Our Space

How to teach the MySpace and YouTube set about HIV? Get them where they live—online.

September 1, 2007 By Kellee Terrell

Web portals like YouTube and MySpace are often dismissed as mindless archives of outrageous screen grabs like *Saturday Night Live*'s infamous "D**k in a Box" and "Lazy Sunday" digital shorts—or, especially with MySpace, overheated hookup pleas from tweens avoiding their algebra homework. But one cool cybertrend has emerged: Using these sites, which many have said encourage irresponsible sexual behavior and even child predation, to explore living with—and preventing—HIV and AIDS.

The video-sharing website YouTube gets thousands of uploads daily, making it an ideal prevention forum. Spokesperson Julie Supan told *POZ* that she has seen a spike in traffic to AIDS-related public-service announcements and movie trailers on the site, as well as to positive people's video diaries (search, for example, for Charlie Johnson's testimonial). "We see celebrities talking about the cause, but there's nothing like a video of someone humanizing the disease," she says. "Some are getting close to 4,000 hits."

MySpace, with more than 106 million members worldwide, offers dozens of HIV forums and support groups (find one of our faves by searching "Out Reaching HIV Positive"). The links tackle everything from hep C coinfection to dating. MySpace targets teens with AIDS blogs, message boards and a daily AIDS news page.

Access to both sites is free—a crucial benefit given federal AIDS budget cuts and the surge in abstinence-only sex education. "Last year, the city of San Francisco had its AIDS budget cut by $7 million," says Christopher Bowers, of Face to Face, an HIV outreach organization in Sonoma county, California. Bowers posted a MySpace profile in January to address those cuts. "The Internet has been a good way to network with local organizations, schools, and reach youth, because the under-30 group makes up more than 25% of the newly diagnosed," he says. "It's really important to go where the people are."

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