Transmedia storytelling makes fictional stories more real by allowing audiences to engage with characters and storylines in different formats. Population Media Center (PMC) creates serial dramas to change the world. Transmedia storytelling brings the serial drama narratives alive across multiple platforms, engaging the audience and drawing them further into the fictional world. The audience can interact with characters, develop emotional bonds, and learn in different ways.

Transmedia storytelling can be accomplished through old and new media, such as fictional characters having in-character social media profiles and blogs or a newspaper from the fictional setting being produced for the audience to read. Serial dramas weave together so many characters and components of life that the possibilities can be endless depending on the media usage and interests of the audience.

In different countries and different segments of the population, internet access and media consumption habits vary greatly. It’s important to research these as part of a transmedia assessment. In mature media markets, particularly when aiming to reach youth and young adults, it’s necessary to reach the audience in more than one arena. They consume and are subjected to media and messages almost continuously and must be engaged repeatedly to develop an understanding of, and eventually a relationship with, the drama.

Transmedia storytelling’s real power revolves around creating a relationship with the audience; transmedia invites the audience deeper into the narrative. Building off of the standard extensive marketing and promotional campaign executed by PMC for each drama, transmedia elements provide the audience with a feeling of involvement, whether it’s extra behind-the-scenes clips that make the audience feel like an insider or a social media profile where the audience can actually “talk” with one of the characters. This deepening of the bonds and creating of peer-like relationships between the audience and characters strengthens the influence of the drama’s positive role models, driving greater behavior change — particularly long-term behavior and attitude changes.
PMC’S SERIAL DRAMAS & TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING:
Bringing the Fictional World Alive Across Other Platforms to Increase Impact

PMC’s first online TV serial drama premiered in June 2013 on Hulu.com for the US market. *East Los High* was an instant success and, for its Latino followers, quickly became the top-rated show on Hulu. Additionally, it was in the top five of all Hulu programs airing the month it premiered, surpassing such popular shows as *Grey’s Anatomy* and *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*.

The storylines for season one of *East Los High* included reproductive health, teenage pregnancy, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, and nutrition.

Several transmedia elements were created to accompany *East Los High* and to extend the narrative onto multiple platforms. These included video blogs by characters, extended scenes, and key characters maintaining profiles on social media sites to connect with the audience.

In the first month of broadcast in 2013, more than 30,000 people used the Planned Parenthood widgets on eastloshigh.com to connect with information or services. More than 98 percent of those who watched the episodes and used the transmedia elements said that they found *East Los High’s* resources incredibly helpful, and 76 percent said they shared those resources with friends.

Some of the most popular components included character Ceci’s vlog (video blog) about what it’s like to be pregnant and a segment of the fictional high school newspaper called “Ask Paulie” where character Paulie answered questions about sex and dating.

Several instances occurred wherein loyal viewers reached out to characters via social media asking for their advice on real-life teenage pregnancy and relationship situations. The staff managing these online profiles worked with the appropriate experts to guide the viewers to open up healthy conversations and access nearby counseling services, all while remaining in character.

*East Los High* season two aired in July 2014, and season three airs in 2015.

*Último Año* (“The Last Year”) represented the first partnership between PMC and MTV Latin America. Together, a highly engaging TV drama was developed that dealt with an array of social issues including teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, domestic violence, and cyber bullying. The 70-episode serial drama was produced in Mexico City and aired in 18 countries in Latin America in 2012. In February 2013, the show was broadcast in the US on MTV Tr3s (a division of the network celebrating Latino culture, music and artists and targeting young Hispanics in the US).

To further the impact of *Último Año*, PMC created a multi-faceted online campaign titled “SexySex” to accompany the program in Latin America and adapted this campaign for use again during its broadcast in the US. The campaign included PSAs featuring cast leads providing important information about services related to issues in the plot and were aired after key episodes.

MTV’s website also offered sexual health trivia powered by StayTeen.org, video clips highlighting important dialogues about social issues, and exclusive photos from the show. “SexySex” featured a wide array of resources as well: Planned Parenthood’s Find A Clinic Widget, Get Tested Widget, and Sextumismo, which provided information about birth control methods and sexually transmitted diseases. All content on the site was available in English and Spanish.