The Difference Between Self-Promo and HIV Awareness

January 27, 2011 By Shawn Decker

I had an interesting conversation at the car wash last month. I ran into an old friend, who asked me how I was so good at self-promotion. It was an odd question, but I immediately knew it was probably related to the amount of "Friends" I have on Facebook or the fact that I've been interviewed on the local news and done some occasional mainstream press.

I explained that it's really more about HIV prevention and awareness than it is about "Hey Look at Me I'm Shawn Decker!" Which would, of course, be greeted with a disinterested yawn. The person seemed surprised by the answer, like they hadn't thought of that as an option. *"Oh, yeah...."*

I'm humbled that strangers add me as a Friend on Facebook after hearing Gwenn and I speak at their school- it means the personal way in which we educate resonates with them. While I hate it that anyone has to go through with the stress of testing positive for HIV, I love getting deeply personal messages about My Pet Virus and how the book made someone feel less alone when grappling with a new diagnosis. It's why I keep doing what I do, I know I'm a small piece of the big HIV/AIDS puzzle, but an essential one. If I didn't feel like I was making a difference with my jokes about myself and how HIV entered my life, than I'd instead dedicate my life to unlocking all the wrestlers on my Legends of Wrestlemania xbox game.

(Full disclosure- I tried but got frustrated at my inability to pin Hulk Hogan.)

So back to the point. When I first decided to go public with my status in 1996 at age 20, I went online believing that there would be hundreds of first-hand accounts from people living with HIV. I was shocked when I only found a handful of sites, yet that really inspired me to get my page up as quickly as possible and think about what it was exactly that I was looking for. In the end, I decided that I was looking for a safe place- one that didn't make me feel afraid to be HIV positive. As I started to write my first pages, I also wanted to stay true to myself, the only difference being that I was now putting my medical resume out there for public consumption.

Now? I can't imagine not claiming my HIV status as part of who I am.

Today the internet is *exactly* what I was expecting to find so many years ago when my dial-up modem screamed like a cat being given a bubble bath. And that is completely awesome. I love being that small piece of the puzzle, perhaps comedic relief against the backdrop of a virus that has and will continue to claim or alter millions of lives. I do my best to walk that line as an HIV educator between offering information to negatoids about how to stay safe and hope to positoids who shouldn't have to waste years of their lives worrying about being accepted by loved ones and strangers alike.

If I have to occasionally scream “Look at me!” to get people to think about HIV, then so be it.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

Watch, Friend and Follow me on:
YouTube, Facebook and Twitter
Website: ShawnandGwenn.com
Also check out the lovely Gwenn’s Fashion/Coffee Blog
My CD, Synthetic Division, A Symptom of Life, is on iTunes!

SHARE THE BLOG. NOT THE VIRUS.



© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.