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How Thomas Siebel Talked Half the Nation Out of Trying Meth

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Starting a public health initiative can be like starting a business. You come up with a plan of action, you figure out where your start-up costs are going to come from, you build from the ground up, and after a few years, if you're doing really well, you get bought out by... the Partnership for a Drug-Free America?

That's how it went for tech billionaire Thomas Siebel. In 2005, Siebel parlayed his [long-running interest in helping homeless and disenfranchised people](#) into the Meth Project Montana, believing that a hard-hitting PR campaign could significantly slash the meth use rates in the state where he owns two ranches and has resided for 35 years. The project was founded with funding from the [Thomas and Stacey Siebel Foundation](#), and it has been an incredible success. Meth use is down 72 percent in Montana since the Meth Project first began. Building on what seemed to be a winning formula, Siebel went on to establish the Meth Project in seven other states: Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, and Wyoming, which have reported similar results.

The [Meth Project's](#) approach is simple and blunt. It's a war of words, images, and information. The website features questions like "What is Meth-Induced Psychosis?" and "How Can Meth Lead to Unwanted Sex?" exactly the sort of leading questions designed to attract curious clicks. Out in the world, in [TV ads and on highway billboards](#), the Meth Project employs images of meth-ravaged faces pocked with sores and bleak white text with questions like, "Will meth make me dig at my own skin?" and "Will meth change who I am?"

It's simple, but it's working. In many areas, meth has caught on in no small part because the people tempted to try it had no idea what it would do to their bodies. Siebel changed that, in a very big way, in those eight states where the Meth Project was established. And then the government came calling.

In 2013, the Meth Project became part of the partnership at [Drugfree.org](#), the government's anti-substance abuse campaign, which has done little to alter the Meth Project's vibe. The Siebel Foundation, instead of running the Meth Project, now gives a sizeable donation each year, \$1.5 million or so, to support what's called the Meth Project Foundation, and watches as the availability and quality of meth keeps rising and the meth usage rates stay low.

 Wednesday, May 21, 2014 at 03:00PM

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