



## Building Our Understanding: Social Marketing on a Dime

### Using Social Media to Do More with Less

Today's limited budgets make it even more important to be able to stretch health communication resources in the most appropriate ways. Lots of people expect that social marketing programs require a lot of investment, the application of expensive marketing research, and funds for an advertising or marketing agency. While this may be true for larger scale programs, hard work and resourcefulness can effectively market public health intervention products or behavior change to any targeted public. Can you do social marketing on a shoestring budget? The answer is yes, if you are realistic about what can be achieved. Priorities – in terms of audiences to be addressed and the scope of the desired change – must be established up front (French, 2010).

The growth and wide acceptance of social media (blogs, social network sites, mobile phones) offers new ways to think about what can be an effective use of limited resources. Before discussing some of these techniques, let's discuss the definition and background of social marketing.

#### **What is Social Marketing?**

Social marketing is a “process that applies marketing principles and techniques to create, communicate and deliver value in order to influence target audience behaviors that benefit society (public health, safety, the environment, and communities) as well as the target audience”. (Kotler, Lee, & Rothschild, 2006 cited in Kotler & Lee, 2008).

Most often, social marketing is used to influence an audience to change their behavior for the sake of social benefits such as improving health, preventing injuries, protecting the environment, or contributing to the community (Kotler and Lee, 2008). When looking at the definition, it is easy to spot the five main components of social marketing. They are that (1) it focuses on behavior change that is (2) voluntary using (3) marketing principles and techniques to (4) select and influence a target audience for their (5) benefit (Kotler, Roberto, & Lee, 2002).

Most people have heard of the four P's used in social marketing: *Product* (key benefits, service or behavior change), *Price* (the cost of stopping an unhealthy behavior or adopting a healthy one), *Place* (the opportunities and access to products, services and places to engage in the behaviors), and *Promotion* (communicating all this to the target audience) (Kotler, Roberto, & Lee, 2002). Many programs today are built with more emphasis put on the fourth P – *Promotion* – which is where much of the budget is allocated. Lower budgets, though, mean that we must pay attention to all four P's and how they can be used to be truly effective.

**Changing a Behavior**— social marketers have as their bottom-line the behavior change of groups of people, not just changes in knowledge or attitude. This is similar to commercial sector marketers who focus on people buying their goods and services –understanding that awareness of the product is not sufficient to make a sale. In social marketing, change agents typically want target audiences to do one of four things: (a) accept a new behavior (e.g., recycling), (b) reject a potential behavior (e.g., not starting smoking), (c) modify a current behavior (e.g., increasing physical activity from 3 to 5 days of the week), or (d) abandon an old behavior (e.g., stopping talking on the cell phone while driving) (Kotler, Roberto, & Lee, 2002; Kotler & Lee, 2008).

**The Behavior Change is typically Voluntary**—the core of the social marketing approach is achieving a level of understanding and empathy of the audience to discover motivations and personal benefits to link to changing behaviors or product offerings.

**Using Marketing Principles and Techniques**—the most fundamental principle underlying marketing is to apply a consumer orientation to designing the product by understanding what target audiences currently know, believe, and do. The product is positioned to appeal to the motivations of the target market to improve their health, prevent injuries, protect the environment, or contribute to their community more effectively than the competing behavior the target market currently practices or is considering (Kotler, Roberto, & Lee, 2002). The planning process for any health communication initiative is as important as implementation and involves making decisions about what can be expected through the social marketing initiative and what can be evaluated. In times of tight budgets, setting the right expectation for outcome and the evaluation process are crucial (French, 2010).

**Selecting and Influencing a Target Audience**—Marketers know that the marketplace is a collage of diverse populations, each having a distinct set of aspirations, wants and needs. They know that what is valued by one audience may not appeal to another. Priority “segments” are selected and targeted based on these consumer characteristics.

**The Beneficiary is the Individual, Group, or Society as a Whole**—the primary beneficiary of the social marketing program is the individual through improved health and quality of life, while society benefits from a healthier and more productive population (Kotler, Roberto, & Lee, 2002).

**More information and details on the entire social marketing planning and implementation process can be found in the online tool CDCynergy – Social Marketing Edition, Version 2.0. Copies can be ordered at [www.turningpointprogram.org/toolkit/content/cdcynergy.htm](http://www.turningpointprogram.org/toolkit/content/cdcynergy.htm).**

### **No-Cost/Low-Costs Social Marketing Tips and Techniques Making the Most of Limited Resources**

1. **Decide on the “product” you are trying to market.** Sometimes we focus too much on the behavior change, when the emphasis might need to be the tangible product (pedometers) that makes the behavior change (more exercise) possible (Weinreich, 1999).
2. **Know your target audience.** As simple as it sounds, many marketing campaigns are kicked off without regard to who should be targeted, or they try to reach too many target audience segments with limited resources (Landers, 2006). As an example, if you

send out a coupon for NASCAR tickets to the first 1,000 people in the phone book, some will be thrilled and some won't care. But think if you sent out the same 1,000 NASCAR ticket coupons to only those people who attended a NASCAR event in the last year. By choosing the right target audience segments (those you know are likely to be more interested and reached) and narrowing your focus to them, you've immediately gone from shooting wildly to steadily prioritizing your campaign, thus increasing your response rate and decreasing your cost per consumer (Martini, 2009).

3. **Getting research on your target audience.** The Internet can provide you with lots of information about the demographics and lifestyles of your audience, and local media has market information that they can provide to you. Use search engines and seek out surveys on audiences that have been done by target magazines and other media companies on different segments. These often have very good information on lifestyle and media habits, which they compile for advertisers. Other government websites also can offer localized data for free. Online tools and social media may be a good place to reach your target audience, but first make sure you know their online habits through market research (Martini, 2009). If you need help with consumer research, consider approaching a local university's marketing program to find a professor and class willing to help. They are always looking for good projects. Sometimes, you just have to go out and talk with some of your target audience, too (French, 2010).
4. **Form alliances.** Especially with tight budgets, trying to implement a comprehensive social marketing program and not simply defaulting to a communication effort (the fourth P) means looking outside your own organization for resources and expertise. Never underestimate the power of cooperation and reciprocal agreements. Is there another organization that reaches your target audience on a regular basis with related products, services, or interventions? If so, form a strategic alliance where you can embed your efforts into their existing programs and provide them with additional support. Look beyond the usual health partners, sometimes other organizations have ready appeal to your target population (Martini, 2009; Weinreich, 1999).
5. **Make everyone in your organization an "ambassador" for your health initiative.** Too often we forget that many people in our organization go home every day and meet with others in the community. They may be talking directly with the target audience about the specific health initiative and you don't even know it. Make sure to enlist them in your efforts by arming them with the background and talking points you would like communicated. Also, have everyone in your organization include a signature file on their e-mail with the campaign; these become little billboards helping you to promote your health initiative (Landers, 2006).
6. **Have a website and keep it updated.** Make certain your website is quick and easy to read and navigate. If it takes more than 2-3 clicks for your target audience to get their information, you've probably lost them. Change information and photos frequently so that your target has reasons to come back. Consider a new domain name for the health initiative; it costs as little as \$2.95/year and, using templates available online, a basic design can be done in a few hours. Alternatively, you can use free software such as

Wordpress to set up your site. Consider the benefits of site linking (getting linked to other websites and having them link to your website) which is not only free, it also helps with your search engine rankings, as many search engines now factor “link popularity” in their search results (French, 2010; Martini, 2009; Thomases, 2009).

7. **Explore the benefits of marketing online.** Marketing online is helping budgets go farther for many organizations. The explosion of digital media along with new websites offer many opportunities that weren’t even there a year ago. Online is a constantly changing landscape to be plowed for little or no cost. Make sure that your target audience is reached through online marketing and include it as part of an overall social marketing strategy, not as a standalone tactic. It is very important to show care to engage in ethical behaviors and be guided by the professional values and goals of your organization. For example, not engaging in alliances or accepting ads from organizations that work against your organization’s goals or take positions contrary to your organization’s values is essential. Some of the benefits of marketing online include:
  - a) **You can make changes on the fly**—by monitoring and tracking your content as your efforts evolve, you can make the decision to change a graphic or wording and do it without any problems.
  - b) **You can track real-time results**—using online analytics can provide hard data to determine how your online efforts are performing.
  - c) **You can target specific demographics**—such as gender, age, and location; you can even target specific income levels, educational achievement, and occupation
  - d) **You can use a variety of methods**—including email, audio, video, blog, social media and networking sites like Facebook, and MySpace, and newsletters (Lake, 2009).
8. **Online Press releases.** In addition to using blast email and services like Bacon’s and Business Wire to distribute news, post your news for FREE on PR Web (Thomases, 2009). Develop a list of e-zines (i.e., online magazines) to send your press releases to, and go beyond press releases that just present information to creating more interesting narrative stories about those affected by your health initiative and the benefits of behavior change. These are much more likely to get picked up (Falconer, 2009).
9. **Get involved online.** Find out where your target audience hangs out and participate in those online discussion groups and forums. Yahoo Groups, Facebook, Ning and SNS are great places to find a wide variety of discussion groups. Similarly, e-mail transmissions and listservs can be effective, low-cost ways to get the word out on events, activities, products, and services Falconer, 2009; Lenhart, 2009). By consistently offering your help to others in online discussions you can present your health initiative’s messages, as well as help to position you as an expert while letting others get to know you (Martini, 2009).

10. **Consider online advertising such as:**
  - a) **Remnant ad buys**—Websites you want to include your materials that don't sell out all their ad inventory might be willing to sell you a mish-mash of locations called remnant space. Ask the websites. However, this is labor intensive.
  - b) **Low-cost classified advertising**—buy space for low cost in newsletters and e-zines targeted to your audience.
  - c) **Pay for performance ad buys**—pay for your ad only when someone clicks on it. Behavioral targeting finds audience segments based on surfing patterns, search queries, responses to messaging or actions taken on a website. Use behavior targeting through ad networks like Advertising.com and ValueClick (Thomases, 2009).
  
11. **Publish an e-zine (or newsletter).** Publishing an e-zine or print newsletter (even as short as a page) is a great way to keep in touch with your target audience. You can produce one online using a program such as Constant Contact for little to no money, and can even set your e-zines up in advance using easy-to-understand templates (Dylan, 2007; Martini, 2009; Nonprofit Marketing Guide.com, 2009).
  
12. **Word of mouth/buzz.** In your overall consideration of health communication and marketing, do not discount the importance of good old word-of-mouth. Word-of-mouth plays an important role in the way that many people end up arriving at your organization (Landers, 2006). Getting the conversation going among your target audience is an important component of achieving behavior change since we all listen to our families, friends and colleagues. The more ways you can reach them through your social marketing program, the more likely it is that some influence will be exerted on your target audience.
  
13. **Use social media.** Social media cannot be ignored. In the last year social media have made huge strides and are good, low-cost communication tools. You will likely spend valuable time connecting, communicating, and networking but the return on investment of social media can be incredible, especially when focusing on your target audience. Find where your target customers are and participate. Local blogs/forums, industry blogs/forums, meetup groups, Facebook Fan Pages, and LinkedIn Groups can be worth the time commitment. Also, networking/partnering with other businesses can be facilitated online (Falconer, 2009). Here are some tools:
  - a) **Twitter**—provides a glimpse into the everyday characters, events, etc., of a company/brand/individual. Use it to create action oriented messages and keep the conversation two-way. Make your message count and resonate with your target audience by providing more than simply a reference back to your website. Also, use Twitter to get out messages quickly to your followers.

**Finding local people and those interested in specific topics on Twitter:**

- WeFollow—<http://wefollow.com/>
- Twellow—<http://www.twellow.com/>
- Twitterpacks—<http://twitterpacks.pbwiki.com/>
- Twitterlocal—<http://www.twitterlocal.net/>
- LocalTweeps—<http://www.localtweeps.com/>

- b) **Blog**—creates an ongoing, in-depth conversation with your audience. Blogging can help you put a human face to the health initiative and presents an excellent opportunity to use narrative (storytelling) in your marketing.

**Finding Bloggers in your Community**

The best way to find local bloggers is by searching Technorati or Google Blog. Search for your city or community name, and then check the sidebars of those blogs for others who are also writing about local issues.

- c) **LinkedIn**—has become a popular online social network for business purposes because it is easy to view profiles, get connected, and even recruit potential new hires. There is also a recommendation feature that allows you to see what others say about an individual. Do a search to find groups that are specific to your local community, or start a LinkedIn group that can reach out to your target audience based on their profiles.
- d) **Facebook**—is a highly popular social network with more than 500 million active members (as of January 2011). It is community oriented and can be used by organizations and groups. The fan page is a great place to have public discussions on your health initiative.
- e) **MySpace**- is an online social networking website that allows communication among friends and other people around the globe. People can post images, blog about ideas and concerns, and post comments on other people's profiles. Once the largest social networking site, it is appealing now to a younger, less affluent more ethnic audience.

- f) **VisiblePath**—is Silicon Valley-based and is a lot like LinkedIn, but it automatically determines who your real network is, and how strong each individual relationship is based on your emails and calendar items that involve them.
- g) **Ryze**—is a large database of users who tend to be casual and has more of a social atmosphere. It can be a little difficult to navigate, but overall it's a great place to hang your hat. Browse the networks and look for others that have something in common with your health initiative.
- h) **Orkut**—is owned and developed by the mega search engine Google; Orkut's social network can help you maintain existing relationships with pictures and messages, and establish new ones by reaching out to people you've never met before such as new business contacts. You can also create and join a wide variety of online communities to discuss current events, business ideas, or reconnect with old school mates (Lake, 2009).

14. **Create widgets.** Widgets are eye-catching animations or videos captured in snippets of code that users can easily copy and paste into their websites or blogs. Develop widgets that your partners can post on their website to link the target audience back to you. Make sure they provide action messages, not just facts (Lake, 2009; Nonprofit Marketing Guide.com, 2009).

15. **Get your organization listed on the 1<sup>st</sup> page of Google.** We all know that everyone has heard of Google, so where does your site rank? It's important that you rank in Google in order for your website to come up when your target audience searches for information about your health issue. It often takes companies 3 to 6 months to even gain rankings in search engines such as Google; you can get on the front page of a search within your local region for your product or service by following five easy steps:

**Steps to Gaining Prime Search Engine Results in Google:**

1. Visit Google Local Business Center online. Click the link on the left hand side of the browser window that says "Put your business on Google Maps."
2. Go to "Sign Up Now" and enter the appropriate information for your organization and health topic, including search tags. Your search tags are what prospective consumers would look for when searching for information about your product or service online.
3. Once you've entered all of the information required by the online form, review and click submit.
4. You will be asked to verify your information. You can do this either by postcard or telephone; chose the option that works best for you. Telephone verification tends to expedite the process.
5. Once you've confirmed either by telephone or postcard you will want to frequently check back for your listing within local search results of the search tags you selected. Google suggests checking back within 7 to 10 days (Google, 2009).

For additional information and resources, contact Dr. Stephanie Sargent Weaver with the CDC's Healthy Communities Program at [SWeaver@cdc.gov](mailto:SWeaver@cdc.gov).

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