



the little book on social marketing

This book is a quick and easy guide to social marketing. It is far from comprehensive. This is not the only book you should ever read about social marketing; it may simply be the first. The goal of this little book is to give you a foundation in the field, so you can begin applying this way of thinking in your own work. If nothing else, it's a good starting point for asking the field's most basic question: How do I get people to change their behavior?

This book was produced by SalterMitchell, Inc., a national social marketing firm that builds behavior-change campaigns and provides training in social marketing. To find out more about SalterMitchell, go to www.SalterMitchell.com.

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what is social marketing? Social marketing is a way of thinking. It is an approach that treats your social program as a choice, not an imperative, and provides ways for making it more appealing than the alternative. It is not advertising or even communication – those are two of the tools of social marketing. Social marketing is a systematic way to apply those tools.

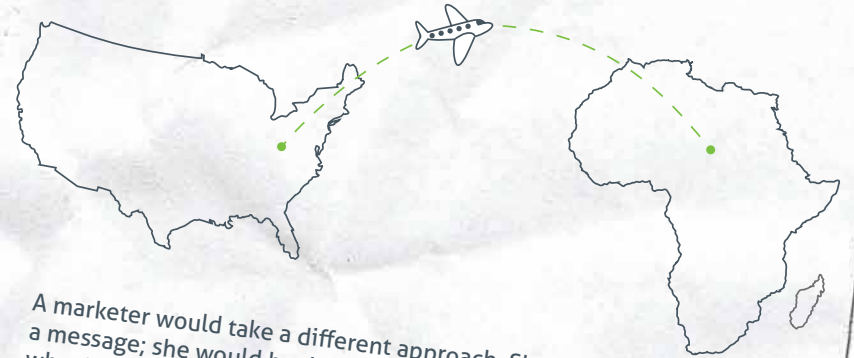
So here's our shot at a definition: Social marketing is a methodology for deciding what factors might encourage a specific behavior and then employing common marketing tools, such as promotions and program changes, to influence those factors and encourage positive social change.

the bottom line is Definitions are nice, but a better way to understand social marketing is through examples. Luckily, you are surrounded by examples of social marketing. All kinds of people are trying to change your behavior – your parents, your spouse, maybe even your children. Who hasn't been exposed to that enormous, if informal, campaign called "Eat Your Vegetables"? You remember that one – the creative director was your mother. She really didn't care what you thought about the vegetables; she just wanted you to eat them. She was looking, like any good social marketer, for behavior change (and a clear social benefit, healthier children). How did she do this? Well, if she was like our mothers she told you two things:

Vegetables are good for your health,
and/or
People are starving in Africa

That didn't work too well with us. We eagerly volunteered our broccoli so it might be shared with those in Chad and, as far as health went, it was not exactly our top concern. Not at age five. It'd be another 40 years before we were popping Lipitor. We were unmoved.

Basically, our mother's message was all about her own reasons for eating vegetables, not ours. She was trying to educate us into changing our behavior.

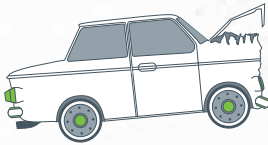


A marketer would take a different approach. She wouldn't start with a message; she would begin with a question, perhaps asking, "So why don't you like these vegetables?" Maybe it's the color: A child who hates green could be offered carrots. Or maybe it is the taste and the vegetables could be prepared differently. Just beginning the conversation with a question would have opened up dozens of possibilities.

Our mom got this intuitively, of course. But she went for a different marketing technique. After years of observing her target actors, she knew what we wanted, so she linked the target behavior (eating vegetables) to a popular reward (dessert). This, more than any message about healthy eating, is what changed our behavior.

your mom's approach on a bigger stage Our mom's simple equation – eat your vegetables and you get dessert – is the underlying logic for dozens of social marketing campaigns. The challenge is figuring out the second part of that equation: What's dessert?

Consider seat belt use. Seat belts prevent people from dying in crashes – that’s clear. But in the early 1990s, only two out of three people were wearing seat belts. Which raises the question: How could one out of three people be so . . . wrong? After all, traffic safety advocates had been hammering home for years that seat belts save lives. They showed gruesome videos. They shared stark statistics. They had even gotten the message across: More than 90% of Americans in a 1994 survey said they would want to wear a seat belt in a crash. The problem: Many just didn’t do it.



So what was going on? What could be a better offer than saving someone’s life? One possibility is that people were making another calculation, perhaps subconsciously. They figured serious crashes are rare. After

all, less than 1% of police reported crashes are fatal. And, in a typical year, there is one fatal crash a year for every 5,200 licensed drivers. It wasn’t that they didn’t believe seat belts made crashes safer; it was that they never planned on getting in a crash. Their knowledge was fine. It was their behavior that was the problem.

This is a classic social marketing dilemma. We tell people why we think they should change and, while they may agree with our point, they don’t change their behavior. It’s why teenagers still take up smoking, why so many Americans still overeat, and why people who oppose drilling in wildlife refuges still buy gas-guzzling SUVs.

The trick to changing behavior is to realize that underlying all these decisions is an exchange: If you do this, you get this. If people are not doing what we consider the right thing, you have to be honest with yourself: Maybe, just maybe, we are not offering people what they really want.

Back in the early 1990s, North Carolina figured this out about seat belts. After years of preaching safety, they tried something new: Instead of talking about the devastating results of an unlikely event, they focused on the negative (if less awful) result of a more likely event – getting a ticket. A ticket is something many of us have experienced (more than 25 million traffic citations are issued every year – one for every 10 drivers). North Carolina’s “Click It or Ticket” campaign launched highly publicized enforcement efforts to boost the perceived risk of getting a traffic ticket for not wearing a seat belt. The result: a 10% surge in belt use. Other states adopted a similar strategy, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reviewed the results and determined the “Click It or Ticket” strategy was boosting belt use by 16%. Behavior was changing.

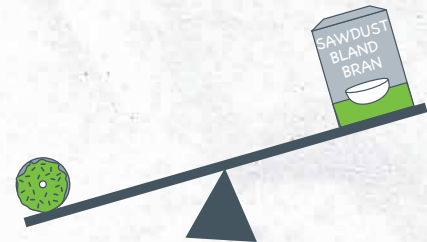


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That’s what this social marketing thing is all about. It’s not about advertising or newspaper clips, creating awareness or changing attitudes. It’s about changing what people actually do.

While the equation is simple, finding each variable can be challenging: What do people need to do? And what can we give them in exchange for doing it?

naming the vegetable That first part may seem easy. Often, it’s not. Boiling down a social problem, which can trigger debates over root causes or what factors matter most. For example, what causes obesity? Is it a lack of exercise, portion sizes, poor food choices, something else, or all of the above? What actions should one target first?



When we began working with environmental organizations to protect North America's Chesapeake Bay, we got a page-long list of actions people should take. We worked with them to prioritize. Often, groups cannot even name a behavior – they want people to be more "aware" or "concerned". These are not social marketing objectives. To affect outcomes, actions need to change. A true social marketing objective needs to have:

- A target group of actors. This is a specific segment of people who need to act differently. If you are putting "general public" on this line, think again. Does EVERYONE need to change? Even if that's the case, can we change everyone at the same time?
- An observable action you want that target to take. This is not what goes on inside someone's head (for example, supporting protection of the environment). It's something we can see and measure objectively (for example, cleaning our a septic tank every five years).
- The context in which you expect that action to take place. This is where you add some details about when and how people need to do this action for it to matter. For example, public health advocates encourage people to use a condom every time they have sexual intercourse, not just that they use a condom when it's convenient (like it ever is).

finding the right dessert So that's deciding what we want. Then there's the other end of the exchange – what should we offer people?

The big complication here is this: People are different. Some kids actually like broccoli (not ours, unfortunately). Some hate chocolate. Some kids yearn to survive entirely on processed cheese. It's hard to say what everybody wants, because everybody includes a lot of people. Even you.

6

Which brings us to a very, very, very important point: You are weird. Weird. Odd. An outlier. You have been chosen to work on a specific issue – let's pretend it's recycling – because you feel so strongly about it you want other people to change. You are not trying to decide whether recycling is worth it. You are a recycling evangelist, studying the numbers on plastic containers and scouring the earth for converts. So when it comes to recycling, something about you is askew, different, a little off. Otherwise, you wouldn't need a social marketing effort at all. Everyone would already be recycling. Just like you.



Recycler

General Public

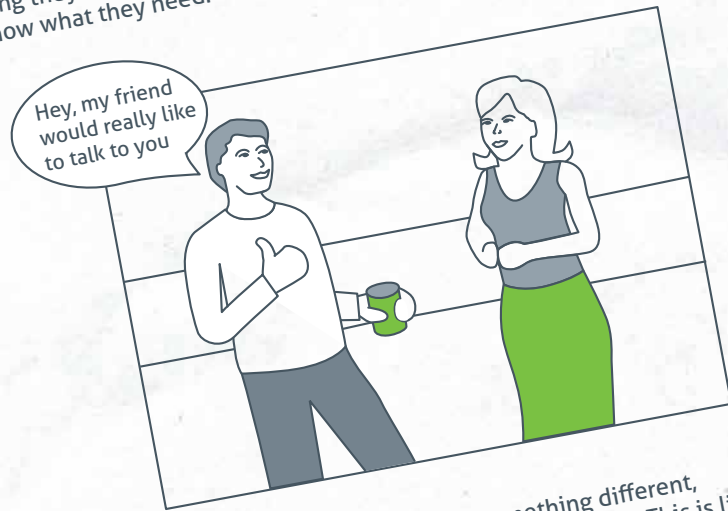
So get comfortable with it. Say it aloud: I'm a freak. I am way, way too into this subject. I read more about my subject than I do about other critical issues in America, such as what Paris Hilton is wearing these days and who the finalists are on American Idol.

Also remember that people are not just different from you. They are different from each other. What's more, they're probably not "shopping" for a solution to your problem. They are probably focusing on other things, like making ends meet or simply pursuing happiness. You may think you are offering them what they need. But let's face it: They seem to be surviving without it.



Commercial marketers face this problem all the time. After all, who really needs a Rolex, when you can pick up a Timex for a fraction of the cost? We wear something called an Armitron (\$9 at Burlington Coat Factory) and it seems to keep time fine. The reason people buy a Rolex is not just to tell time (though that's supposed to be the main purpose of a watch); it's to look nice and say something about the wearer ("I'm one rich dude"). Those are benefits some people seek. They don't need to get these benefits from a watch, but the Rolex folks have used their watch to fulfill those needs, making a tidy profit in the exchange.

Social marketing is not about profits, but it is about offering people something they want. Too often, social causes try to convince people they don't know what they need.



Campaigns tell people they should want something different, something healthier or something better for the planet. This is like having our mother tell us broccoli really tastes good. Yeah, maybe to her it does. We know what we like – and broccoli ain't it.

8

A strong social marketing appeal is anchored not in what you want, but in what the target actors seek. It works like a strong brand. Good brands don't convince people to change their style; they speak to what people already seek and give them a way to get it. Good brands come to you.



They don't persuade you to change into what they represent. When social causes start off by saying, "Hey, you've got it wrong," it's probably no surprise they are not changing a lot of minds. What they seem to want are converts. But what they should be seeking are customers – people willing to try a behavior, not adopt a whole set of foreign beliefs.

what do people want from me? So here's the bottom line about your offer – if you want people to change their behavior, you have to offer them something they already want. Yes, you read it right: The desire is already there. What you provide is the connection.

Figuring out what people want and how your program or behavior can fulfill that need is the crux of every marketing assignment.

9

To succeed, you need to break down the challenge into pieces. At SalterMitchell, we look at 12 common factors that frequently determine behavior. Basically, these behavioral determinants fall into three categories:

- Those related to the perceived consequence of a behavior;
- Those related to the target actor's self-efficacy around the behavior;
- Those related to the social norms around the target actors.

William Smith, a columnist for Social Marketing Quarterly and colleague of ours at the Academy for Educational Development, has summarized these categories quite memorably. In general, he says, we should all try to make our programs fun, easy and popular. If you remember nothing else from this little book, remember that.

(Okay, for the social scientists out there, let us translate this into jargon: By fun, we mean the perceived consequence of your program should seem pretty fantastic, maybe even irresistible. By easy, we mean giving the target actor a sense of self-efficacy. By popular, we mean fitting the target behavior within the population's social norm.)

The basic concept here is that there are a bunch of common things people want out of . . . well, just about anything. It doesn't matter what the behavior or program is; if it's more fun, easier to do, or more popular, we're more likely to do it.

Like eating apple pie after we finish our vegetables. Something about pie suddenly makes steamed broccoli more appealing. So take a moment as those cinnamon apples melt in your mouth. Savor the sweet taste of a marketing success.

