

## **The Role of Social Marketing in Leisure and Recreation Management**

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Consistent with the “social welfare” philosophy of park and recreation, much work has been done to identify the benefits of leisure and incorporate them into recreation management. The benefits of leisure constitute all aspects of human existence; including psychological (e.g., improved self-concept, reflection of personal values, peak experiences), psycho-physiological (e.g., cardiovascular health, disease control, mental and physical restoration), sociological (e.g., promotion of community stability, family solidarity, cultural identity), economic (e.g., employment, income, reduced health care costs), and environmental (e.g., preservation/conservation). These benefits should not accrue only to those who can afford to participate in activities and/or actively seek them out. Leisure’s potential to improve the quality of lives of individuals with mental and physical disabilities as well as at-risk youth, adults, and families speak to the potential that recreation has for social welfare. Making the benefits of recreation available to the public requires that individuals, heads of households, and community leaders are aware of and buy-off on the benefits of specific programs. The job of recreation professionals is not only to provide opportunities for achieving benefits, but to get the word out. “Unless each of us promotes and articulates the benefits of leisure, the tremendous value that parks and recreation adds to human welfare will never be recognized and appreciated fully outside the leisure profession” (Driver 1998, p. 26). These benefits are understood by leisure professionals, academicians, and students, but experiencing of the benefits by the public at-large as well as special populations will not reach its full potential without techniques designed to educate, and influence the public regarding available opportunities.

To plan, develop, provide, and communicate recreation opportunities, and the enjoyment of their benefits, park and recreation agencies should utilize a systematic process of doing so. One way is to adopt technologies from the field of marketing, however, recreation managers are often hesitant to utilize these technologies for a variety of reasons. There is a misconception that marketing is synonymous with advertising and selling. Marketing entails product and service development, distribution and pricing as well. Another problem is the stigma that marketing is a tool for increasing profits and

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market share for businesses. Recreation professionals also cite a lack of money, time and personnel resources available for adopting marketing techniques. Given limited resources, attempts at doing "marketing" have often been haphazard, limited to semi-annual or annual advertisements and brochures. Finally, marketing recreation behaviors, experiences, and benefits differs from tangible manufactured products. Recreation professionals should examine and adopt marketing technologies that recognize this difference.

One marketing process takes into account concerns of recreation professionals while emphasizing the social welfare philosophy. *Social marketing* was derived from the private sector as a way of "marketing" social ideas and behaviors in order to benefit individuals and society as a whole. It has been used to distribute condoms in 3<sup>rd</sup> world countries, in AIDS/HIV prevention, and in child/infant nutrition. Social marketing can be used in providing recreation opportunities designed to improve quality of life for a variety of populations with special needs.

### Traditional Marketing

Traditional marketing has brought products that have changed and improved our lives. Companies selling automobiles, home computers and their software, ready-prepared meals, and microwave ovens have benefited from the development of mass markets, aggressive advertising, and expanded distribution networks. Growth in the service sector has led marketing professionals to reexamine the marketing mix in order to apply them effectively to the development and selling of services and experiences. For recreation professionals marketing can get someone to go downhill skiing or visit Las Vegas for a weekend getaway. It can prompt a family from Illinois to take a hiking trip down the Grand Canyon or a Caribbean cruise. If marketing can effect consumers of products and experiences, it may also improve the physical and mental health of individuals and the general quality of society and the environment.

#### *Societal Effects of Traditional Marketing*

Traditional marketing has significantly effected social issues. Companies have exploited public interest in healthier foods and environment-friendly products to increase sales. Auto manufacturers advertise a vehicle's expanded safety features such as passenger seat and side air bags with the primary goal being to increase the number of cars sold. However, dependence on commercial marketing to bring about desirable social change is problematic. Empirical evidence suggests marketing has negative effects, such as the promoting undesirable behaviors (Andreasen 1994). The potential to improve the quality of lives of individuals and society is untapped by the profit-driven goals and objectives of commercial institutions. Marketing technologies in

the hands of government agencies, non-government organizations, and voluntary organizations has potential for enhancing social benefits, leading to increased focus on social marketing.

### Social Marketing

*Social marketing* is established in the vocabulary of private non-profit organizations, government agencies, and universities. It has been defined as “influencing the acceptability of social ideas” through “product planning, pricing, communication, distribution, and marketing research” (Kotler & Zaltman 1971). Suggesting this definition is limited to social ideas, many social marketers believe social marketing should focus on affecting attitudes and behaviors (Kotler & Roberto 1989). More recently, social marketing has been described as “the application of commercial marketing technologies to the analysis, planning, execution, and evaluation of programs designed to influence the voluntary behavior of target audiences in order to improve their personal welfare and that of their society” (Andreasen 1995, p. 7).

#### *The Social Marketing Approach*

Following are several components of an effective social marketing program. First, *the bottom line of social marketing is behavior change and/or influence*. While information programs often attempt to influence behavior, they are often evaluated based on how much information is disseminated rather than effects on behavior (Pierce & Manfreda 1997).

Second, *programs must be cost-effective*. Since many social marketing programs are run by public or private non-profit organizations, cost-effectiveness is paramount. Resources are often limited, emphasizing the need to be selective in the target markets addressed and to explore the possibility of cooperative alliances with like-minded organizations.

Third, *social marketing strategies should be customer-focused*. The beneficiaries of social marketing are individuals (increasing the level of physical activity of seniors with heart problems) or society (increasing environmental behaviors such as recycling). Individuals will act when they perceive it as being in their best interests. Social marketers should understand the values, needs, and wants of their audience.

Fourth, *strategies designed to effect behavior change comprise all four elements of the traditional marketing mix*. These four factors (*the 4 Ps*) are product, place, price, and promotion. *Product* is the behavior being promoted by the social marketer (e.g., exercise or recycling). Often the behavior is not such that an individual would find it desirable. The social marketer should present the behavior in a way that is consistent with the audiences’ wants and needs and is perceived to be satisfying. Social marketers must also insure that the *place* that the behavior can be carried out is accessible to the target audience. Programs to increase physical activity of seniors will fail without a convenient location for them to exercise, or if the program has not included information

about opportunities to exercise around the home. Consideration of *price* emphasizes that decisions to behave are based on the audience's determination that the benefits to them are worth the costs they would incur. This is not limited to economic costs. Social and psychological costs (association with a particular activity or group), and temporal costs (travel and consumption time) should be considered. *Promotion* is more than disseminating information through selected media such as TV, radio, or brochures. It includes personal selling and/or reward systems for engaging in proper behavior. Furthermore promotion should be designed and conducted in ways that are appropriate to the target audience's life.

Fifth, *social marketers use market research techniques to design, pre-test, and evaluate programs*. Formative research, done prior to and during the social marketing program, identifies the wants, needs, and other characteristics of the target audience. Pre-testing program materials occurs prior to circulation to be sure they will elicit intended behaviors. Once materials are disseminated, assessment continues in order to make necessary changes to the program.

Sixth, *social marketers use market segmentation techniques*. Social marketers do not treat their target audiences as mass markets. Formative research often discovers that the audience includes people with different wants and needs. Target audiences are grouped into segments whose members have similar relevant characteristics. These segments become foci for development of programs, budget allocations, and information emphases.

Finally, *social marketers compete with alternative behavioral choices*. Every behavior involves the opportunity cost of another behavior given up. Social marketers should focus beyond the marketed behavior and also consider the target audience's perception of alternatives to that behavior; that is, show the deficiencies of alternative behaviors.

### Social Marketing and Recreation Management

Social marketing is a promising technology in a practical and philosophical sense. It provides a framework for planning, development, promotion, and administration of recreation programs with direct benefits to individuals or society. Social marketing also provides opportunities for applied social science research in recreation.

For many Americans, the benefits of recreation are being accrued. According to the 1994-1995 National Survey on Recreation and the Environment, most U.S. residents over 16 years old participate in fitness activities (68.3%), swimming, (54.2%), and walking (66.7%) (Cordell 1999). In a national survey Godbey et al (1992) found that 75 percent used local park and recreation services occasional or frequently. Convincing Americans to participate in recreation does not represent the strongest potential for applying social marketing techniques. The greatest potential lies in providing recreation-based programs designed to (a) improve the quality of life of individuals for whom that quality eludes them, and (b) benefit society on a broader

basis. For example the National Recreation and Park Association teamed with the Center for Disease Control to assist leisure service providers throughout the country in marketing the benefits of physical activity to segments of the public most in need of activity (O'Sullivan & Spangler 1998). The public awareness of Smokey Bear after extensive informational campaigns is a well known example. The use of print, radio, and television advertising as well as other health promotion and public relations tools increased bicycle helmet use in children (Morris et al 1994). The Illinois Association of Park Districts launched a public education program designed to influence attitudes about the importance of preserving open space (O'Sullivan & Spangler 1998). While not a social marketing program in the sense discussed in this paper, it does represent a trend toward recognizing the role of parks and recreation in providing a direct benefit to society. Other potential foci of social marketing include (a) participation of at-risk youth (and their families) in specially designed recreation programs, (b) support for and participation in recreation programs designed to benefit persons with disabilities, (c) appropriate management of private open space to preserve biodiversity or protect wildlife habitat, (d) support for controversial land and wildlife management policies such as endangered species restoration or hunting techniques, (e) physical activity of seniors with health conditions, (f) health related behaviors, through recreation, in cooperation with public (or private) health organizations, and (g) vandalism and other depreciative behavior.

Social marketing provides opportunities to answer applied recreation research questions (Andreasen 1995). *How do individuals turn intention to participate in recreation programs into action?* Often attitudes toward and intentions to act remain unfulfilled even when constraints are removed. *What emotional investments do individuals make in existing behaviors?* Social marketing addresses behaviors that may have an emotional component such as the support for reintroduction of predator species into an outdoor recreation area. We need to examine the role that emotions play in influencing behavior, how they can be effectively measured, and how they relate to "rational" behavior. *What factors suggest an individual is ready to change behavior?* Understanding what measurable factors might predict readiness would allow social marketers to specifically target those individuals in effective ways.

In addition to these practical applications, social marketing addresses philosophical concerns that many public recreation professional may have about marketing. With its primary emphasis on individual and social well-being as opposed to a monetary bottom line, social marketing is consistent with the social welfare philosophy that drives the work of public recreation professionals.

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