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Title of paper:
Brand co-creation for effective social marketing: The 'Lose the Fags[1]' case study.

Form of presentation desired:
Seminar presentation

General subject area:
Public health, smoking cessation, branding, community development

Method:
Case study

Other details:
The first author is willing to serve as a reviewer.
The first author is enrolled as a part time PhD student but is also a full time Lecturer in Marketing at BBS.

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[1] 'Fags' are British slang for cigarettes

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BRAND CO-CREATION FOR EFFECTIVE SOCIAL MARKETING: THE 'LOSE THE FAGS' CASE STUDY

Abstract

There is a growing case for using branding in social marketing (Evans and Hastings, 2008, Keller, 1998, McDivitt, 2003, Basu and Wang, 2009); yet social marketers have failed to consistently integrate branding into their work. This paper explores the development of a new brand, 'Lose the Fags' which supports a smoking cessation social marketing intervention run by NHS Stockport; one of the National Social Marketing Centre's Learning Demonstration Sites.

Underpinning all social marketing must be meaningful customer-orientation. The use of research to achieve this is well understood, but social marketers are increasingly embracing the ideas behind co-creation, in which the target audience jointly creates intervention ideas with the marketing professionals. Co-creation principles can be effective within brand creation because, as many authors have commented, the effectiveness of branding in social marketing often depends on how well the brand fits with the cultural mores of the target group (Orth et al., 2007, Orth et al., 2005, Perea and Slater, 1999). 'Lose the Fags' was created in partnership with local people through a rigorous consultation and research process. The effect has been a local adoption and acceptance of the brand.

Branding in social marketing

From a customer's perspective a brand is a set of associations in their minds (Basu and Wang, 2009) about a product or behaviour and also the degree to which they feel aware of and loyal to that brand (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 1997). The result of good branding is a strong relationship between consumer and brand (McDivitt, 2003) which strengthens all other

marketing activity. Branding in social marketing is likely to have a positive effect on the overall effectiveness of interventions (Evans and Hastings, 2008). Widely acclaimed branded social marketing interventions include VERB, which encouraged tweens to build a relationship with the fun side of physical activity (Banspach, 2008). LoveLife is another example which brands a behaviour; safe sexual practices (Stadler and Hlongwa, 2002). However, despite these successes, arguably few social marketing interventions make the most of the potential which branding could offer. This is a shame because the problems social marketers tackle are extremely complex (Evans et al., 2008) and there are a large number of competing public health and commercial marketing campaigns vying for people's attention (Rothschild, 2001), so it has been argued that branding is an essential part of the social marketer's toolkit. In this complex environment, "branding creates a unique identity for a product and helps a consumer negotiate an association with a product" (Basu and Wang, 2009: 80).

The NHS Stop Smoking team were keen to use this evidence from the literature to maximise the effectiveness of their intervention, the aim of which was to increase the number of smoking quit attempts in a small (population 6500) deprived housing estate in the North of Stockport in North West England. The estate had a 54% smoking rate in a 2006/7 survey and there were only 252 attempts to quit smoking using local services. A large part of the social marketing work undertaken was service redesign, but research also indicated that culturally, smoking was ingrained locally and quitting was unacceptable; associated with outsiders 'telling them what to do'. Marketing communications supported strongly by an effective brand, was considered to be an important part of the project.

Social marketing: Underpinned by consumer orientation

As mentioned earlier, the effectiveness of branding in social marketing depends on how well the brand fits with the cultural mores of the target group (Orth et al., 2007, Orth et al., 2005, Perea and Slater, 1999). To achieve a cultural fit, there must be an emphasis on deep consumer insight and placing the consumer at the heart of all marketing activities (Andreasen, 2002).

Rigorous multi-stage qualitative primary research in Stockport indicated that the target audience were tired of being 'nagged' into quitting and were often unable to make a successful quit attempt because their support networks consisted of smokers, which provided a real fear of being ostracized. On the other hand there was a real drive to quit, because of financial worry but also because of the fear of ill-health and to be a positive role model for children. Low confidence was a barrier to community participation, and a locally-based intervention with services in trusted, safe and familiar environments with familiar faces was considered essential.

In the light of this insight, the whole Lose the Fags intervention was developed by a team of local stakeholders, facilitated by NHS Stockport. The consumer consultation approach taken in this case study is advocated by Grier and Bryant, who write that

> Efforts to involve consumers in goal-setting, participatory research and strategy development would also enable them to become true partners instead of targets of professionals' programs (Grier and Bryant, 2005: 330).

It was acknowledged that for any intervention to be effective in this area, the target audience would need to be involved with the co-creation of the intervention from the start and feel that they both 'owned' the intervention and that it presented a true representation of their needs. The community consultations involved key stakeholders including smokers (service users and

non-service users), local community activists, local smoking cessation advisors, and local health care managers. Workshops helped the PCT develop core ideas for new services, community partners and the communications strategy.

Most importantly, these consultation workshops directed the development of the intervention in terms of its tone and 'feel'. The 'proposition', 'message', 'offer', 'imagery' and 'tone' were discussed and defined, and the resulting document became the creative brief for the design agencies. Concepts from tendering agencies were also run through the same community filter and the result was a strong campaign, hinged around the 'Lose the Fags' brand.

The brand comprises a mock 'order' which is voiced by a local resident who has recently quit. Communications materials show one of six locals, their photos having been taken in recognisable local settings, each of whom is raising 'two fingers' in the pose commonly associated with smokers; only their cigarette has disappeared and only a telltale trace of smoke remains. The accompanying slogan 'Give smoking the two fingers' is a call to action from the featured resident, reflecting the proposition that 'Brinnington is giving up smoking'. Quitting is not something that has been demanded by an outsider but something that local people are doing and can be in control of. Their first step is to text through their details and then wait to be contacted by a local advisor.

Discussion and Conclusion

The campaign is ongoing and definitive results are not yet available for analysis. However the signs are promising, with informal feedback extremely positive. The authors would note that

for the smoking cessation social marketing work in Stockport, 'Lose the Fags' achieves much of the promise in the public health branding literature. The brand gives individuals positive reinforcement for their efforts by demonstrating that the movement is coming from within the community rather than from outside it (Keller, 1998). The language, humour and imagery makes the image of quitting accessible, salient and meaningful and it simple for people to understand what is required of them (ibid). The fact that local people are featured, along with their own quit dates, means the brand is considered to be genuine and trusted, and helps the target audience believe they can also quit (McDivitt, 2003).

'Lose the fags' is a snappy, memorable brand which is now used in conjunction with all smoking cessation activities in the target area. Due to this consistent messaging, local people have begun to associate quitting with the 'lose the fags' brand. The brand, then, has become a bridge or mediator between consumer perceptions of quitting (such as fear of failure) and the behavioural goal, which in the first instance is simply sending a text (Evans and Hastings, 2008).

This case study demonstrates that branding in social marketing does not need to be limited to the branding of services (Diamond et al., 2009), causes (see http://www.madd.org/) or messages (Rothschild, 2001). Behaviour can also be branded (Evans et al., 2008) in order to build a relationship between the audience and desired behaviour. Early evidence suggests that this has been the effect in Stockport; the behaviour of 'quitting' has been rebranded as an internally-driven behaviour rather than a demand from an outside, invisible authority. Thanks to a brand rooted in the community which co-created it, the behaviour of quitting smoking is slowly becoming to be accepted into the daily narrative of life in the target area.

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