Banned by Facebook! What Could Be Wrong With These PrEP Ads?

Hint: It’s not that Apicha’s HIV prevention campaign is too sexy.

October 31, 2019 By Trent Straube

When Apicha Community Health Center tried to launch its new PrEP campaign on social media, the organization ran into an unexpected roadblock: Instagram and its parent company, Facebook, rejected the HIV prevention campaign, telling Apicha CHC, “You haven’t been authorized to run ads about social issues, elections or politics.”

View this post on Instagram

“I do see now more Asian faces in various campaigns, particularly in subway posters, train ads and in other venues in the city than before. Which definitely is important in a multicultural city like NYC.” Read our interview with the queer API NYC-based artists who created artwork that reflects their relationship

with PrEP, stigma, & representation. Visit blog.apicha.org. #prepaware #prepawareweek Art by:

@kuldeepsingh19

A post shared by Apicha CHC (@apichachc) on Oct 23, 2019 at 11:03am PDT

Phillip Miner, Apicha CHC's director of grants and communications, told Vice last week that he was unable to ascertain what, exactly, about the campaign got it flagged, especially in relation to politics, elections and social issues.

PrEP, or pre-exposure prophylaxis, refers to daily tablets of Truvada or Descovy that can reduce the risk of acquiring HIV by 99% in men who have sex with men. The campaign by New York City–based Apicha CHC aims to raise PrEP awareness among the Asian and Pacific Islander (API) community and features illustrations by queer API artists. (Read more about the campaign here.)

View this post on Instagram

Apicha CHC is proud to offer PrEP and HIV services to those in need. This artwork commissioned by

@migurrl for Apicha reflects that message. #prepaware #prepawareweek

A post shared by Apicha CHC (@apichachc) on Oct 25, 2019 at 12:37pm PDT

In a follow-up conversation with POZ, Miner said the ads were approved on October 31 and are

now running. To be clear, Apicha CHC was always able to post the campaign on its Instagram page. What the health center wasn't allowed to do is promote it to people who are not following its account.

Here's the back story on the campaign being banned in the first place.

Miner learned that part of the problem stemmed from the fact that Facebook must authorize any Apicha CHC employee who creates ads in the health center's social media account. The employee who attempted to promote this campaign had not been authorized by Facebook.

Sounds like there's a simple solution—have Facebook authorize that employee on the account. Not so fast. To be authorized, employees are required to give Facebook their personal information; authorization cannot be shared among administrators. This protocol can be problematic for many reasons, Miner explained. An employee might wish to remain anonymous, or someone's Facebook name might not match their government ID—think about transgender people, for example, who have not legally changed their name.

View this post on Instagram

"What I remember is being raised in a way where if we didn't talk about something, then it didn't exist.

And so I wonder if taking this pill challenges that way of thinking & uproots or subverts that denial." Read

our interview with queer API NYC-based artists who created artwork that reflects their relationship with

PrEP, stigma, and representation. Visit blog.apicha.org. #PrEPAware #prepawareweek Art by:

@marcoschinart

A post shared by Apicha CHC (@apichachc) on Oct 23, 2019 at 10:54am PDT

Miner said the Instagram team granted him temporary authorization to post “political” ads while he goes through the verification process to become permanently authorized. That process usually takes about two weeks, and once completed Miner can discuss with the Facebook and Instagram team why the campaign raised alarms. He has, however, learned that the company classifies public health as a social issue and thus posts related to public health may get flagged for closer inspection.

Perhaps Facebook’s approval process wouldn’t seem so frustrating if this drama weren’t unfolding the same time that the company’s cofounder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg testified before Congress that Facebook basically allows politicians to run false ads on the platform. In case you missed it, watch the revealing exchange between him and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez below:

“So, you won’t take down lies or you will take down lies? I think that’s just a pretty simple yes or no.”

Complete exchange between @RepAOC @AOC and Mark Zuckerberg at today’s House Financial Services Cmte hearing.

Full video here: https://t.co/heT7Psnlp1

pic.twitter.com/0iiWtfU5gQ

— CSPAN (@cspan) October 23, 2019

This isn’t the first time Apicha CHC has run into these issues when promoting HIV and sexual health campaigns on social media. In most cases, Miner said, the content is flagged, Apicha CHC

appeals and the content is soon approved. This is what happened on Twitter with the same PrEP campaign.

The recent exposure on Twitter and via the publicity surrounding the Instagram rejection has made a positive impact: The PrEP information has been seen by over 71,000 people, Miner told POZ, and 950 people have visited Apicha.org to learn more.

“This situation’s silver lining,” Miner said, “is many more people are aware of the issues surrounding new HIV diagnoses in New York State’s Asian and Pacific Islander communities.”

In related news, New York data from 2018 show a record low number of new HIV cases and a huge increase in people taking PrEP. As a result, the state is on track to reach its goals to end the epidemic.

To learn more about the effectiveness of PrEP, read “How Well to U=U and PrEP Work? The CC Updates Its Answers.” And visit the POZ HIV Basics to learn more about HIV transmission risks.

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