

Men Who Have Sex with Men (MSM) Who Meet Partners Online, Dating/Hookup Website Owners, and HIV/STD Directors Agree on Many Online Strategies to Reduce Transmission of HIV/STDs

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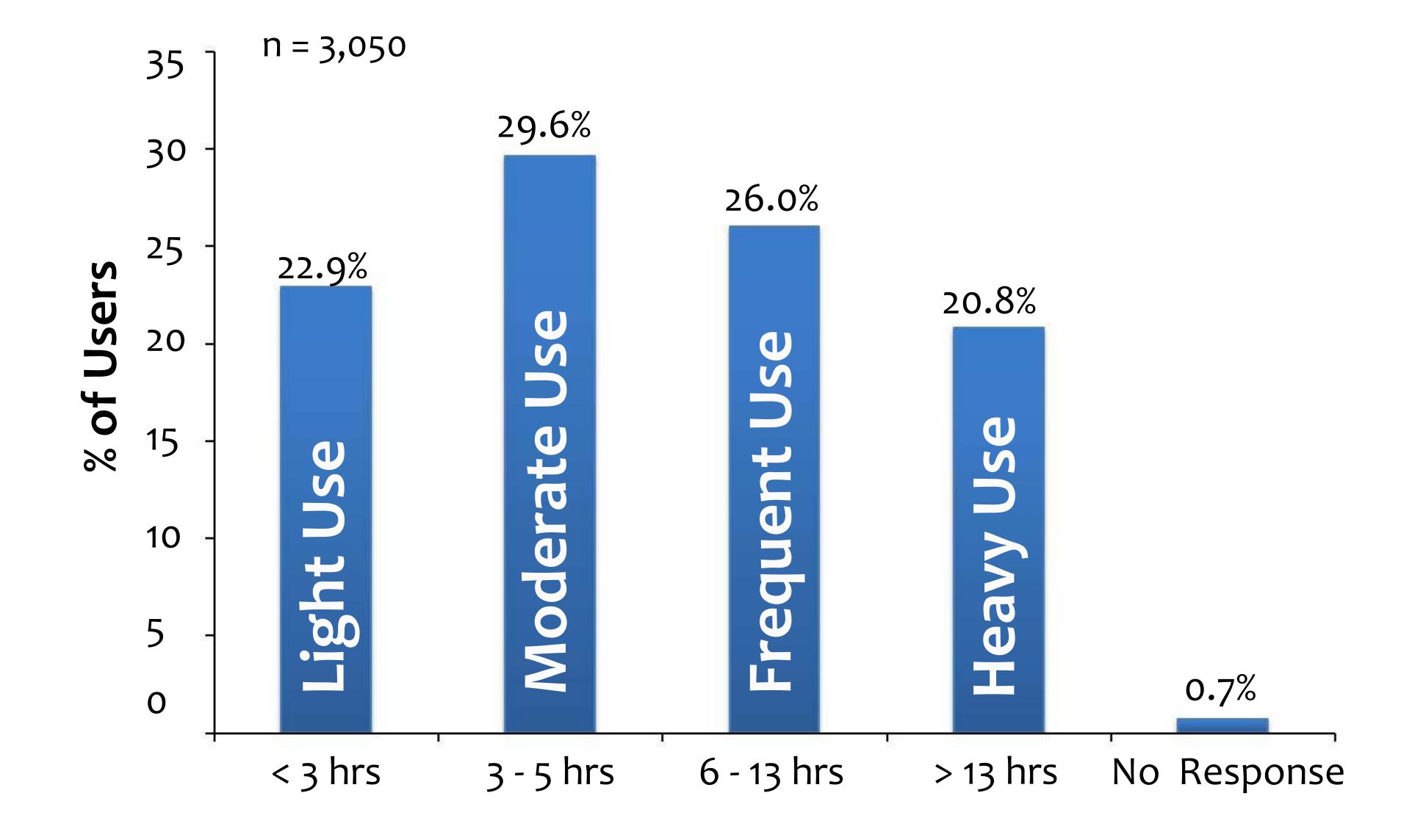
OUR GOAL

• To find strategies to reduce HIV and STD transmission that will be supported by, and low-cost to, website owners and public health, and likely to be used by website users.

BACKGROUND

- Strategies to reduce STD and HIV transmission among men who meet partners online have typically been created without consultation with website owners or users.
- The public health field has relied heavily on behavioral interventions, and has not fully leveraged the internet's assets in disseminating information efficiently, or helping men who have sex with men (MSM) make informed choices about their partners.
- The lack of coordinated approach between website owners and public health has had negative consequences for both website owners and public health and strained relationships between them.
- A high percentage of MSM look for new relationships, both casual and romantic, on dating and hook-up websites (see Fig. 1).

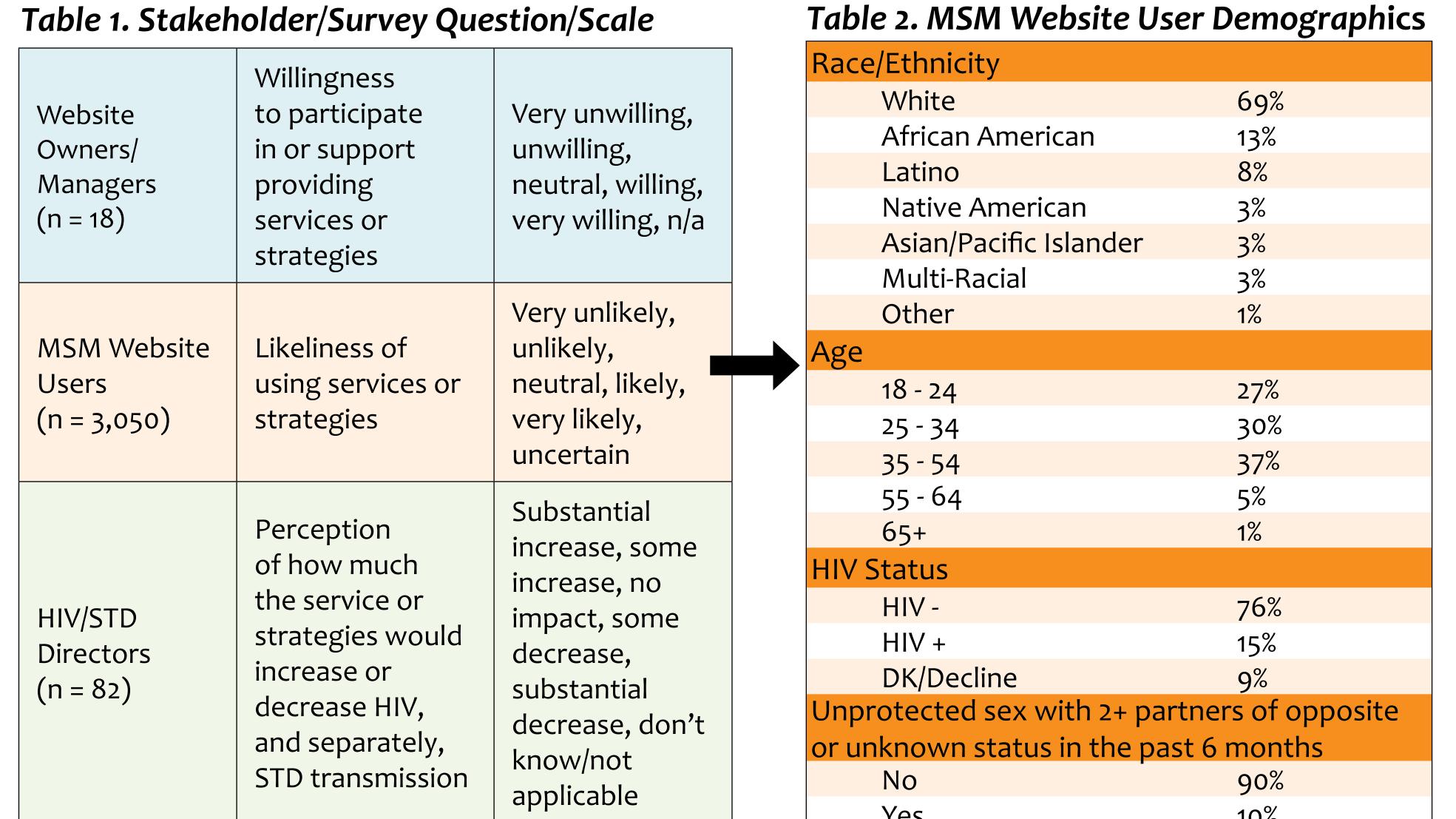
Figure 1. "In a Typical Week, How Many Hours Do You Spend Online Looking for Guys?"



METHODS

- We designed three surveys, each with the same set of 41 intervention strategies for the three stakeholder groups: website owners/managers, website users, and HIV/STD directors (table 1).
- Types of strategies we asked about were: searching for partners; profile options; information about sites (by and for users); HIV/STD testing; partner notification about HIV/STD exposure; messages and information about physical health and social connections; and online education sessions and outreach.

METHODS (continued)



We tailored recruitment strategies to each of the three stakeholder groups: **Website owner/managers:**

- We developed a comprehensive list of gay-oriented dating and hook-up sites, as well as mixed gay/straight sites on which MSM meet partners. All sites had to have users in the US.
- We sent email invitations to the 31 website owners and managers for whom we were able to locate contact information asking them to participate in the survey.
- Eighteen of 31 website owners/managers completed the survey (58%).

HIV/STD directors:

- We invited all members of the National Coalition of STD Directors (NCSD) and National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD) to participate.
- Eighty two (76% of HIV/STD directors) completed the survey. **Website Users:**
- We placed banner ads on gay dating and hook-up sites and Facebook (see Fig. 2).
- Eligibility criteria included: being over 18 years old, living in the US, identifying as male or female-to-male transgender (transman), and having looked for a male sex partner online in the previous six months.
- We enrolled a total of 6,896 men and transmen during 8 weeks of recruitment. Forty-four percent (n = 3,050) of those completed the survey. A demographic breakdown of these 3,050 participants can be seen in table 2.

Figure 2. Examples of banner ads used to recruit MSM website users.



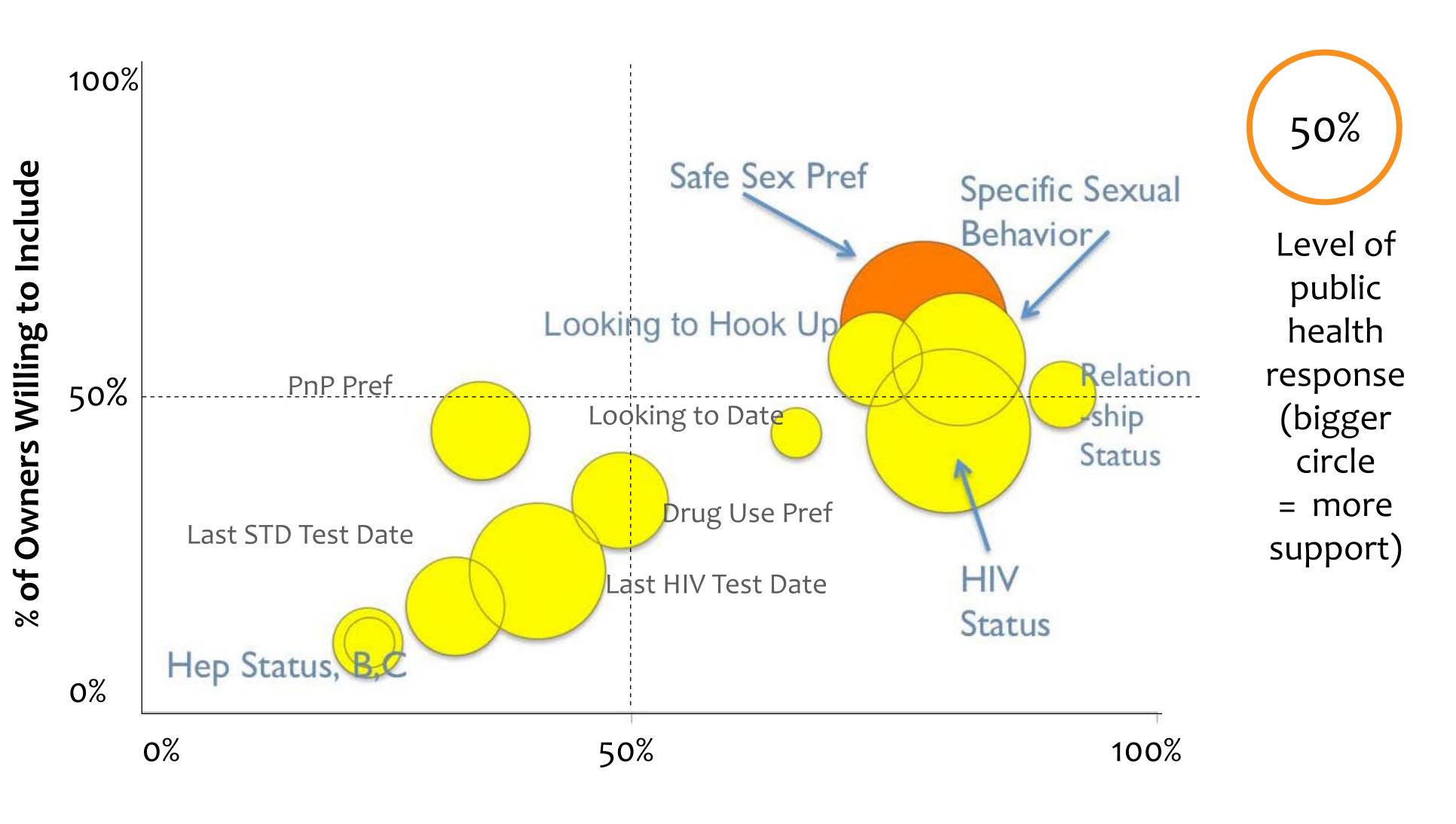


RESULTS

We found eight strategies that were favored by a majority of all three stakeholder groups.

- 1. Filtering partners by profile information
- 2. Online STD testing directory searchable by zip code
- 3. Subsection of sites for specific sexual interests
- 4. Including safe sex preference as a profile option (refer to Fig. 3 to see ratings of profile option strategies included in the survey).
- 5. Access to sexual health experts
- 6. Access to sex-positive videos
- 7. Automatic HIV/STD testing reminders
- 8. Online partner notification re: HIV/STD exposure with e-card (refer to Fig. 4 to see all online partner notification option strategies included in the survey).

Figure 3. Profile Options for Decreasing HIV Transmission



% of Website Users Willing to Provide

Several strategies were rated low by one of the three stakeholder groups yet rated high by the other two.

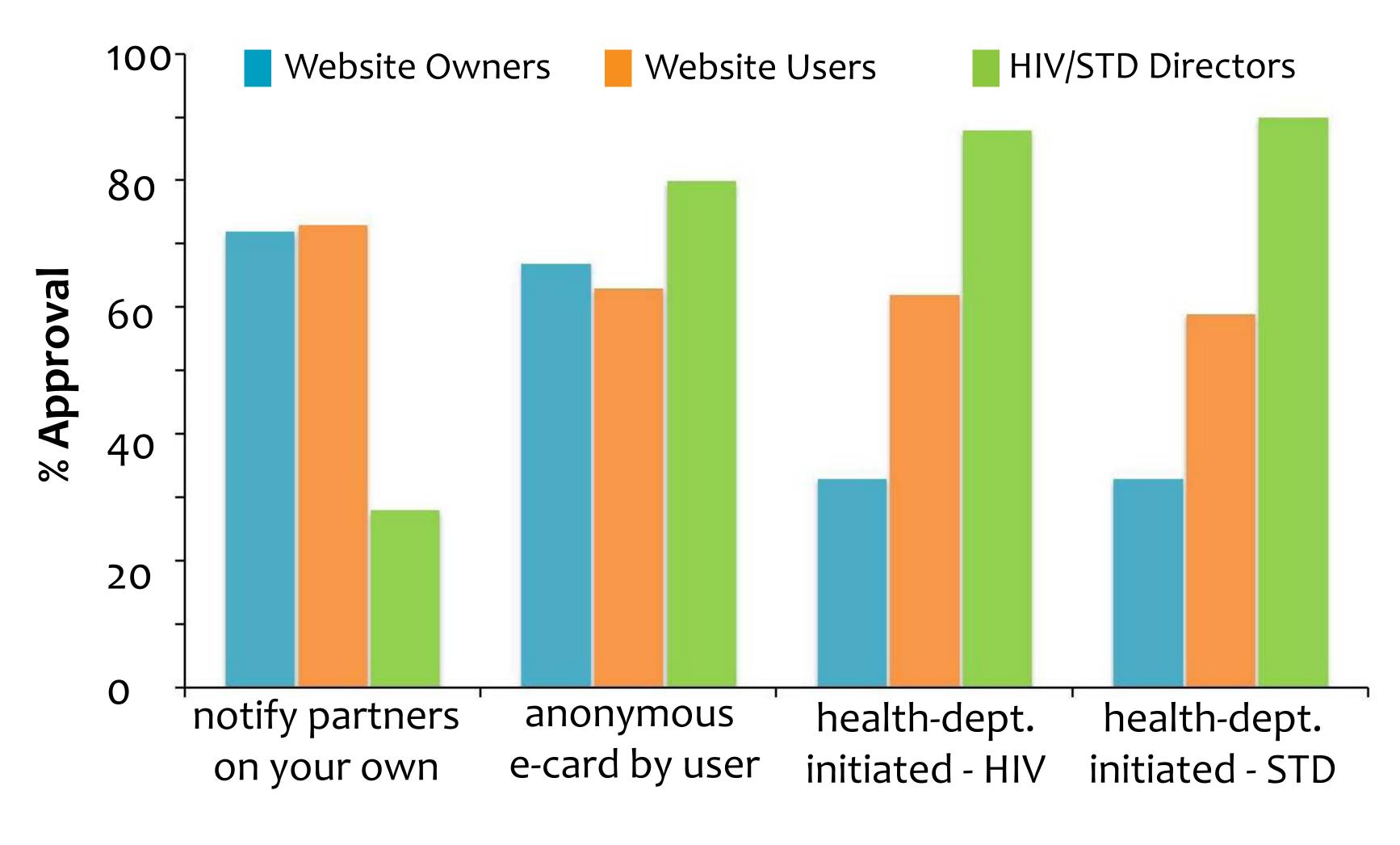
 For example, website owners were less supportive of health-department initiated partner notification than users or directors (see Figure 4).

There were several strategies that did not earn the support of a majority of any of the three stakeholder groups, including:

- Blogs about users' experiences meeting partners online;
- Links from dating websites to social network sites, such as Facebook; and
- Options to add Hepatitis B and C status, date of last STD test, or drug use preference to one's profile.

RESULTS (continued)

Figure 4. Partner Notification Options and Percent Approval by Website Owners, Website Users, and HIV/STD Directors



- **High-risk users** were somewhat less willing to use nearly all strategies but MORE willing to include specific sexual behaviors and interests in sadomasochism (S&M), kink, and/or bondage in their profiles;
- HIV-positive users were somewhat less willing to use most strategies, but MORE willing to use specific subsites and to include the following information in their profiles: party and play (getting high on methamphetamine and having sex), poz-friendly, looking to hook up, interested in kink and specific sexual behaviors, and nearby social events;
- African American users were generally MORE supportive to use strategies than white, and slightly less willing to support HIV status and safe sex preference (but still a majority supported them); and
- Men from states with the fewest lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) couples were more likely to support online education.

NEXT STEPS

- Form a workgroup of National Coalition of STD Directors (NCSD) and National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD) members; and
- Meet with owners to discuss moving ahead with the strategies supported by a majority of the three groups; seek to understand objections; explore ways to change strategies which high-risk and HIV-positive men may have rated lower.

CONTACT

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