



RESULTS OF A PILOT EFFORT TO DEVELOP A SOCIAL MARKETING CAMPAIGN FOR URBAN AT RISK YOUTH

BACKGROUND



duBay Horton Associates LLC (dHA) is a community-based public health research firm dedicated to providing high quality public health and community organizing services to communities in need. The firm, which is owned and operated by an African American woman, seeks to bridge the gap between public health theory and practice.

“Social marketing” has been a popular idea in public health for more than fifteen years. The adoption of strategies that have been used by advertisers selling everything from sneakers to cigarettes to

“sell” public health messages encourages the use of targeted and carefully designed messages to at risk populations. The core components of social marketing are: (1) segmentation of the audience into defined groups, (2) inclusion of that audience in the design of the appropriate message, and (3) delivery of that message through multiple channels aimed at repeatedly saturating the at risk group with the common and recognizable message. Finally, social marketing includes ongoing study of the effectiveness of the campaign to formatively evaluate its efficacy and to continuously hone the message to be appropriate and effective. This pilot effort sought to understand the preferred messages, messengers, and modes of delivery for HIV prevention messages targeted to youth in Bridgeport and New Haven, CT, through two rounds of focus groups and brief surveys.

Methods:

The project began with a literature search for published studies of evaluation of social marketing for young people on HIV prevention messages. While other social marketing efforts targeting adolescents with HIV prevention messages were discovered, no published evaluation studies of these campaigns were found. This may be due to the added complexity of evaluating minors, with the burden of parental consent.

Therefore, the search was expanded to include the evaluation studies of social marketing that target adolescents, regardless of the topic. This search led to the Florida “truth” campaign, a grass roots, teen-driven anti-smoking marketing effort targeted at adolescents, which used telephone surveys to evaluate teens’ awareness of the campaign, as well as the influence of the campaign on their decision to smoke. The evaluation results were also used to identify market segments where influence was lagging; adjustments were made to increase the campaign’s influences.

To assist this pilot, members of our target population were engaged. Four youth participated on a steering committee to both test the focus group protocol and to aid in the analysis of Round 1 Focus Groups and the development of test messages for Round 2. One youth participated in a coordinator role and aided in note-taking, analysis, and data entry. 117 youth participated in the Focus Groups. During Round 1, seven focus groups were conducted and 39 youth completed pre-post questionnaires and participated in a discussion of their knowledge and perceptions about HIV and HIV educational campaigns. Based on the results of these groups a sample campaign was developed which was

then tested in Round 2. 78 youth participated in Round 2 – during which youth provided direct feedback to the campaigns developed in Round 1. The youth participating in the two rounds were comparable: 53% were sexually active; the average age of first sex was 13.8; 31% report having sex when they were drunk; 78% report condom use at last intercourse; and 21% reported having ever been pregnant or having ever gotten a partner pregnant.

Findings:

Messengers: Young people in the study were knowledgeable about HIV. Out of 9 questions in a knowledge scale, 69.9% of youth answered 7 or 8 questions correctly.

Despite the youth of the sample, many cited Magic Johnson’s retirement as the first time they heard of HIV. As participants would have had an average age of 3.8, it is likely that the youth remember stories of this event and not the announcement itself. Participants also cited movies and TV as the first place they learned about HIV, and they identified music as having an important role in getting the message across. Young people wanted to hear from either famous people or youth living with the virus. The issue of whether celebrities make good messengers was a complex one, as the youth liked the idea but struggled to find examples of celebrities who they both respected and found credible. Parents were frequently reported as sources of HIV information, but youth were split as to whether or not they were a good messenger for HIV prevention messages. Youth universally felt that siblings and friends were better sources of information.

Modes: RAP It Up, a campaign on the BET cable channel, was the most commonly mentioned source of HIV information. The “truth” anti-smoking TV ads were generally seen as the most effective campaigns. Participants responded well to the humor, sarcasm, and “in your face” shock value of those advertisements. Youth suggested placing messages in locales where young people already were: movie previews, concert venues, clubs, or other places where youth were waiting for some event to occur. The inside of elevator doors and doctor’s offices were also cited as good places to catch a captive audience.

Messages: The youth recommended messages that emphasized the importance of getting tested, of knowing one’s status and the status of one’s partner, statistics about the prevalence and incidence of the disease, as well as personal stories of teens living with the virus.

Based on this input, a two pronged sample campaign was developed to test in Round 2. The tag lines: “Think, React, Get Tested,” “Take a test you want to fail,” “Think, React, Be Free,” and “Reach for a condom before it’s too late,” were developed into print ads. *

Limits:

Overall, the posters created for this study did not test as well as those that were “borrowed and adapted” from previous campaigns, highlighting the necessity of graphic designs that “grab” the youth’s attention with vibrant and memorable images.

Participants in this sample were gathered by convenience – through contacts at agencies serving at risk youth, and through personal contacts and connections to programs. As a result, the group may have been more homogenous than desired and may not be representative of all urban youth of color. Moreover, this

study utilized young people in Bridgeport and New Haven, CT – and cannot be generalized to all youth or even all youth in CT.

Due to resource constraints only print ads were produced and tested in Round 2, despite the popularity of a variety of locales and messages for use on television or radio. However, our results do give some general direction as to how any campaign (regardless of media) can best reach young people.

Take home messages for social marketing on a shoe string budget:

- *A campaign should be well-researched and developed with the input of the target group.*
- *Repetition and recognizability of the campaign’s core message enhances the effectiveness of the effort.*
- *Youth respond to graphic pictures and images with clear messages.*
- *Youth respond to campaigns that are not preachy, but give concrete, realistic recommendations in clever and creative ways.*
- *Youth recommend guerilla marketing tactics. “It has to be random when no one will expect it” such as in sneaker boxes or posted on menus at fast food restaurants. They also recommend the use of other locales where youth are bored and waiting (e.g. doctors offices, elevators, bus stops).*
- *Youth want to hear stories of other young people living with the disease. Though our sample didn’t test well, that may have been because the story itself was unclear. Youth also recommended a reality television show about young people living with HIV.*

LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

dHA has undertaken a number of public health projects on a variety of topics including: breastfeeding, childhood lead poisoning, perinatal depression, and environmental health. In all of this work dHA has engaged community members in CT about the best ways to reach them with public health information. Based on all of this work dHA staff have developed the 3 “Cs” of social marketing on a shoestring budget.

Consistency Something catchy that repeats itself as often as possible - a logo, format, tag lines or other element should run through the entire campaign. Strength comes in repetition and recognizability.

Creativity Design a campaign that is true to your target audience - young people respond to color and action-oriented items and “in your face” humor or sarcasm, women to stories of women they can relate to, men to direct outcomes.

Captivity Catch your audience in unexpected places and ways, where they are stuck anyhow - bus stops, inside buses, in doctor’s offices or inside elevators where there is nothing else to do but look at the ad. Don’t try competing with Coke or Nike on TV – unless your marketing budget rivals theirs!



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* Please note that despite the popularity of television ads the resources available in this effort did not allow for the development of ads beyond print for testing.