

Program Marketing From A to Generation Z: Making the Sale to ALL Your Stakeholders

A Guide for Grantees of the Office of Adolescent Health and the Family and Youth Services Bureau

Effective youth-serving programs do not simply “happen” on their own. Programs must be marketed to have their greatest possible impact. When done well, marketing will not only help recruit youth participants and keep them engaged; it will also help sustain the program by “selling” its value to stakeholders: the funders, policymakers and community partners you depend on for all your agency’s activities. Successful marketing requires a program marketing plan.

What is program marketing?

People often think of marketing as “selling” only. Often they assume this means advertising. In reality, program marketing involves activities far beyond selling and advertising. Management and marketing expert Peter Drucker once said, “The aim of marketing is to make selling superfluous. The aim of marketing is to know and understand the customer so well that the product or service fits him and sells itself.”¹ Therefore, effective marketing means:

1. Understanding who your “customers” really are
2. Helping your customers understand—and embrace—your “products.”

For adolescent pregnancy prevention programs, marketing includes **advertising to, motivating of and engaging with** your stakeholders.

Your stakeholders (the “customers”) are your **adolescent participants**, your **organizational partners**, your **funders** and your local, state and federal **policymakers**.

What are the elements of program marketing?

Program marketing includes the elements of “social marketing” and more. Social marketing uses marketing theories and techniques from the business world to influence behavior *to achieve a social goal*. Unlike the goal of commercial marketing, the goal of social marketing is not to maximize profits or sales; instead the goal is to change behaviors for the benefit of society—such as persuading more youth to delay sexual activity or increase their use of condoms and contraception if they choose to be sexually active.²

¹ Kotler, P., & Lee, N. R. (2006). *Marketing in the Public Sector: A Roadmap for Improved Performance*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

² Smith, W., & Strand, J. (2008). *Social Marketing Behavior: A Practical Resource for Social Change Professionals*. Washington, DC: Academy for Educational Development.

The basic elements are:

- Product—the products or services you offer
- Place—the locations where stakeholders can benefit from what you offer
- Price—what stakeholders must give up to benefit from what you offer
- Promotion—the “sales pitches” you make to your various stakeholders

Plus:

- Partnerships—relationships with other agencies that can increase your marketing power.

What is a program marketing plan?

A marketing plan puts in writing all the elements of program marketing as they apply uniquely to your agency and adolescent pregnancy prevention program. The plan defines (1) the stakeholders you intend to reach, (2) the products and services your program offers to each stakeholder group, (3) the places in which you will reach those stakeholders, (4) the “price” you expect them to pay in terms of time, money, social status or other factors connected with participating in or supporting your program and (5) the partnerships you will depend on to market your program to increase participation and long-term sustainability.

Segment, then target, then tailor

Defining who your stakeholders are can help determine which products and services your program can offer. Think of your stakeholders as a “market”: what are the unique characteristics of the youth you seek to enroll? Of their families and friends? What are the unique characteristics of the funders and policymakers whose support can help sustain your program over the long term? What are the unique characteristics of the partner agencies whose support can extend your reach? Listing your various stakeholders is called “segmenting” your market so you can prioritize whom to reach first or most often. Prioritizing your stakeholders is called “targeting.” Once you have decided on your priority stakeholders, your marketing plan should define *how* you will market your program to each segment; that’s called “tailoring” your marketing activities and messages.

Who participates in the development of the marketing plan?

Effective marketing plans are developed by a cross-section of agency staff, *with stakeholder input* whenever possible! Health care marketers sometimes use the term “cross-functional teams” when describing collaborations of different kinds of staff and stakeholders. An ideal cross-functional team to develop a marketing plan for an adolescent pregnancy prevention program may include:

- A program manager
- An educator
- A development specialist
- A policy or external affairs specialist
- A clinician, counselor or social worker
- At least one youth leader

- A parent representative
- A representative from a partner agency.

Although the program manager may take the lead in drafting the marketing plan, the other team members can serve as valuable sounding boards to review the draft plan and suggest specific stakeholders and marketing activities to increase participation in the program and its long-term sustainability.

Promising ideas in program marketing

Unlike evidenced-based programming, program marketing strategies have not gone through rigorous evaluation, and strategies but are often based on best knowledge and experience of programs. Much of the literature comes from health care marketing journals and other business publications, as well as social marketing publications from the field of public health. The ideas listed below have shown promise but may not work for every program, with all populations or in all geographic areas.

Possible activities include:

- “Brand” your program with an easy-to-identify logo that can be put on all publicity materials and any custom-made incentives such as key chains, pens, cups, hats and the like.
- Offer an information/referral hotline (or a text messaging service for smartphones) that includes recorded messages that promote the program and highlight its success stories.
- Train youth peers to share information about the program through word of mouth, structured presentations or a social media site such as Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, MySpace, Pinterest, Foursquare and so forth.
- Host (or offer program staff or youth to serve on) panel talks that highlight adolescent relationships and health.
- Record audio/video testimonials of youth who have benefited from your program, and share them on your website or in other forums.
- Identify community events, including health fairs, where program staff or youth can have information tables or other exhibits.
- Conduct “street outreach” in which program staff or youth engage targeted communities with information and incentives (such as key chains, pens, cups, and hats).
- Inform counselors at other youth-serving agencies about your program to ensure that they can make referrals as needed.
- Provide additional incentives for potential youth participants (such as transit or gas cards or gift certificates), and be sure to mention these when publicizing the program.
- Seek out endorsements for your program from youth and adult “opinion leaders,” and feature these on fliers, in audio/video publicity and at community events.
- Use social media (Facebook, Twitter, Foursquare, YouTube) and other media that youth can help develop both for their peers and for adult stakeholders such as funders and policymakers.

- Use live theater, such as a youth “Talent Night” event or dramatization of social issues that your program addresses, for youth audiences as well as for audiences of adult stakeholders.

Resources

Websites:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Gateway to Health Communication & Social Marketing Practice

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Teen Pregnancy and Social Media

<http://www.cdc.gov/TeenPregnancy/SocialMedia/>

Social Marketing Toolbox: California STD/HIV Prevention Training Center

http://www.stdhivtraining.org/YSMT_toolbox.html

Books:

Kotler, P., & Lee, N. R. (2006). *Marketing in the Public Sector: A Roadmap for Improved Performance*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Smith, W. A., & Strand, J. (2008). *Social Marketing Behavior: A Practical Resource for Social Change Professionals*. Washington, DC: Academy for Educational Development.

Journals:

Health Marketing Quarterly

<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/WHMQ>

Cases in Public Health Communication & Marketing (George Washington University)

<http://www.gwumc.edu/sphhs/departments/pch/phcm/casesjournal/index.cfm>

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