

## Achieving Behavior Change Through Effective Social Marketing

Moving the needle of public opinion long has relied on mass media tactics. But seldom has this “monologue” been effective for efforts aimed at changing behavior. For today’s socially conscious endeavors—from public health to recycling—achieving desired behavior change requires a different perspective on communications outreach.

Our information rich society makes it difficult to penetrate the clutter with most messages, much less those that need to do more than raise awareness. This difficulty often results in outreach efforts that are “loud” and attention grabbing. But being loud is different from being heard, just as being seen is different from being understood. Understanding this difference is key to effective social marketing.

Social marketing addresses public interest, and often public policy issues, by applying marketing principles to achieve changes in behavior. The key difference between social and conventional marketing is that the former is designed to achieve results that affect society at large rather than benefit an individual marketer. It is sometimes referred to as social education. This form of communications outreach is based on the four fundamental principles of marketing:

- **Customer.** Focuses on customer’s needs and wants.
- **Cost.** Focuses on the cost to satisfy the wants and needs of the customer.
- **Convenience.** Focuses on making the item or service available at the customer’s convenience and satisfying the customer’s needs.



*Social marketing influences individual behavior to derive a larger societal outcome, such as a cleaner environment.*

- **Communication.** Focuses on engaging consumers in a dialogue as opposed to a monologue.

The fourth principle is central to effective marketing and is the hallmark of an integrated marketing communications approach. Mass media is effective at raising awareness of social problems but is not in and of itself an effective method for educating individuals and organizations about alternative behaviors and motivating

change. Motivating changes in behavior can be difficult when the resulting benefit is often not delivered directly to the individual you desire to influence. A dialogue must occur that educates individuals about the benefits of change and provides the tools they need to make informed decisions. By engaging in a dialogue with customers, social marketers can incorporate feedback and learning into key messages to improve the effectiveness of subsequent marketing materials. After all, social change does not occur overnight—it results from persistent, deliberate, long-term outreach toward a focused end point.

Social marketing often is intrinsically linked to public policy. Policy changes may be needed to create the proper incentives for desired action, remove particular barriers to desired behavior change, and reinforce specific communications messages.

For example, most residential recycling programs provide households with plastic bins to store recyclables prior to pickup. The standard bins are typically one-fourth the size of the trash cans also provided by the local governments. The size differential in the bins sends a contrary signal to

residents. It counteracts the message of recycling campaigns that are designed to motivate residents to divert recyclable materials from the municipal waste stream in an effort to reduce the demand for landfilling and incineration.

An effective social marketing campaign must acknowledge and address all of the barriers that prevent individuals and organizations from acting in the desired manner. From that perspective, social marketers must work hand-in-hand with public policy makers to create an atmosphere that is conducive to solving the social problem.

Social marketing also can be characterized by the public policy environment in which it occurs. Social programs often have many diverse stakeholders and are typically managed by public sector organizations that are scrutinized for their expenditure of public monies. Social marketers must

be able to demonstrate a return on investment by yielding clear benefit. Because these programs result in benefits to society that may manifest themselves over a prolonged period and permeate many aspects of our society, they can be difficult to measure in comparison to a conventional marketer that easily measures the sales of products or services.

Using social marketing and integrated marketing principles has enabled ICF Consulting help its clients influence purchasing behavior about energy-efficient household products, help consumers rethink their recycling habits, and educate parents and caregivers about the most effective ways to reduce the risk of childhood lead poisoning.

For more information about ICF Consulting's capabilities, please visit [www.icfconsulting.com/communications](http://www.icfconsulting.com/communications).

## Clean 'n Green San José: Services with Curb Appeal

ICF Consulting completed an 18-month, award-winning social marketing campaign for the City of San José Environmental Services Department. The campaign, *Clean 'n Green San José: Services with Curb Appeal*, helped ease residents into the City's new recycling and waste management services while maintaining a high diversion rate through the transition period. The new program aimed to increase convenience by requiring residents to recycle in a single, wheeled cart for curbside pick-up, eliminating the need to separate recyclables into four different containers. Residents also were given the opportunity to select an appropriately sized recycling cart for their household from among three different sizes of wheeled containers. The City received a response rate of approximately 47 percent on its selection cart mailer.

The City of San José boasted a strong recycling program with a significant diversion rate as a result of long-term education and outreach. So to prevent a decrease in the diversion rate, the *Clean 'n Green* program positioned the service enhancements to residents as convenient, economically sound, and a point of neighborhood pride. To intersect with the behavior related to the desired change, ICF Consulting created informational

items for use in the kitchen, where most recyclables are collected and sorted. Items included posters for kitchen walls and materials to adhere to the refrigerator. ICF Consulting also used waste hauler bill inserts to further intersect with the related behavior. The campaign incorporated a variety of other tactics including community meetings, special events, media outreach, and broadcast, transit, and cinema advertising. Educational materials were created for cable television and for children in grades 4-6, as well as for use in adult life skills classes. Information also was posted on the program's Web site. A partnership with Orchard Supply Hardware was very beneficial. Orchard Supply Hardware promoted products made of recycled materials and provided space for the City to conduct one-on-one outreach with residents about the program changes. Campaign materials, including advertisements, were produced in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

The California Integrated Waste Management (CIWM) Board validated that the City of San José achieved a 64 percent diversion rate for the year 2000, exceeding the statewide mandate to divert 50 percent of the waste stream. Although CIWM diversion rate data is unavailable for 2001 and 2002, the post-campaign evaluation

suggests that the results will be impressive. Five months into the program, a survey indicated that the new collection services were "finding great favor among the population and that the services were having a positive impact on recycling behavior." A significant portion of respondents said "that they have been recycling more under this new system than they were before." The post-campaign survey indicated that 85 percent of respondents thought the new method for recycling was easier than the old method, with nearly three-quarters (73 percent) describing it as "much easier." Nearly four out of ten (37 percent) of these residents reported that they recycle more with the new cart than they did with the old sorting method, and one-fifth (21 percent) reported that they recycle "much more" than they did when they had to sort their recyclables.

ICF Consulting received numerous awards for its work on the *Clean 'n Green* recycling campaign, including three Public Relations Society of America awards, two Awards of Distinction from the Communicator Awards 2003 Print Media, and a Grand Award from the APEX 2003 Awards for Publication Excellence.



ICF Consulting has earned more than 23 prestigious awards, including the Creativity in Public Relations Award (CIPRA), MOBIUS, and Telly.

In June 2003, the Council of PR Firms ranked ICF Consulting number one in government public relations and in social education for 2002. ICF Consulting also was ranked as the thirteenth largest public relations firm in the United States and the second largest in the Washington D.C. Metropolitan area.