

2-1-2005

Social Marketing: Meeting the Outreach Challenges of Today

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Recommended Citation

Skelly, J. (2005). Social Marketing: Meeting the Outreach Challenges of Today. *The Journal of Extension*, 43(1), Article 18. <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol43/iss1/18>

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February 2005 // Volume 43 // Number 1 // Ideas at Work // 11AW1



Social Marketing: Meeting the Outreach Challenges of Today

Abstract

Social marketing uses traditional marketing strategies to create social change by maximizing audience response. The social marketing framework holds great promise for extending Extension's outreach to new audiences on new and old issues. Extension professionals can greatly benefit the communities they serve by employing some simple, but strategized marketing techniques. Six simple tools are shared to develop a social marketing toolbox.

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Introduction

Extension faces challenges and competition in changing economic times (Varea-Hammond, 2004). Why do some programs fall short of reaching desired goals? Often, the target audience's needs are not met, or the method used to disseminate information is poorly chosen.

Social marketing is a powerful tool that can improve an individual's, a group's, or a society's welfare. Often, the goal of Extension programming is to change behavior or to have new ideas adopted and used by the target audience. Social marketing uses traditional marketing strategies to create social change by maximizing audience response. "Social marketing is the application of commercial marketing technologies to the analysis, planning, execution, and evaluation of programs designed to influence the voluntary behavior of target audiences in order to improve their personal welfare and that of their society" (Andreasen, 1995).

The focus is on the target audience or society. While social marketing may use commercial marketing techniques, it differs from the commercial sector because the primary objective is to influence social behavior rather than to profit the marketing organization (Weinrich, 1999).

Tools in the Social Marketing Toolbox

There are six simple tools to define, design, and deliver the right market fit.

Know the Market

Effective social marketing begins with identifying and specifying the target market and their needs as precisely as possible. Whose behavior is to be influenced? What social change should occur? Research the audience's needs and the best methods to meet those identified needs. Tailor the program delivery approach to meet their needs.

Identify the WIIFM

Answer "What's in it for me" for the target audience. Social marketing builds consumer-centered programs (Weinrich, 1999). This goes beyond promoting the benefits of a program. There may be risks, and a potential client may have good reasons not to change. Identify why adopting the desired behavior is more valuable than maintaining an undesired behavior.

Ask, Ask, Ask, and Then Listen

Begin with a behavioral objective in mind. Find out why the audience is doing what they are doing. What is their current knowledge level? What are the audience's beliefs and attitudes related to the advocated behavior change? Ask the audience what they want, and listen to determine relevant needs (Brinckerhoff, 2003). Target the needs specifically.

Consider the Five P's

- **Product**--What kind of product must be offered to make the behavioral change attractive to the consumer/target market (Andreasen, 1995)? To succeed in social marketing, either develop a new product, or improve an existing product (Kotler & Roberto, 1989).
- **Price**--What is the price in time, energy, and money for the participants? What do they have to give up to adopt the new behavior? What do they see as the costs for their behavioral change, and is it worth it to them? Minimize the perceived costs, and reduce the barriers to changing. Maximize the potential benefits. From the program delivery perspective, where will the funding come from to research what behavior change is necessary and to implement and evaluate the program?
- **Place**--How can Extension reach the audience? Is there a new place to deliver the marketing message? Can a new location generate more enthusiasm in or be more accessible to audiences? How might distribution processes work more effectively for Extension consumers? Make products and services readily available to the target audience to effectively accomplish behavioral change. If a program in a classroom setting is poorly attended, train a trainer to deliver the program in a different venue; for example: train a beautician to present nutrition information to her clients. Reach them where they are.
- **Promotion**--What is the best technique to get the message out to the targeted audience? How can customer/media communications be more clear and compelling? Are there new ways to communicate with clientele and market the message of Extension? Can changes be made to capture the attention of clients and media? Promotional tools include advertising, public relations, media advocacy, personal selling, special events, and rewards for achieving the desired change. Find out the most effective way to reach the consumer. For example, Hispanic-American television households watch more television on average each week than total U.S. television households (Nielsen, 2004). Television promotion could be a good promotional tool for this market.
- **People/Partnerships**--How can Extension increase motivation and enthusiasm in internal audiences: staff, volunteers, the organization, and the community? How can Extension increase motivation and enthusiasm in external audiences: policy makers, media, partners, or donors?

Cross the Line

Be creative. Think outside the box, and be imaginative in marketing efforts. Be relative and meaningful to the audience. Be original, and state the message in a new way (Weinrich, 1999). For example, if a county government wants to change the watering practices of its resident to conserve water, it might work with wholesale nurseries to give away native drought-tolerant plants at water-efficient landscape workshops. This encourages participation at the workshops. Then, each participant could receive further plants when they have implemented the recommended water-conservation practices.

Create a "Bump in the Envelope"

An envelope that arrives in the mail with a "bump" in it, grabs the attention of the receiver. In social marketing, getting the target market's attention may be more than just a give-away. It can be memorable slogan, a catchy advertisement, or billboard. A successful slogan for a sheep-grazing fuels management project in Nevada was "Only Ewes Can Prevent Wildfire."

Conclusion

In today's non-profit market, most projects require a scientifically developed needs assessment, a monitoring process throughout the project, and a formal evaluation upon conclusion. All are factors in a successful social marketing effort. Social marketing has a systematic structure that includes pretesting of the strategy (Andreasen, 1995). Extension often involves people in educational opportunities as part of a social change campaign. This work can be effectively achieved through social marketing, which allows for improved audience identification, better product development, and targeted marketing for each outreach effort. This framework for changing behavior holds great promise for extending Extension's outreach on old and new issues.

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