user base that is growing rapidly, faster than any other platform.

**Engaging:** Instagram gets more than ten times the engagement that Facebook does.

**Limitations:** Instagram is mostly image-based messages, videos are limited to 60 seconds, and text-only posts are not supported.

**Adapting:** Instagram has undergone many drastic changes and is likely to continue to change and adapt.

## YouTube

**Searchable:** YouTube is not just a social media platform but also the second largest search engine in the world.

**Integrated:** YouTube and Google are integrated, meaning YouTube content ranks highly in organic searches.

**Lifespan:** Videos uploaded to YouTube have a huge lifespan and continue to show indefinitely in searches.

**Reach:** YouTube has 1.3 billion users covering a wide and diverse range of demographics.

**Affordable:** YouTube ads have a lower starting price than any other social media platform.

**Targeting:** YouTube has many different targeting options and allows targeting based on what users watch.

**Limitations:** YouTube currently only supports video content and does not offer text or image-based content.

**Other expenses:** Video production can be expensive and should be factored into associated costs.

## Google AdWords

**Largest digital ad platform:** Google AdWords is the biggest digital advertising platform in the world.

**Search:** Google is the leading search engine and ads can appear next to relevant searches.

**YouTube Integration:** Google and YouTube are integrated, allowing you to create adverts in a different format on YouTube. To advertise on YouTube you need a Google AdWords account.

**Flexible budget:** It is free to sign up and you can spend as much or as little as you want.

**Targeting:** Offers a variety of targeting options that can be useful for different goals.

**Multi-media:** Google AdWords supports different advert formats that include text, image and video, however there may be limitations on some formats in some places.

**Real-time monitoring:** You can monitor the performance of your advert in real time.

**Limitations:** While Google AdWords can be used by anyone, time needs to be invested to ensure the best results. Google does provide free support to advertisers to ensure that you use the platform efficiently.

## Online advertising (websites and smartphone applications)

**Purpose:** Online advertising aims to increase awareness and promote services to large groups of people.

**Options:** There are many different ad options depending on the platform and your budget. These include broadcast or inbox messages, banners, animated images, videos and more.

**Attention please:** Strong and appealing creatives are needed to catch people's attention. Some dating platforms reward users who watch ads with special features.

**Pre-determined:** Content creation and ad placement are decided beforehand and require sufficient preparation time, making advertising less flexible.

**Standardised reporting:** Advertisers report standard metrics for reach, engagement and conversion.

**Budget decides scope:** Your budget determines how much content can be developed and promoted. Several platforms offer discounts or free ad space for non-profit organisations.

## Online outreach

**Purpose:** Online outreach improves knowledge and promotes services through direct conversations.

**Two-way communication:** Providers can initiate conversations or wait for users to contact them.

**Tailored to needs:** Information and services are tailored to individual needs.

**Blocked:** Online outreach is not always permitted and providers may be blocked from the platform.

**Reporting:** Providers have to devise their own data collection methods and monitor independently.

**Human capital:** Lots of staff time and training on professional skills are required.

**Interdisciplinary excellence:** Online outreach challenges professionals to excel in the use of digital technologies, counselling and health promotion.

Once you have selected the appropriate platform the guides will provide help and information for the successful implementation of HIV prevention interventions.

Each module can stand alone or can be used as part of multi-channel digital strategy. They can also be used as a basis for staff training within organisations.

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