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10 Ways Technology Can Advance Family Planning

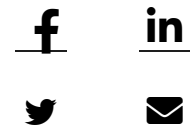
By [Christopher Purdy](#) April 28, 2017

Family planning and contraceptive social marketing used to be a straightforward, relatively low-tech affair. You would design an attractively packaged condom or contraceptive product and sell it to as many retail outlets as possible. To increase demand, you would create TV and radio advertisements and produce T-shirts, caps, and other promotional items to drive interest in your brands.



Times have changed. While my organization, [DKT International](#), still uses those tactics, we now have new technologies at our disposal that

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According to the [U.S. Global Leadership Coalition](#), 94 percent of people living in low- and middle-income countries now have access to mobile phones, up from 4 percent in 2000. That means more people in the world have access to mobile phones than electricity or clean water.

And, as almost everyone knows, [social media](#) has become an increasingly prominent communication platform. Eighty-nine percent of Internet users in Indonesia use social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, according to [a Pew Research Center survey in 2016](#). This should come as no surprise, given the excellent 4G coverage in that country combined with the Indonesian penchant for community building. The [statistics in other countries](#) are equally impressive: 88 percent in the Philippines, 85 percent in Nigeria, 81 percent in Mexico, and 79 percent in Brazil. By comparison, only 71 percent of Internet users in the United States are on one or more social networking site.

These developments give family planning organizations a wealth of new opportunities and channels to share information about contraception.

With that in mind, here are ten innovative ways technology is being used to advance sexual reproductive health globally:

1. Sex info 24/7: Thanks to a new technology embedded in Facebook Messenger, DKT Brazil has launched “Prudence Advisor,” a “chatbot” on the Prudence Condom Facebook page that can answer sex-related questions in real time.

2. Knowledge panels: Google has introduced knowledge panels, a handy way of accessing information about modern contraception (or anything else). When you search for the name of a contraceptive method, you’ll see information regarding that method pop up on the right side of the search results. The potential to educate millions of young people with a simple mouse click is enormous. Thank you, Google!

3. Sexual health texts: In Nigeria, we’re using SMS text messaging in two ways: 1) women using the Sayana Press injectable contraceptive can subscribe to a free text messaging service that reminds them when it’s time for their next injection (apps have long existed to remind people to take medication); and 2) TV and radio program listeners are directed to text their sexual health questions to a secure number. Doctors and certified health professionals then call them back with answers to their questions and can even refer callers to nearby clinics.

4. Find a doctor: In Mexico, users can use this page to locate the nearest reproductive health clinic in the Red DKT Network by entering their state and municipality.

5. Tablets for sales and data: The use of handheld electronic tablets has made it easy for educators, researchers, and pharmaceutical detailers to

access a wealth of information and share updates and technical information about family planning. For example, Performance Monitoring and Accountability 2020 uses tablets to gather data on how many people are using contraceptive methods. In Nigeria, DKT's fifty medical sales representatives are using customer relationship management (CRM) field force automation on tablets to capture data (sales, location, type of outlet, etc.), track and fill orders, and send that information to their head office in Lagos, enabling fast and cost-efficient monitoring and evaluation of their activities in real time.

6. Social media: In Egypt, we launched a social media campaign that discusses, in a frank and straightforward manner, condoms and lubricants. Because local law forbids mass media advertising of contraceptives, Facebook and Instagram play a critical role in that work. For example, this condom ad went viral, attracting more than 120,000 views. (It may seem mild to an American consumer, but it is daring by Egyptian standards.)

7. Reaching youth digitally: In Kenya and Tanzania, Well Told Story, an award-winning media company, has created a digital media platform called Shujaaz that engages African youth with fictional characters who deal with issues such as contraceptive use and HIV/AIDS. The website Bedsider, which is targeted to U.S. audiences, is another youth-friendly site, as are DKT sites like Honey & Banana (in Nigeria) and this Egyptian website focused on emergency contraception (available in both Arabic and English). And DKT uses Google Analytics to track

visitor behavior on our sites, enabling us to better tailor our messaging and content to our target audiences.

8. GPS, with a twist: In Brazil, our program has a Prudence condom tester program (now in its seventh year) through which people can geo-tag their location and report the creative use of a condom. In Ethiopia, we use GPS to monitor sales, finance, and inventory for all of our 30,000+ sales outlets.

9. Online videos: To reach youth in Myanmar, we bypassed expensive television ads and, instead, produced fifteen-second ads more likely to resonate in today's quick-click social media culture. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, a popular YouTube video addresses contraception-related issues for a youth audience. And in Ghana, we've produced humorous animated videos on issues related to the use of Fiesta Condoms.

10. Online sales: In Myanmar and Egypt, clients can order condoms and lubricants online and have them delivered to their homes in discreet, unmarked packages. In Turkey, DKT's condoms and sexual enhancement products are available from a popular online sales site.

These are only a few examples of a trend that we expect to continue in the coming years as older technologies improve and new technologies emerge. Best of all, the beneficiaries of this innovation will be women who are more empowered with the knowledge and tools they

need to manage their own reproductive lives. And that's good for them, good their societies, and good for the planet.

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