

# Internet Recruitment for Cessation Research and Treatment: A Viable Strategy for Young Adult Smokers

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## INTRODUCTION

In the two decades before 2003, young adults in the United States were the only age group to show an increase in smoking prevalence, and a recent analysis concludes that there is little evidence of a decline in smoking among young adults (18 – 24 years old).<sup>1</sup>

Our recent analysis of data from the 2005 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) found that:

- Over 70% of young adult smokers (aged 18-24) say they want to quit smoking completely;

- 49% of young adult smokers made a serious attempt in the past year.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, only 4% of young adult smokers who attempted to quit in 2005 reported using behavioral treatment.

Young adult smokers are an important target for smoking cessation treatment; however, because young adulthood is a distinct, transitional life stage, recruiting this population for research to test targeted methods for increasing treatment use is challenging.

Most research in this population is conducted with college students, due to the organized central location of universities; this however does not offer a comprehensive understanding about young adults:

- Their approach to quitting,
- Their awareness and knowledge of treatment options,
- The types of treatment that would appeal to them.

With the vast majority (87%) of young adults going online, a national recruitment strategy using the Internet was implemented to:

- Identify young adult smokers to participate in focus groups, and
- Explore a new recruitment method to determine if it is a viable model for future studies.

This presentation describes the recruitment strategy that was implemented, and the sample pool that resulted.

## METHODS

A classified advertisement was posted to Craigslist.com, an online network of local classifieds available for 450 cities world-wide. The classified ad was posted in the "jobs/et cetera" section in 15 geographically diverse, large metropolitan areas across the U.S.

Those selected were:

Albany*, NY	Buffalo*, NY	Long Island*, NY
Rochester*, NY	Atlanta, GA	Baltimore*, MD
Chicago, IL	Denver, CO	Las Vegas, NV
Miami, FL	Orange County*, CA	Sacramento*, CA
Richmond*, VA	Spokane*, WA	Worcester/Central, MA*

\*Note: Boston, Los Angeles, New York, Seattle and Washington, DC sites were originally chosen, but were replaced by alternate city/area sites that were geographic similar and did not charge for job postings.

The ad was posted from April 4 to June 1, 2007. On April 17, the ad was taken down and reposted at the end of the business day with additional search terms included to increase visibility among search results.

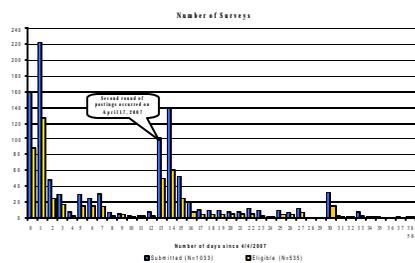
The ad explained that researchers at UIC were conducting telephone focus groups about smoking, and directed cigarette smokers aged between 18-24 years to a study Web site ([www.UICYoungAdults.org](http://www.UICYoungAdults.org)) to:

- Learn more about the study and consent to participate,
- Provide contact information, including US postal zip code to track respondents, and
- Complete a 15-item survey covering topics on:
  - o Smoking status and history,
  - o Prior experiences and interest in quitting smoking,
  - o Use of treatment and/or quit strategies,
  - o Current and future education and employment, and
  - o Basic demographic characteristics.

## RESULTS

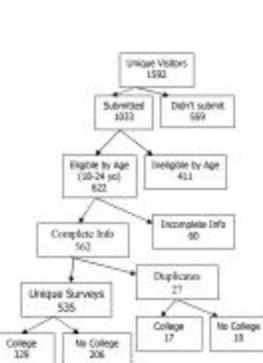
Over a two-month period, the Craigslist.com ad directed 1,592 unique visitors to the study site where 1,033 surveys were submitted.

Out of 622 survey respondents between the ages of 18 and 24 years, 535 provided complete survey information.



\*Over half of the eligible surveys were submitted within the first 2 days following the initial posting and reposting of the ad.

## Recruitment Process



\*Sixty-one percent of eligible survey respondents currently or planned to attend 4-year college.

## Demographics

The sample had a mean age of 22.21 years and included:

- 57% Females;
- 65% on-Hispanic White,
- 11% non-Hispanic African American,
- 14% Hispanic/Latino,
- 5% Asian non-Hispanic,
- 1% American Indian,
- 4% Multiple Race/Ethnicity and unspecified.

## Non-College vs. College

Among the total sample (535): 39% are not and have no plans to attend a 4-year college. The non-College and College groups were similar with regard to:

- Age (mean = 22 years)
- Gender (female: 56% and 58% respectively)
- All respondents: want to quit smoking cigarettes

Among non-College, as compared to College (%difference):

- More were White, non-Hispanic (8%), and fewer were Hispanic (4%) or Asian (5%)
- More were working full-time (9%)
- More were heavy smokers (13% smoked on all of the past 30 days and 10% smoked 11+cig/day on days smoked)
- More wanted to quit for good (4%)
- More had never tried to quit, or had made fewer quit attempts (6% 1 or less times)
- More had used pharmacotherapy (7% NRT and 4% Zyban)
- Fewer had used an Internet program (6%)
- Fewer had made a quit attempt in the past 12 months (10%)

## Smoking Status

All of the respondents were current smokers; 87% reported smoking earlier that day and 69% reported smoking on all of the past 30 days.

The amount smoke over the past 30 days varied:

- 26% smoked 2-5 cigarettes per day
- 28% smoked 6 – 10 cigarettes per day
- 34% smoked 11 – 20 cigarettes per day
- 9% smoked more than twenty cigarettes per day

## Motivation and Quit History

All of the respondents wanted to stop smoking. When asked to describe their current goal:

- 82% reported wanting to quit smoking for good.
- 91% had ever stopped for a day or longer because they were trying to quit,
- 62% had tried to quit 3 or more times, and
- 81% had tried to quit in the previous 12 months.

## Treatment Strategies Used

During their last quit attempt:

- 35% used nicotine replacement therapy,
- 30% visited an Internet quit site,
- 7% used Zyban, Wellbutrin, or Chantix,
- 6% called a telephone help/quit line, and
- 3% attended a smoking cessation group.

## DISCUSSION

- The Internet is a practical and viable strategy for recruiting young adult smokers.
- Recruitment results are immediate. The majority of eligible participants responded in the first two weeks, and over half submitted within the first two days of posting the ad.
- Craigslist is an economical and effective Web site for recruitment internationally.
- Through Web-based strategies, recruiting a diverse sample of young adults for research is no longer a challenge.

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## Acknowledgement

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2. Curry SJ, Sporer AK, Pugach O, Campbell RT, Emery S. Use of tobacco cessation treatments among young adult smokers: 2005 National Health Interview Survey. *American Journal of Public Health*. 2007;97(8):1464-1469.

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