

Aboriginal Youth Network

www.ayn.ca

National

WHO ARE THEY?

The Aboriginal Youth Network is just that - a network that runs across Canada connecting all Aboriginal youth.

Their main goal is to ensure that there's a place in cyberspace just for Aboriginal youth in Canada. The site contains lots of information on many issues important to aboriginal youth such as education, employment opportunities and health. Not only that, AYN is a great source for cultural events, entertainment, conferences, contests, and sports. All in all, the AYN is a great resource for aboriginal youth today.

WHY IS THIS WEBSITE SO IMPORTANT?

“Often in the past, aboriginal youth haven’t had much of a say in decision-making. The latest generation realizes that they have greater opportunities and many want to take advantage of them, get involved, and help shape their communities.”

Donita Large and Ryan Janvier, AYN

The AYN is a gatherer and presenter of opportunities. The more opportunities youth see presented to them, the more motivated they become. Opportunities also used to be very limited to within the individual community, but now with improved communications and education, opportunities to work in and around the community are growing. AYN aims to make sure that these opportunities don't go unnoticed by aboriginal youth.

WHAT'S THE APPEAL?

In a nutshell, the AYN provides valuable information to youth in a very youth-accessible way. Their health center section provides lots of useful information to youth on abuse, addiction, sexuality, wellness, safety, and a great flash movie on quitting smoking.

Their pathfinder section connects youth with employers by providing information for job searches, a section to post your resume, and starting your own business. That's just the tip of the iceberg: there are toolkits provided for job seekers, entrepreneurs, employers and recruiters. So you can learn everything from how to put together a resume, the first steps in creating your own business and a whole slew of related information.

There is also an education center where youth can find all sorts of information on scholarships, internships, education programs for Aboriginal people and training opportunities. The AYN has even teamed up with the nation's youth music tv station, Much Music, for an Aboriginal Youth Scholarship!

AYN METHOD

Youth find an abundance of resources to help them get involved in various projects and to develop themselves into stronger individuals. When youth see opportunity, they'll come.

The website itself is very well put together. They've gotten a lot of feedback from youth and have built the site around that framework. The site is interactive and has a nice hip-hop kind of feel to it. There are discussion boards for youth to talk about all sorts of things from "Native Punks", activism, and essays, to drugs and suicide. There is also a poll section and a feedback form. This way, AYN is able to stay connected with youth and in tune with what matters most to them. They build their web site based on the information gathered from these efforts and then keep updating it almost daily. Updating your website is crucial if you want to keep them coming back!

WHAT THE YOUTH FRIENDLY GUIDE SAYS

One of the reasons why the AYN is so successful is because it promotes the five principles for intergenerational partnerships which are discussed in the Youth-Friendly Guide:

The AYN gives aboriginal youth a voice and encourages creativity by posting songs, art, poetry and stories from youth all across the country. This is a great way to encourage creativity and difference which one is bound to find from community to community. If youth feel they can comfortably speak out and truly express themselves, they'll definitely come back.

The AYN makes connections between generations by encouraging youth to learn more about their heritage and providing information and learning opportunities.

The discussion boards and openings for youth to post information are excellent, allowing the free flow of unhindered communication, which is essential to the establishment of successful partnerships between youth and organizations.

Though the AYN is not a physical organization, it is playing a major role in strengthening the fabric of aboriginal communities across Canada by helping youth to get involved, and disseminating information that is invaluable to bringing youth and organizations together.

All in all, the AYN is successful with youth because it shows them opportunity, it's built around their feedback, and it's very accessible. Not only that, it's also a place where youth can come without feeling like they're "on the job" or "on the hunt". The AYN has sections on horoscopes, dating, movie/cd/book reviews, jokes, etc. Youth don't want to be in work-mode 24/7 and enjoy feeding their curiosity about other things sometimes. They are much more likely to return to your organization if they feel relaxed and if your atmosphere is not just all about work. Even simply leaving a few interesting books or magazines lying around can create the right impression. These are guidelines worth taking into consideration if your organization wishes to successfully engage youth.