

African American Prevention Intervention Network

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What is Social Marketing?

The health communications field has been rapidly changing over the past two decades. It has evolved from a one-dimensional reliance on public service announcements to a more sophisticated approach which draws from successful techniques used by commercial marketers, termed "social marketing." Rather than dictating the way that information is to be conveyed from the top-down, public health professionals are learning to listen to the needs and desires of the target audience themselves, and building the program from there. Social marketing was "born" as a discipline in the 1970s, when Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman realized that the same marketing principles that were being used to sell products to consumers could be used to "sell" ideas, attitudes and behaviors. Social marketing can be defined as the planning and implementation of programs designed to bring about social change using concepts from commercial marketing. Social marketing seeks to influence social behaviors to benefit the target audience and the general society.



Like commercial marketing, the primary focus is on the consumer - on learning what people want and need rather than trying to persuade them to buy what we happen to be producing. The social marketing process takes this consumer focus into account by addressing the elements of the "marketing mix." This refers to decisions about 1) the conception of a Product, 2) Price, 3) distribution (Place), and 4) Promotion. These are often called the "Four Ps" of marketing. Social marketing also adds a few more "P's."

"Four P's"

Product - The social marketing "product" is not necessarily a physical offering. A continuum of products exists, ranging from tangible, physical products, to services, practices and finally, more intangible ideas.

Price - "Price" refers to what the consumer must do in order to obtain the social marketing product. This cost may be monetary, or it may instead require the consumer to give up intangibles, such as time or effort, or to risk embarrassment and disapproval.

Place - "Place" describes the way that the product reaches the consumer. This refers to the distribution system and also decisions about the channels through which consumers are reached with information or training. Another element of place is deciding how to ensure accessibility of the offering and quality of the service delivery.

Promotion - Finally, the last "P" is promotion. Promotion consists of the integrated use of advertising, public relations, promotions, media advocacy, personal selling and entertainment vehicles. Research is crucial to determine the most effective and efficient vehicles to reach the target audience and increase demand.

Additional Social Marketing "P's"

Partnership - You need to team up with other organizations in the community to really be effective. You need to figure out which organizations have similar goals to yours--not necessarily the same goals - and identify ways you can work together.

Policy - Often, policy change is needed, and media advocacy programs can be an effective complement to a social marketing program.

Politics - The issues addressed by social marketing programs are often controversial or complex, such as safer sex or violence, and may need some political diplomacy with community organizations to gain support, to get access to the target audience or to head off potential adversaries at the pass.

Each element of the marketing mix should be taken into consideration as the program is developed, for they are the core of the marketing effort. Research is used to elucidate and shape the final product, price, place, promotion and related decisions.

Source: <http://www.social-marketing.com/library.html>.

For more information, call the technical assistance analyst at the Mississippi Urban Research Center, 1-866-JSU-MURC (578-6872).

