



# Social Marketing

## Does Your Project Require That People Do Something Completely Different?

Some development projects don't ask people to change their behaviors. For example, emergency food relief and new water plants fill obvious needs.

But development projects increasingly ask people or organizations to change their practices for the good of the community. For example, farmers are asked to adopt new soil conservation techniques, industrial managers are asked to change their production systems, city residents are asked to recycle trash, community members are asked to protect their watershed.

A new set of techniques based on social science research and commercial marketing methods can effectively motivate people to make these changes in a sustainable manner that outlives the project itself. One of the most powerful techniques is called social marketing.

### What Is Social Marketing?

Social marketing is a process for influencing human behavior on a large scale, using marketing principles for the purpose of societal benefit rather than commercial profit. Marketing, by definition, involves an exchange. Commercial marketing usually urges an exchange of money for goods or services. Social marketers usually ask an audience to change its practices in return for something of value. The central challenge of any social marketing program is to establish which exchange is likely to satisfy both the marketers' needs and the target audience's wants in addition to producing an overall societal benefit.

### How Does It Differ from Other Education and Communication Methods?

Social marketing differs from an education approach, which posits that knowledge leads to behavior change, and also from a regulatory approach, which relies on enforcement and penalties to change behavior. Considerable research has shown little causal linkage between knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. The regulatory approach can change behavior, but at a significant cost in enforcement. Social marketers offer people a voluntary exchange.

Social marketing's roots date to the mid-1970s with early work in family planning and health programs. Since then the discipline of social marketing has built up a coherent philosophy and record of success and has expanded into other fields such as agriculture and environment.

### How Do You Know If It Is Social Marketing?

Social marketing may be identified by six elements:

1. Changing behavior is the bottom line. Increasing knowledge or attitudes is not sufficient.
2. All strategies begin with the target audience, which might consist of anyone from "women who manage household waste" to a select group of policymakers.
3. Market research is essential to designing, pre-testing, and evaluating each project. Social marketers strive to understand the audience's needs, wants, values, and perceptions in order to craft the best "offer" or "product" that will motivate the audience to take certain actions.
4. Through preliminary research, audiences are carefully segmented into groups with similar needs. Each group may receive a different "offer" based on its particular needs.
5. Social marketers develop strategies based on "Four P's": product, price, place, and promotion. By researching their audience they learn which product (benefits) and at which price (often time or effort rather than money) the audience will accept in exchange for new behaviors. Place refers to how the product is delivered. Promotion refers to the marketing campaign that promotes the advantages of the exchange to the audience.
6. The strategy addresses the "competition": the audience's current behavior as well as possible alternative behaviors. This competition must be understood and addressed by "positioning" (the 5th "P") the desired behavior as preferable to competing behaviors.

## How Does It Work?

Social marketers generally follow a simple five-step process:

1. Assess the audience through preliminary research.



2. Design and plan a social marketing strategy.

3. Pretest the messages, the strategy, and the products with the audience segments and incorporate their feedback.

4. Implement the first stage.

5. Constantly monitor and evaluate the effects of the strategy on behavior.

Finally, go back to step three and make revisions in the strategy or materials based on the audience's changing needs and then begin the process anew.

## Where Has It Worked?

USAID has been a pioneer in developing behavior change methodology in the health, agriculture, and environment fields. In the early 1980s, a project called the Mass Media for Health Project (MMHP) incorporated social marketing strategies into its mix. Its results were so striking that other projects were created to apply and further develop the methods. They included Communication for Technology Transfer in Agriculture (CTTA), HealthCOM, AIDSCOM, and GreenCOM.

The GreenCOM project has applied social marketing and other social change methods to environmental projects in more than 30 countries.

In El Salvador, GreenCOM used social marketing techniques to triple the number of conservation projects undertaken by social organizations, to help pass 12 local ordinances, and to increase household conservation practices.

In Egypt, following a GreenCOM mass media television campaign to motivate viewers to conserve water, household conservation practices increased to 98% from a previous 65%.



Based on findings from a campaign pre-test in El Salvador, GreenCOM developed a character called Cantarito to communicate messages to promote clean water practices. Cantarito resembled the water jugs called *cantaros* that rural Salvadoran women, such as the one pictured here, use to collect water.

## Why Use It?

Although social marketing requires a significant level of planning and engagement to be successful, it offers a valuable return: real changes in how people interact with their environment.

## Sources

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