

Chapter 22

Making an Impact: Digital Resources for Teens

Roger Rosen

Rosen Publishing, USA

Miriam Gilbert

Rosen Publishing, USA

ABSTRACT

In this case study, Roger Rosen and Miriam Gilbert describe the creation of Rosen Publishing's award-winning, critically acclaimed Teen Health & Wellness: Real Life, Real Answers database. They focus on how Rosen was able to offer a unique value proposition both to teens and librarians, craft age-appropriate and credible content, and build an interactive site that offers an engaging, dynamic user experience. They review the process of creating a resource that had no barrier to finding information, made the discovery process fast and easy, and supported different styles of learning and information-seeking behavior. They discuss the challenges of ensuring that Teen Health & Wellness remains relevant and current in today's crowded digital landscape, and share the successes in building a unique health and wellness resource that is indispensable to teens and librarians alike.

MAKING AN IMPACT: DIGITAL RESOURCES FOR TEENS

Whether content is on clay tablets, papyrus, the printed page or online, the eternal verity embedded in the compact between reader and information provider is that the content be authoritative, accurate, unbiased, vetted, and, ideally, age appropriate.

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This basic principle has guided Rosen Publishing's e-decisions as we negotiate and innovate in these revolutionary times.

Rosen Online's goal is to create a "digital experience" and bring critical, often life-saving, information to the place that teens turn most often: online. To that end, we strove to create a resource that works both in an authoritative and in a personal, peer-to-peer fashion. We recognize that the online experience is a dynamic, mutual

one, and aim to provide a vehicle not just to give teens static information but also to allow them to share that information and filter it through the lens their personal experiences.

Notwithstanding the common ground to be found in the editorial process between our 1969 book *The Teenager and VD* (Deschin, 1969) and the eleven articles on STDs in the Rosen Publishing's 2011 database *Teen Health & Wellness: Real Life, Real Answers* (Rosen Publishing, 2011), there are innumerable challenges, decisions and opportunities that impact the dissemination of information in the 21st century. These issues include the competition against unvetted sources, helping students who struggle with information overload, providing context when other sources fail to do so, aiding discoverability, dynamizing interactivity, and providing continual updates for currency.

In January 2007, Rosen Publishing launched its first online database for middle school and high school students—*Teen Health & Wellness: Real Life, Real Answers*. Our goal was to provide an age-appropriate, up-to-date, authoritative health resource that would be the go-to site for teens to consult with their questions and needs. We wanted this site to be direct, intuitive, easy, seamless, and engaging, such that any user or learner could be immediately successful. A pivotal goal was to make the process simple for users to find the information that they were seeking as well as to encounter other material that might be of interest to them. We wanted to provide a resource that had no barrier to finding information, made the discovery process fast and easy, and supported different styles of learning and information-seeking behavior.

Rosen felt it was critically important to put information online in the format and modality that teens look to most frequently when seeking answers. Discoverability and ease of search and browse was key, because we were cognizant that teen users would have limited time in the library and not all would have computers at home.

We conducted extensive testing with both teen and librarian users at the beta stage of site development. We observed user behavior on the site and asked for feedback on specific features and function to ensure that we were building a site that met their needs and complemented their online behavior.

Teen Health & Wellness: Real Life, Real Answers—the award-winning, critically acclaimed online resource—provides middle school and high school students with nonjudgmental, straightforward, standards-aligned, curricular and self-help support. Topics include diseases, drugs, alcohol, nutrition, mental health, online safety, suicide, bullying, green living, financial literacy, and more.

Rosen cast the definition of “health and wellness” as broadly as teens themselves define health. This concept includes far more than simple physical and mental health, but the health of relationships with family, friends, and significant others as well as the health of the school, local community, and larger world. Key features of *Teen Health & Wellness: Real Life, Real Answers* include the following:

- Instant translation into 50 languages, including Spanish, French, Chinese, Russian, Arabic, and Haitian Creole.
- Site optimized for Smartphones to connect anytime, anywhere.
- Social bookmarking allows users to share article links with friends and family.
- Videos throughout, including student-created videos, add a sense of personal connection for teens.
- Customizable hotlines connect users to local community resources as well as national organizations.
- Engaging photos, illustrations, and charts.
- Health calculators, including body mass index (BMI), budget, blood alcohol content, and more for personalized tips.

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