

# THE POWER OF PR IN SOCIAL MARKETING

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You need a healthy fridge for a healthy heart. Maybe you've quit smoking. If you want to avoid cancer, you'll need a breast screen. With winter around the corner remember to use energy wisely. Going out tonight? If you drink and drive, you're a bloody idiot. Remember to slip, slop, slap.

From its early use in health promotion campaigns, public relations has been a long established staple in the social marketing mix.

Most of us have viewed television community service announcements, heard radio spots, seen posters, called hotlines and talked with volunteers about community issues. These are all elements of social marketing campaigns, sometimes also called public information campaigns.

Social marketing campaigns strive to create conditions in the social structure that facilitate behavioural changes at community, family and individual levels. Their ultimate goal is to change individual's behaviours, not simply increase awareness or alter attitudes.

Behaviour is influenced by an individual's personal beliefs, values and attitudes – including normative beliefs – and the socio-cultural environment within which he or she lives.

A social marketing campaign can exert influence at a number of levels. In line with agenda setting theory, it can stimulate greater discussion and awareness within the community level. Media advocacy together with interventions by trusted sources and social networks can assist in framing issues so that there is an eventual change of community norms.

At the family level, campaigns can stimulate positive action in the home as well as discussion with other families who can provide advice and encourage new behaviours to be adopted.

Whilst media publicity has been powerful in placing social issues on the public's agenda, it is the plethora of other public relations tactics that have allowed social marketing messages to reach both grassroots communities and government and industry decision-makers.

In a survey carried out in 2006, by Advertising Age and the Council of Public Relations Firms in the United States, marketers gave public relations high marks for raising awareness (83%), providing credibility (76%), reaching influencers (63%) and educating consumers (61%). All of these roles are crucial in campaigns aimed at improving community wellbeing.

Successful public relations strategies for influencing public attitudes and supporting behaviour change include:

1. Understanding stakeholder's current attitudes and behaviours and identifying the barriers and enablers for change.
2. Linking the social issue to topical news through research findings, new initiatives, high profile role models, policy statements or symbolic visual events.
3. Supporting media publicity with word of mouth publicity, utilising trusted information sources in neighbourhoods and workplaces.
4. Telling the personal story and building behaviour changing skills through testimonials and case studies.
5. Developing partnerships or coalitions with other organizations to help cascade activity and knowledge throughout the community.
6. Making the message available through multiple channels, for example, free telephone information lines, web sites and e-communities, newsletters, spokesperson panels, retail point of sale and community information points.
7. Increasing the visibility of the social issue through a range of ambient media such as street theatre or merchandising materials such as t-shirts and wristbands.

Using these techniques provides the opportunity for organizations to tie together the various components of a social marketing campaign and facilitate synergistic interaction between them.

Ultimately, however, to motivate people to change their behaviour they must believe that the benefits to them will outweigh the cost of their participation – only then will awareness about an issue be converted into action.

### **About The Reputation Group**

The Reputation Group is a boutique public relations agency based in Melbourne, Australia. We are a strategic communications and public relations consultancy with particular expertise in brand and reputation building, marketing communications and corporate responsibility and sustainability. We are passionate professionals, offering the one-to-one service of a boutique agency with deep experience gained working with major corporations, industry associations, government, and not-for-profits. We strive to provide clients with the highest level of service backed by total accountability and value for money.

If you would like us to help translate your communication challenges into opportunities to enhance your organisation's reputation, our contact details are below.

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