

AN INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL MARKETING
POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS FOR FORESTRY

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Introduction

Human behavior underlies a number of problems, including a number of those related to the environment. From isolated issues such as littering and low rates of recycling to large scale problems involving energy consumption and resource depletion, it is human behavior that must be changed in order to bring about positive change. One of the tools utilized to influence behavior and encourage more responsible behavior is social marketing.

Broadly defined, social marketing is the practice of applying traditional, commercial marketing techniques with the goal of influencing the behavior of the target audience. Most commonly, the intent is to achieve a positive social impact. The poster illustrated in Figure 1 is an example of a social marketing campaign.

The term social marketing has some negative connotations. Social marketing is sometimes associated with the concept of “social engineering” or manipulation of choice and activities. Social marketing campaigns may be characterized as propaganda, and social marketing can be utilized to promote any number of behaviors, not just environmentally friendly ones. However, whether used for good or evil, social marketing has proven successful and the lessons from these successes may be worth considering.

This report provides an introduction to the concept and practices of social marketing and the tools of community-based social marketing. To date, there has been scant use of social marketing for the purpose of influencing forestry-related behaviors, although potential benefits from broader use of this approach are now recognized. Perhaps the greatest opportunity for successfully applying social marketing techniques to forestry may be related to engaging family forest owners in behaviors that

Figure 1.

I'll Quit Smoking

When my friends do

When it affects my health

When I don't have to study

Before I graduate

Except when I go to parties/bars

When I start a family

New Years

If not now, When?

Make today the day to stop smoking

Stop by SHAIC and get more information on their Quitting Tobacco Program

SHAIC, High Street Hall
M-F 9am-4pm
650-2961

<http://www.wvu.edu/chw/preventionandwellness/grantpages/socialmarketing.htm>

support improved forest management. Given that there are a variety of human behaviors impacting the success of sustainable forestry initiatives, social marketing may be an important tool for influencing these behaviors to achieve positive change.

Background on Social Marketing

Marketing is fundamentally about influencing behavior, even if the desired behavior is simply the purchase of a particular product. Indeed, efforts to induce consumers to buy energy efficient vehicles could be described as social marketing, or at least marketing with a social component. More direct examples of social marketing are the use of advertising or other marketing tools to get people to stop smoking, start exercising, or to participate in the political process.

Social marketing was formalized as a distinct marketing discipline in the early 1970s and widely applied to a variety of health related campaigns throughout the 1980s. Social marketing utilizes much of the same terminology and tactics of traditional marketing with some nuances in interpretation and application. There have also been several adaptations of social marketing including the *Seven Doors Approach* and *Community Based Social Marketing*.

Marketing Basics and the 4 P's

Social marketing emphasizes marketing concepts involving Audience, Action, Exchange and Competition. Also, drawing from the experience of traditional marketing, social marketing makes use of the 4 P's of Product, Price, Promotion and Place, as well as an additional P – Policy¹.

In the social marketing context the following interpretations are used:

Audience

The audience for social marketing is the group of people, or market segment, currently engaged in an undesirable behavior for which change is desired. Correctly identifying the target audience and designing the message and mechanism to effectively communicate with this audience are key elements of any marketing effort. .

Action

Social marketing aims to result in behavioral change – the stopping or starting of some action. It is important to clearly and carefully articulate what the program wants the segment to do and to design a program to move the target audience toward this action.

Exchange

In commercial marketing, the audience exchanges something, usually money and gets certain benefits, usually in the form of a product or service. In social marketing there is also an exchange. The target audience is being asked to either give-up an old or to start a

¹ *The Basics of Social Marketing: How to Use Marketing to Change Behavior*. Turning Point Social Marketing National Excellence Collaborative. <http://www.turningpointprogram.org>

new behavior. The key to the success of the social marketing program is in clearly defining in the eyes of the audience those benefits in order to motivate the desired behavioral change.

Competition

Just as in the soda wars and competition between Coke and Pepsi, there are also competing alternative behaviors that social marketers need to understand and address. For example, smoking and not smoking are competing behaviors and exercising versus doing anything else are competing alternatives that social marketing campaigns have to acknowledge and overcome.

Product

In social marketing the product is the desired behavior and all its associated benefits. The social marketer is marketing “non-smoking” as well as a longer-life, more energy, saving money, greater health, improved physical appearance, being a better role model to your children, and all kinds of other benefits. In social marketing campaigns it is important to gain an understanding of which benefits have the greatest perceived value and potential to influence behavior when the target audience believes the benefits are real and attainable through the change.

Price

The price includes all the costs and barriers to executing a change in behavior. These “costs” may be financial as well as emotional or psychological. For example, the price of quitting smoking may be the loss of a social circle of friends, not being able to hang out at a favorite bar or restaurant, or sacrificing a personal identity as a person that smokes.

Place

The term “place” is a marketing reference for defining how you physically reach your target audience, e.g. through what channels. For example, warnings about the health impacts of smoking are printed right on the cigarette package. Advertisements aimed at informing teens about the perils of drugs are generally timed to occur during television programs known to be commonly watched by teens, or placed at locations where teens are likely to “hang out.” A unique feature of societal marketing is that is almost exclusively aimed at segments of the general populace, unlike traditional marketing which is often aimed at channel members (e.g. distributors or retail stores).

Promotion

Promotion includes all the communications and programmatic activities used to reach the audience and influence behavior. Promotion includes passive communications such as posters or other literature as well as direct engagement through interviews, neighborhood or classroom visits, and door knocking. Promotion also includes both direct advertising and more indirect public relations activities.

Policy

Most behaviors happen within a policy context. For example, littering along the highways is illegal and engaging in this behavior can result in a significant fine. Policy can provide

strong disincentives to behaviors. However, even where strong regulation exists, social marketing can increase the motivation for compliance and reduce enforcement costs.

Advances in Social Marketing

One of social marketing's strengths is its deep exploration of how change occurs. Successful social marketers spend a great deal of time understanding the process of change and how to make it happen successfully. Illustrating the change process and how to engage it has been an area of evolution in social marketing and is reflected in some specific social marketing approaches. Two techniques covered in this report are the *Seven Doors* and *Community-Based Social Marketing*. These approaches offer insight into the general concept of social marketing and suggest specific steps to creating behavioral change.

7-Doors Social Marketing Approach

A central concept in the Seven Doors social marketing approach² is that a lack of knowledge or ignorance about an issue is generally not the limiting factor preventing the desired behavior. This approach recognizes seven steps in behavior change, as illustrated below.



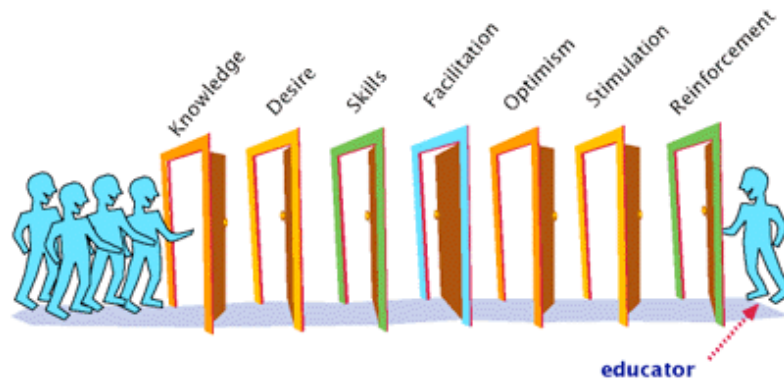
Source: Social Change Media

The process illustrated in Figure 2 acknowledges that in many instances people start from a place of existing awareness of a problem or need for change. The process also illustrates that getting an audience to the point of “I know I should” is only the beginning of the process of changing behavior. Clearly, for some behaviors the steps from “knowledge” to “reinforcement” can occur very rapidly and for others it may take a great deal of time. Also some steps may represent greater barriers than others for specific issues.

² <http://media.socialchange.net.au/strategy/>

To further illustrate how this process relates to social marketing and how marketing techniques can influence this process, the seven steps are illustrated as seven doors.

Figure 3.



Source: Social Change Media

With the depiction in Figure 3, the seven doors represent seven types of obstacles or barriers to enacting the desired behavior. This illustration also places the educator, expert, or social marketer in the position of having to assist with opening doors and helping others overcome their obstacles, rather than simply seeking to change behavior through dispensing of facts, figures, and information.

The seven obstacles represent the specific gaps or needs that must be addressed before a desired activity can occur. Some of these gaps can be overcome with information, but others require different types of assistance. Social marketing expects educators to facilitate change through a learning and experience-based process.

The Seven Doors approach is structured around addressing each of the seven obstacles in the social marketing program. Social marketing programs often begin with research of the current situation and gaining an understanding of the barriers to the desired behaviors.

Applying the 7-step research methodology to forest management behaviors

Surveys are often used to identify the existing barriers to behavior change. Surveys of the target audience can help inform the design of the program. Survey questions can be structured to identify which specific obstacles the target audience views as the most significant. Each question is intended to identify gaps related to the steps of behavior change as outlined in Figures 2 and 3. The following example illustrates questions that could be used to identify barriers to landowners installing bluebird-nesting boxes as part of their land management activities. For each statement the audience would be asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement.

- Knowledge Statement: The best way to take care of bluebirds is to have nesting boxes on my land.
- Skills Statement: I know how to get or build a bluebird nesting box.

- Desire Statement: Having a bluebird nesting box is part of being a responsible landowner.
- Services Statement: I know where to get information and advice about bluebird nesting boxes.
- Optimism Statement: I don't bother to have a bluebird nesting box on my property because it won't make any difference.
- Stimulation Statement: I don't have a bluebird nesting box on my property because I'm too busy or just not interested.

The results of the survey help the social marketer understand how the audience perceives the behavior and the barriers they are encountering. This understanding helps identify opportunities to develop a marketing campaign that targets specific barriers. For example, if many landowners strongly agree with the “optimism statement” and don't believe nesting boxes make a difference, the social marketing efforts can include data illustrating the significant benefits and impacts of providing bluebird nesting boxes.

The Seven Doors social marketing approach was developed by Les Robinson and more information about the system is available from Social Change Media³, a social marketing agency.

Community Based Social Marketing

Another example of an approach to social marketing is Community Based Social Marketing. The concept of Community Based Social Marketing (CBSM) is an evolution in social marketing developed by Doug McKenzie-Mohr and articulated in the book *Fostering Sustainable Behavior: An Introduction to Community-Based Social Marketing*⁴. Mr. McKenzie-Mohr addressed the connections between Community Based Social Marketing and forestry at a conference sponsored by the Blandin Foundation in May 2006 at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota. The proceedings from this conference are available from the Blandin Foundation⁵.

The basis for CBSM is social science research that has demonstrated that the behavior change goals of social marketing are most likely to result from community level initiatives. The dual aims of CBSM are to remove barriers to desired activities while also increasing the benefits of the activity. There are four steps to CBSM: 1) Identifying barriers and benefits for a specific activity, 2) Developing a strategy to effect behavior change, 3) Piloting the strategy, and 4) Evaluating the strategy.

³ <http://media.socialchange.net.au/>

⁴ McKenzie-Mohr, Doug and William Smith. 1999. *Fostering Sustainable Behavior: An Introduction to Community-Based Social Marketing*. New Society Publishers. Also See: <http://www.cbsm.com>

⁵ Please see <http://www.blandinfoundation.org>.

The conference webpage is: http://blandinfoundation.org/html/public_vfvc%20ffconf_061.cfm.

The direct link to the proceedings is:

http://blandinfoundation.org/html/documents/VFVC_Family_Forest_06/FF_conference%20proceedings_FI_NAL.pdf

Similar to the Seven Doors approach, the barriers and benefits for a specific activity can be identified through survey questions, focus groups and other research methods that help explore the perceptions and needs of the target audience. The CBSM method recommends that barriers and benefits be identified through three methods of research: a literature review, focus groups, and a survey.

One of the first challenges of social marketing and the CBSM approach is to identify the specific behaviors you wish to promote. It is important that these behaviors be succinct enough to focus the research and the eventual strategies that will be used.

Strategies developed through the CBSM process include the use of the following tools: Commitment, Social Diffusion, Prompts, Norms, Communication, Incentives, and Convenience. Again, these are tools that social science research has identified as effective methodologies for creating behavior change. These tools each have their particular strengths and weakness. Which tool is most appropriate depends upon the barrier that the program is trying to overcome. The tools can also be used in combination.

Commitment

Commitment is a request to do something or an agreement to do something in the future. The commitment can be verbal or written, public or private, or made in a group or individually. Using commitment as a tool can be very successful and an example of its use is campaigns to get teenagers to pledge not to become smokers or not to drive drunk. The effectiveness of a commitment strategy is increased when it is publicized, made in a group, actively involves the person, occurs through normal contacts, and isn't the result of coercion.

Social Diffusion

Closely related to commitment is the tool of social diffusion. If a person has committed to a certain activity, the next step is to have him or her inform friends or neighbors of the commitment and request that they make the same pledge.

Prompts

Prompts are an effective tool for overcoming forgetfulness and for behaviors that need to be repeated. Prompts can also help keep key information in a handy location. For prompts to be effective they need to be noticeable, self-explanatory, and kept in close proximity to where the behavior occurs or is thought about. Examples include refrigerator magnets, posters, stickers, and door hangers. In general, prompts are used to encourage positive behaviors such as turning off the lights when leaving a room; however the ubiquitous Mr.Yuck stickers are an example of a prompt that brought attention to something negative and potentially harmful.



Norms

Norms are the community guides used to influence behaviors. In simple terms, it means keeping up with your peers, watching what your neighbors are doing and utilizing the concept of role models in the social marketing program. For norms to be effective they need to be visible and involve personal contact as reinforcement.

Communication

Communication that is likely to effect behavior change needs to include captivating and persuasive information, reflect an understanding of the target audience, rely upon a credible source, frame the message, provide personal or community goals, emphasize personal contact, and provide feedback. Caution should be used with threatening or fear-based communications. Although negative messages can seem compelling, it may be difficult to translate the audience's reaction into positive behaviors. It may be more effective to stick with information related to the actions that can be taken and the benefits that will result. It is also necessary to decide if the communication will cover different opinions on the issue at hand or just one position. Communications that present multiple viewpoints are increasingly important as the knowledge and awareness level of the audience increases.

Incentives

Incentives can be most effective when motivations are low or the behaviors that are occurring are not being executed very effectively. Incentives should reward positive behavior, be closely linked to the desired behavior, and be visible. There are several cautions with incentives. One risk is that at some point in the future the incentive may end and behavior will relapse. Also, incentives may be viewed as discriminatory and people may try to cheat the system or undermine the program. The size of the incentive should be informed by previous experiences or research. The use of non-monetary incentives should also be considered.

Convenience

Some behaviors are difficult to engage in because of real or perceived issues of convenience. For example, recycling programs have achieved increased participation rates by reducing the requirements for sorting (although some evidence shows this may negatively impact recovery rates). There are also community programs that involve door-to-door visits to install water saving showerheads or programmable thermostats for homeowners to help make these practices more convenient and increase participation and the resulting benefits.

Community Based Social Marketing is a process of identifying the desired behaviors, researching the barriers and benefits to each behavior, and designing a strategy for addressing each barrier that utilizes one or more tools. The CBSM approach also emphasizes the use of pilots as a way to gauge the effectiveness of a strategy before launching an entire program. The results of the pilot can inform modifications to the overall program and also provide an indication of the level of behavioral change that may be expected from the program.

Community Based Social Marketing has been used successfully to influence a wide range of behaviors related to pollution prevention, energy efficiency, transportation and other environmental and social issues. Several studies have evaluated CBSM programs in comparison with traditional education and outreach programs and in terms of the longevity of the behavior changes over time. These evaluations have found significant gains from the CBSM programs. In a water efficiency project in Canada, a community using traditional education-based techniques achieved a 1% reduction in water usage whereas two communities using CBSM techniques achieved 32% and 45% reductions respectively. An EcoTeam Program in the Netherlands found continued changes in behaviors two years after the initial social marketing project.⁶

Potential Applications for Forestry

In 2003, a collaborative group called the *Sustaining Family Forests Initiative* was started with a number of partners from government, industry, non-government organizations, certification systems, landowners, and academic institutions. One of the first research efforts of this group has been a social marketing project to identify the target audiences and key characteristics of family forest owners in the United States.

The research identified four segments of the family forest owner population in the United States. These segments are characterized as “Woodland Retreat”, “Supplemental Income”, “Ready to Sell” and “Working the Land” types of landowners. The research also identified potential effective messages for each segment. About 40% of forest owners fall within the Woodland Retreat segment. These landowners are also frequently identified within the category of landowners who may not currently be practicing land stewardship but indicate they would like to. The research demonstrated the data for these landowners also includes predictive variables that correlate with more active land stewards.

The landowner populations and potential messages identified from this research can help inform existing outreach and technical assistance programs and may help form the foundation for new social marketing campaigns.

The summary report *Getting the Attention of Family Forest Owners: Lessons from Social Marketing Research* was released in July 2006 and developed by Roper Public Affairs & Media, the Yale Program on Private Forests, and The USDA Forest Service as part of the Sustaining Family Forests Initiative. The complete report has not yet been released⁷.

Needs and Opportunities

To date, social marketing concepts have been applied with significant success to fairly discrete issues such as health related behaviors, recycling, composting, and littering. The

⁶ These and other project reports are available at <http://www.cbsm.com>

⁷ For more information, contact: Mary Tyrrell, Executive Director, Global Institute of Sustainable Forestry, Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, 205 Prospect Street, New Haven, Connecticut 06511, Phone: 203-432-5983, Email: mary.tyrrell@yale.edu

next frontier for social marketing will be demonstrating its impact on complex issues such as responsible consumption, sustainable food production, and forest management. One of the challenges of social marketing is that regardless of the complexity of the overall challenge, the specific individual behaviors that need to be changed need to be articulated. For complex issues there may be hundreds of behaviors that need to change and each behavior will likely require its own strategies and campaigns. It is unclear how social marketing can be applied to this level of complexity.

Fear-Based Campaigns

Marketing campaigns often use shock or fear tactics to get their message across. Advertisements for commercial products may leave the impression that the customers' quality of life will be greatly enhanced, or alternatively significantly diminished, if they do or don't purchase the item. Social marketing campaigns can also use fear-based strategies. Anti-smoking ads may graphically portray potential health impacts; drunk-driving opponents may use images of violent car crashes and heart-wrenching emotional portrayals of loss; and anti-abortion campaigns may relate statistics about fetal development and the potential personal trauma of having an abortion. Environmentally-related ads sometimes seek to trigger fear through images of contaminated water supplies or pesticide-laden foods. Fear has also been used in forestry campaigns seeking to motivate landowners to take action by highlighting the threat of forest fires, insect or disease.

While these types of ads may be offensive to some and seem to go beyond what is reasonable or necessary to deliver a message, the key to any successful marketing campaign is to know the audience. By knowing the audience and understanding what that target audience actually sees as key barriers to changing their behavior, campaign developers can ensure greater success. What may seem offensive or over the top to some may be exactly what is needed to reach the key audience whose behaviors are being targeted.

Making Fear-Based Campaigns Work

- Make sure the portrayed consequence of not taking action is severe, but not exaggerated.
- Make the audience feel that the problem is relevant to them.
- Provide a specific action that the audience can take to prevent the portrayed consequence from happening.
- Ensure that the audience believes that the proposed solution is effective in preventing the consequence.
- Portray the solution as something that the audience can easily do.

<http://www.social-marketing.com/blog/2006/06/making-fear-based-campaigns-work.html>

A Word of Caution

It is tempting to simplify social marketing as just catchy slogans and glossy ads that trick people into changing their behavior. In fact, there are some audiences and behaviors that can be influenced in this manner. However, these are generally one-time behaviors, behaviors with a small number and insignificant barriers, or behaviors that are not deeply rooted or culturally reinforced. Social marketing's real potential as a tool that is unique from other marketing efforts is in addressing behavioral changes that will need to be repeated, that face significant complex barriers, or that are undermined by social norms or other pressures. It is one thing to convince someone who has never smoked not to start; it is another to change the behavior of someone who has engaged in that activity for many years.

It is also important to understand that social marketing is not just another form of education. In fact, social marketing is in many ways a reaction to the overuse of education as the only response to complex, behavior based problems. Social marketing aims to go beyond education and information campaigns to include community development, recruitment of partners and participants, skills training, and planning that addresses gaps and needs in infrastructure and resources. One of the important lessons informing the work of social marketers is that what people know and believe does not correlate to their behavior. For example, most people know and accept the evidence that smoking is harmful to a person's health; however, many people continue to smoke. Many people are well aware of what they are supposed to be doing, but there are real and significant barriers preventing them from connecting their knowledge and beliefs to actions and behaviors.

An additional caution that arises from this discussion is the appropriateness of social marketing. As mentioned, in some contexts social marketing can be viewed as propaganda that supports a specific cultural view and set of values. Some values may be fairly universal, but others may be deeply offensive to some segments of the population. As government agencies and publicly funded educational institutions use social marketing, who has the right to decide which behaviors will be encouraged or discouraged? Social marketing has a responsibility to ensure that the behaviors being promoted result in social benefit and do not result in discrimination against those that may choose to continue to engage in the undesired behavior. Backlash from social marketing campaigns is potentially harmful and can undermine the success of the marketing effort.

The Bottom Line

The techniques of social marketing and community based social marketing offer new approaches and may be an important part of an expanded toolset for educators and others interested in promoting environmentally responsible behaviors. Social marketing may have particular applicability to efforts to engage family forest owners in behaviors that support forest stewardship.

This report was prepared by
DOVETAIL PARTNERS, INC.

Dovetail Partners is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation that collaborates to develop unique concepts, systems, programs, and models to foster sustainable forestry and catalyze responsible trade and consumption.

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