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"Some notes on Marketing Oral Rehydration Therapy" by Prof. Alan R. Andreasen, UCLA, background paper presented at Social Marketing and ORT Workshop, Washington, DC

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Notes

5 pp

Discusses the concept of marketing and is subset, social marketing, from a general and academic point of view. Advises on what elements are required for a successful social marketing strategy for ORT.

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SOME NOTES ON
MARKETING ORAL REHYDRATION THERAPY

Alan R. Andreasen
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Background Paper presented to:
Social Marketing and ORT Workshop
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SOME NOTES ON
MARKETING ORAL REHYDRATION THERAPY

Marketing has come to be seen as something of a knight in shining armor for a wide range of social programs. It has been looked to as the potential saviour of the National High Blood Pressure Education program, the National Cancer Institute's Smoking and Breast Cancer programs, and even the marketing of the two-dollar bill. And, of course, it has seen growing application in contraceptive programs in a range of developing countries. It has been proposed that marketing can materially aid the adoption of oral rehydration therapy (ORT). So that potential sponsors and users understand what social marketing can and cannot do, it will be useful to understand some of its basic elements. This paper offers a few brief notes introducing an approach I have found useful in designing effective marketing programs in a wide range of profit and non-profit contexts. These notes may prove useful as a framework for discussing concrete problems involved in marketing ORT at the present workshop.

Defining Social Marketing

First, it is necessary to define marketing and then social marketing. Marketing may be defined as:

the analysis, planning and implementation of strategies designed to effect exchanges with target audiences so as to maximize the marketing organization's objectives.

Social marketing then can be defined as simply a subset of marketing where the organization's objectives in the particular program are primarily to improve the welfare of the society rather than its own well being. In most cases, such as with ORT and contraception, project success requires responses at the individual level with individual benefits. In some cases, however, such as

driving 55 mph or saving energy, social marketing requires individual responses but the benefits are primarily at the societal level. Indeed, often the latter may involve net costs to the individual.

Marketing Building Blocks

What then, are the essential building blocks of a marketing program consistent with the above definition?

1. Consumer Behavior. Basically, any organization undertaking a marketing program wants the individual to give up things. These can be concrete things like cash payments or contributions of money, time, blood donations and so on. Or the things one must give up can be abstract things like old habits or old ideas. To get the individual to give up things the marketer in return has to offer benefits. These, too, can be concrete like products or services or they can be abstract and subtle like good health, a feeling of doing good, increased self-esteem, a sense of participation and so forth.
2. Exchanges are not simple. In most cases, what the target consumer will be evaluating is a bundle of benefits to be exchanged for a bundle of costs.
3. Increasing the number of exchanges means changing the ratio of costs to benefits as seen by the target consumers. Improving the ratio can mean reducing the cost, for example by making it easier or less frightening to act or to change ways of thinking. Or it can mean increasing the benefits like offering giveaway incentives or providing a clearer picture of how one's health will improve after a certain change of life style. It can mean both.
4. Since success is, in the first instance, dependent upon the target customers' perceptions of the cost/benefit ratio inherent in the exchange, development of any marketing strategy must begin with (a) the target consumer and (b) an understanding of how they initially perceive the exchange and its potential costs and benefits. (That is, the best marketing projects must begin with some kind of customer research).

5. Target customers will vary in both their perceptions of the costs and benefits involved in potential exchanges) and their likely responsiveness to strategies and tactics the marketer might adopt. As a consequence marketing analysis and planning should always consider segmenting consumers into different sub-populations who would subsequently receive different marketing treatments.

7. Since the task of changing complex perceived cost/benefit ratios can be difficult -- especially when, as in social marketing programs, the costs are often seen by the target consumer to be very, very high -- complex strategies will be needed to effect the exchanges. And to insure that the tactics involved in these complex strategies are mutually reinforcing and not counter-productive, they must be carefully coordinated (e.g. so that, for example, tactic A enhances the effect of tactic B and does not counter the effect of tactic C).

Since marketing strategies are only effective if they achieve organizational (e.g. societal) objectives, decisions about individual tactics and overall success must be dependent upon (a) careful definition -- preferably quantification -- of objectives; (b) careful testing of program strategies and tactics to see whether they are likely to achieve short run program objectives and (c) careful monitoring of program accomplishments to see whether they are achieving longer run objectives.

Pseudo Marketing

What, then, is marketing not?

1. Marketing is not trying to effect exchanges the marketer wants, but what the consumer wants.
2. Marketing is not assuming one knows customer perceptions in advance.
3. Marketing is not trying to force target customers to perceive costs and benefits as the marketer perceives them.

4. Marketing is not treating all customers alike (unless there is sound research evidence for doing so).
5. Marketing is not relying on just one or two elements of the marketing mix such as advertising or public relations or distribution.
6. Marketing is not assuming that achieving interim goals (e.g. number of posters put up, rallies held) that are supposed to lead to longer run goals (e.g. behavior change) will in fact lead to long run success.

What ORT Societal Marketing Should Be

If ORT programs are to adopt the best of marketing practice, they must adopt the principles outlined above. This means:

- a. Adopting a customer not an organization starting point for strategizing.
- b. Conducting a substantial amount of consumer level research before beginning a program and following up with a consistent program of consumer monitoring as one goes. (This is particularly critical for programs in developing countries where marketers may have ethnocentric perspectives different from target consumers.)
- c. Carefully investigating what kind of segmentation in the market is possible and desirable.
- d. Testing elements of the marketing mix before using them and then monitoring after the fact whether they've worked.
- e. Thinking constantly about using all of the elements of the marketing mix and making sure that they are complementary and not conflicting. This may require considerable imaginativeness in infrastructures that are only weakly developed.
- f. Finally, remembering that the end result is the exchange and that the basic strategy must be based on a full understanding of the core nature of

the exchange as seen by consumers. The ultimate goal of ORT programs (as Meyer and Boni have pointed out¹) is behavior, specifically correct, continual usage. To achieve this, Foote Snyder and Spain note that:

"the target audience[s] must have access to the channels, must be exposed to messages from the campaign, [and] must have the information or skills being taught..."²

This is a complex task made all the more difficult by the poor infrastructure in many developing countries, the abstract nature of the benefits to be communicated, and the seriousness of the costs to consumers inherent in giving up old habits and ideas.

Achieving the goals in such projects is therefore immensely difficult. Marketing can help considerably. But, as this brief note has sought to point out, expectations as the usefulness of marketing will most likely be met if program managers adhere closely to principles distinguishing between what marketing can and cannot do.

¹Anthony J. Meyer and Anthony F. Boni, "CRS and ORT: A.I.D.'s Alphabet for Social Marketing," working paper, A.I.D., February 1984. Privately circulated.

²Dennis R. Foote, Leslie Snyder and Peter Spain, Executive Summary of Findings from the First Year of Evolution of the Mass Media and Health Practices Project in "The Gambia," working paper, Institute for Communication Research, Stanford University, December 1983.