

Notes from the Field

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Marketing with No Budget

Imagine you are a regional representative for a state or federal agency. You have no staff, 5-6 layers of supervisors. You are responsible for supporting at least three state-wide health programs. Your annual budget is unpredictable and often shaped by recent “fads” in federal funding. Whatever budget you receive, there is precious few dollars for “social marketing.” You are definitely not in the “campaign” business. You have no big anti-smoking dollars. But your immediate boss is pressing you to do “outreach.” “Outreach” to her means “visibility”- print or media materials with a clever, compelling message... “you know, like those advertising guys do all the time.”

You have just finished a social marketing training. You know what the *4 Ps* stand for (Product, Price, Promotion.....and ah,Place) but you have no idea what you are suppose to do with them. You are excited about the *consumer-centered idea*, it has always struck you that beneficiaries need to be more involved with your programs. But “beneficiaries” have usually boiled down to “interest groups” which push hard for one agenda or another. Question: given these conditions, what do you **do** about the practice of social marketing?

In a previous *Notes from the Field* I tried to stress the importance of structural change. I suggested a five-step action process which includes lots of thinking. And I laid out four questions to answer for your program as you moved through this thinking process. But, I didn't really give you very much advice on what **to do**.

Before we begin to talk about what you might do, let me share with you what I believe is the bottom line about marketing that makes a difference in programs. First, marketing can be a very sophisticated practice - much like surgery. You need a lot of training, experience and talent. Not every surgeon is as good as every other, and not every marketer is as good as every other. If you are dealing with 100 million dollar budgets to combat smoking among teens, or fighting a second and third wave of HIV infections among hard to reach audiences; if you are addressing domestic violence on a large scale, or seeking to increase enrollment rates in large national health care insurance programs, you need bucks, talent and trained marketing professionals.

But not all medical problems require sophisticated surgery; and not all public health problems require expensive highly expert social marketing. There are critical local health programs where vast resources are not needed to make a difference. Programs, such as enrolling in local Medicaid programs, increasing calls to a crisis hotline, reducing infection from local outbreaks, or changing local policy about AIDS education in the schools, are all manageable marketing problems. I have seen over the past six years communities, epidemiologists, and just regular smart folks learn enough about social marketing to significantly improve their programs' effectiveness in addressing issues such as these. I believe there is a core of fundamental ideas that any sensible person can grasp and use to benefit their program of social change. I'll call this core of fundamentals ***minimalist marketing***.

Minimalist marketing consists of three basic actions:

1. Keep the audience and the behavior in the picture constantly. There has always been an interaction between choosing a behavior and an audience. I think the commercial advertising folks have over-emphasized “the audience first” notion. This is logically because often in commercial marketing advertising enters when the “behavior” and the “product” have already been selected by the client. But as we move to social marketing where we need to select the behavior and the audience, a more complex definition of both which links audience and behavior is necessary.

The definition I use of marketing behavior (See Exhibit 1 for an example) is “**an action, by a specific segment of the population, under certain defined circumstances.**” By defining behavior this way, marketing necessarily focuses on the segmentation of populations and attention to specific behaviors.

The most important marketing job is deciding who your audience should be, and what you want your audience to do. The next most important job is never losing focus on that audience and that behavior. If you have lots of program money, research is invaluable. If your funds are severely limited, however, involving the audience in every stage of a program’s development is a useful substitute. The most sophisticated programs today are doing both.

2. Make the behavior Fun, Easy, and Popular for the audience. I started using these three words a few years to summarize three social science determinants - perceived consequences, self-efficacy, and social norms. Obviously, they are short hand, but they have been useful in making a bridge between theory and practice. These three words focus program managers on how to change behavior by giving people what they **want** along with what we feel they need. FUN in this context means to provide your audience with some perceived benefits they care about. EASY means to remove all the possible barriers to action and make the behavior as simple and accessible as possible. POPULAR means to help the audience feel that this is something others are doing, particularly others who that audience believes are important to them.

3. Base your decision on hard fact. What evidence do I have that anything I have decided upon is based on reality? Essentially this is a research issue. Do I have any real factual support for my program ideas or am I just shooting from the hip of experience? The less information you have then the more careful and watchful you have to be during implementation.

What’s Your Call to Action.

There are numerous opportunities that all of us have to practice these fundamentals of minimalist social marketing. Even if we are not doing big campaigns each of us have control over something. Public health professionals, particularly those in government, for example, have at least five basic settings where their actions could be guided by minimalist social marketing. Their actions in these settings include:

1. Organizing meetings.
2. Build partnerships
3. Give presentations.
4. Approve, sign off on, or give your remarks about a proposed program.
5. Speak your mind; give your opinion about something.

Many of you may do much more. But all of, or just about all of you, do at least these five key actions. Let's look for a moment at each one and think about how **minimalist social marketing** might help. Remember minimalist social marketing means to:

1. Keep the behavior and the audience in the picture.
2. Make the behavior Fun, Easy, and/or Popular for the audience.
3. Ensure your decisions are based on some hard facts.

In the following section I will just list a few of the specific marketing actions you could take in each of the five tasks mentioned above.

Marketing and the Organization of Meetings

1. Invite members of the audience to attend the meetings. This is not as easy as it sounds. The audience should not include only paraprofessional "advocates" for groups, but rather people actually using the intended program. This audience often makes planners feel uncomfortable. Meetings time have to be changed. Vocabulary at the meeting often changes dramatically. I remember one incident where a member of a new low cost health insurance program called the audience "beneficiaries". A young women in the group spoke up and said she didn't want to be a beneficiary but a policy owner.

2. Take a picture of the audience and put it up before the planning group for every meeting.

3. Stop during the meeting and ask- what would "they in the picture" think about that?

4. Make up buttons with the audience's face on it and have everyone wear them.

5. As you design an activity ask yourself :

Is there anything the audience will think is fun about this behavior?

Have we done everything possible to make it easy for them?

How can we get people they trust involved? By the way, who do they trust, really?

6. If someone suggests focus groups, you counter-suggest that individual interviews might be interesting to consider too. Don't let folks rely too heavily on focus groups.

7. Hand out a piece of paper which has two categories listed at the top; STRUCTURAL BARRIERS and INTERNAL BARRIERS. Make sure the group you are working with has items listed in both columns. Discuss the structural factors first. Be sure you have defined the problem and, therefore, the behavior correctly. The solution may not be in the behavior of your primary audience. It may be that other folks are making it impossible, or very difficult

for your audience to do the right thing. See if there is anything you can do to make your program easier to do.

The most important thing you can do is to keep the audience and the real barriers they face in the mind of every group member and to keep asking yourself, how do we know we really understand that audience?

Marketing and Building Partnerships

Perhaps the single most powerful role you have is to convene people. The decision who to convene and what the agenda ought to be is critical to the success of almost all social marketing efforts. Partnerships are important even to the big boys and girls - those running major national campaigns spend lots of time, dollars and talent on building partnerships.

Don't underestimate the importance of this role.

Perhaps the most overlooked partner is the media. Oh yes, we think of the media as a channel, but not always as a partner. Your work building a partnership with the media can be critical. The media is inundated with social causes. They are being beaten up by everyone and they want allies who do not abuse their alliance. The media must maintain independence and appear to do so. Recognize this fact and figure how you can offer them a seat without co-opting them. There are numerous books and guides on how to work with the media. I won't review the details here.

Again, think like a marketer. The media, local corporations, the churches, business organizations, local politicians, etc, are **audiences** you need to understand and address those same basic questions:

What do they want and
How can I give it to them and
get what I want too?

This is the theory of exchange in action.

Do away with "needs assessment" and replace them with "wants assessment". People are more motivated by what they want than by what they need. Try asking people what they want instead of what they need and see if you don't get different answers.

Marketing and Giving Presentations

You are often called upon to speak before groups. If you are an epidemiologist you are there to present data folks can understand about the health problem. If you are a federal or state officer you are seen as the person who should understand the program's organization, why it is there, how funds can be accessed, the person to complain to, etc. But you can also be a marketer.

Before your presentation think about your "presentation" audience.....the folks coming to meeting.

Why are they coming?
What do they expect to get at this meeting?

Are there different groups.....what common ground might they have?

What do you want to get from them? A commitment to do something?...what? Be specific. Think about more than just giving them information. **What do you want them to do after this meeting that they are not doing now?** What is your Call to Action?

What can you do to help them do it?

What do they know about your “program’s” audience?

How can you make that “program” audience come to life for them?

Never make a presentation about data without pinning the data on a real life story - a real person your audience can come to understand. Remember, every meeting is a marketing opportunity. Marketing is **not** about selling **your** ideas. It is about finding an idea that meets your needs and the wants of your audience. You have to change *your* ideas often in order to be a good marketer.

Marketing and Approving Programs

You may be one of several people who are asked to review or approve a program. Again, think like a marketer. How can what you say make it more fun, easier, or more popular for these program people to build an effective program. Even as an authority, you have the responsibility to persuade as well as criticize and praise; to help as well cajole.

Begin with the praise. Never underestimate the human need for approval.

Focus your criticism on the big issues -

1. the audience and the behavior or action,
2. the benefits the program is proposing to offer and
3. the evidence they have that they are right.

Your primary job is to ensure that these programmers really know their proposed audience. Try to help them to be realistic - so many times community planners think they have to solve the world’s problems in order to get a grant. If you think something is weak.....suggest how they might strengthen it.

My guess is the weakest part of their plan will be the evidence they have about their assumptions. This is tough for community groups because first, they think they know their audience so well; and second, they have few resources for research. Often they do know their audience, sometimes they do not. But which ever, being clear about their assumptions is an area where you can help them. Try to find a logic thread through their plan. The thread should connect their final proposed actions (a campaign, counseling and testing, etc.) with their assumptions about the audience. There are many around.

The next most important thing is to help them be clear about the behavior. You might use the marketing definition of behavior I used above..... *“an action by a specific segment of the population, under defined circumstances.”* Help them define not only the action and the segment, but the circumstances. For example,

“gay men between the ages of 14 to 18SPECIFIC SEGMENT

who are living on the streetDEFINED CIRCUMSTANCES

*will use a condom every time they have sexACTION
(both oral and anal) with a casual partner.”*

Suggest some ways they might verify their assumptions. You know they do not have a lot of money for research, but they may be able to do a few intercept interviews, or monitor the program looking for things they are less sure of. Just helping them define what areas they are less sure of, could be helpful to them.

There is a lot of potential marketing to be done when reviewing a program proposal.....but remember the authors of that proposal are your audience. You have to understand them and offer them something in return for what you want of them.

Marketing and Speaking Your Mind.

Finally, you will undoubtedly find yourself able to influence decisions by speaking up...in the hall corridors, in casual encounters, at that one moment when someone is willing to listen; vulnerable to new ideas. These encounters are where minds are really changed. Your job as a marketer during these critical encounters would be to help your boss or a colleague:

Put the audience and the behavior in their mind.....

discover what their program might offer that your audience **wants**

You can bring the program to life by talking about the people it will affect.

Every interaction is a marketing opportunity...but that opportunity is lost if you fail to realize that the persons you are talking to are also:

an audience which you have to understand and **offer something** in order to get what you want from them.