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## Social marketing ... a powerful process for influencing and changing behavior

By Jim Mintz

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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 is a planned process for influencing change. It is a modified term of conventional consumer marketing with its components of marketing and consumer research, advertising and promotion (including positioning, segmentation, creative strategy, message design and testing, media strategy and planning, and effective tracking)

In its most general sense, social marketing is a new way of thinking about some very old human endeavors. As long as there have been social systems, there have been attempts to inform, persuade, influence, motivate, to gain acceptance for new adherents to certain sets of ideas, to promote causes and to win over particular groups, to reinforce behaviour or to change it .

Social marketing has deep roots in psychology, sociology, political science, communication theory and anthropology. Its practical roots stem from disciplines such as advertising, public relations and market research.

In the past few decades campaigns have been launched in the following areas:

- Health promotion (e.g., anti-smoking, safety, drug abuse, drinking and driving, HIV/AIDS, nutrition, physical activity, immunization, breast cancer screening, mental health, breast feeding, family planning)
- Environment (e.g., safer water, clean air, energy conservation, recycling, preservation of national parks and forests)

- Education (e.g., literacy, stay in school)
- Economy (e.g., boosts job skills and training, attract investors, revitalize older cities)
- Other issues like family violence, bullying, public safety and emergency preparedness, identity theft, human rights, and racism.

Social Marketing combines the best elements of the traditional approaches to social change in an integrated planning and action framework, and utilizes advances in communication technology and marketing skills. It uses marketing techniques to generate discussion and promote information, and change attitudes and behaviours. Social marketing should have a long term outlook based on continuing programs rather than one-off initiatives. The planning process starts and finishes with research, and research is conducted throughout to inform the development of the strategy.

In addition, social marketing engages practitioners to fully understand and appreciate concepts like social norms, competing behaviours and barriers. To succeed in the field of social marketing and influence behavior change, marketers need to understand what their target audiences perceive to be the barriers to change. Social marketers focus on removing barriers to an activity while simultaneously enhancing the benefits. There is a tendency for individuals to respond positively to actions that are highly beneficial and have few barriers. Social marketers conduct research to discover the key barriers and potential benefits and then develop strategies and tactics that address them.

In recent years experts have come to reject the narrow victim-blaming approach of focusing all of the social marketing campaign on the individual, and emphasize that social marketing must also be used to:

- bring about changes in the social and structural factors that impinge on an individual's opportunities, capacities, and right to a healthy and fulfilling life
- target individuals/groups who have the power to make policy, regulatory and legislative changes that protect and enhance people's quality of life

Social Marketing is used as a tool to integrate and coordinate other components of an organization's strategies and tactics, including: training, education programs, advocacy, strategic communications/public relations, public affairs, outreach activities, legislation, research, and public policy.

A social marketing approach gives organizations a single approach which may include:

- mobilizing communities
- influencing the media
- advocacy and
- building strategic alliances with business, government and non government organizations.

Social marketing need not be expensive; it is a way of thinking and approaching behavioral change in a strategic way and not a way of spending money...it is not an ad campaign! It is a tool; really a process and set of tools wrapped in a philosophy for helping an organization do what it wants to do to better society.

The ultimate objective of social marketing is to influence/change behaviour. It is not a process to solely create awareness or educate target audiences or to use advertising and communication techniques although all of these are part of social marketing. With rare exception only long term multi-year campaigns can produce measurable changes. Social marketing initiatives measure performance through direct and indirect qualitative and quantitative methods and performance measurement requiring measurable objectives and benchmarks.

Many social marketing programs are developed by people who are not skilled in the field of marketing and not trained on how to use the marketing mix (4p's) and only focus on the communications function of marketing. However In order to be successful in marketing it is absolutely crucial to look at all of the 4 p's (product, price, place and promotion).

After many years of leading the social marketing group at the federal health department in Canada and running many campaigns, I moved into the field of consulting and came to realize that many public sector organizations do not have the skill set and training to develop and implement a comprehensive social marketing campaign.

In order to address this major challenge our organization the [Centre of Excellence for Public Sector Marketing](#) developed a [social marketing workbook](#) which takes the reader through a step-by step structured approach to preparing a social marketing plan. In addition we also developed workshops [Develop a Social Marketing Plan in "ONE DAY"](#) This workshop takes you through a proven planning process to develop a customized, structured social marketing plan for public sector and nonprofit organization. We run these workshops across Canada and hope to do the same in the USA one day. If you require further information on social marketing or any type of government marketing including web and social media marketing, services/product marketing for government etc. contact: [jim.mintz@publicsectormarketing.ca](mailto:jim.mintz@publicsectormarketing.ca) or visit our website: [www.publicsectormarketing.ca](http://www.publicsectormarketing.ca) also subscribe to my blog: [www.jimmintz.ca](http://www.jimmintz.ca)

*Jim Mintz is Director of the [Centre of Excellence for Public Sector Marketing](#). The Centre's mandate is to deliver strategic marketing solutions, designed to meet the unique needs & challenges of governments, associations and non-profit organizations. He is also Program Director of the "[Professional Certificate in Public Sector and Non-Profit Marketing](#)" and "[Executive Certificate in Public Sector and Non-Profit Marketing Leadership](#)" at the [Spratt School of Business at Carleton University](#). Jim also lectures in the Undergraduate Program at Spratt in his specialty areas of marketing communications and non-profit/public sector marketing and at the [University of South Florida; College of Public Health \(Tampa\)](#). He is also serves on the planning committee for [MARCUM](#). He was formerly Director of Marketing and Corporate Communications at Health Canada (federal health department) and Adjunct Professor of Marketing in the School of Management at the University of Ottawa.*