



Customers for the Cause

Are we using the best available methods to foster change for animals in society? New ideas on how to be more effective come from a surprising source: big business.

Every day, we invest our comparatively limited money, time, and energy to make the world better for animals. Our adversaries usually enjoy significant advantages from greater resources to entrenched opinion. For example, the National Fluid Milk Processor Education Program has spent over \$100 million on the milk mustache campaign.¹ To do more with less, national animal protection organizations, grassroots groups, and individual advocates must become expert marketers. **Whether we are advancing the general concept of animal rights, championing plant-based eating, supporting computer-based dissection alternatives, or seeking funding, we are marketing social change.**

For many in our movement, the term “marketing” brings to mind unnecessary products, manipulative messages, and a profits-above-all mentality, frequently involving animal exploitation. However, marketing is no more inherently evil than a hammer; the same hammer used to build a new home, hang a treasured photo, or repair a fence can also be used to destroy a piece of art, kill someone, or injure the errantly placed thumb. In the same way, marketing is a neutral tool wielded for benefit or harm depending on the intent and skill of those who use it.

Most animal advocacy organizations and leaders employ marketing techniques--especially communications--but few have

consistently applied a comprehensive effort of customer-focused, research-based, results-oriented marketing. Just as we have achieved important gains through increasing sophistication in legislation and court challenges, so can we speed results for animals through improvement in social marketing. This approach has been used to reduce drunk driving, to increase family planning, to limit the spread of disease, and much more.

More than Education

Social marketing is more than education; it includes analysis, planning, execution, and evaluation of integrated programs designed to influence people to trade their old ideas, beliefs, and behaviors for new ones. Although compelling communications can be highly motivating, promotion is more powerful when combined with appropriate product, price, and place elements. For example, a campaign to persuade women who wear fur coats to choose alternatives should not only deliver a message on the cruelty of fur (promotion), but also provide information on fake furs (product), identify where to buy them (place), and explain how to donate a fur coat to an animal protection organization for a possible tax deduction (reducing the price of change). **These “4 Ps” of marketing should be part of every animal rights campaign.**

Customer Focus

The committed activist may abhor fake fur or people's desire for financial incentives to dispose of a fur coat. However, **the primary principle of social marketing is to regard people as customers for the changes we want to achieve.** When we urge people to buy into something different, they ask, "What's in it for me?" To persuade them, we must not only convey what we want them to do for the animals, but also help them to believe it's in their interest.

Recall how you may have evolved to modify the way you eat, to stop attending animal entertainment, or to shift to cruelty-free products. At some point you saw the new behavior as both desirable and possible. In contrast, do we all consume only organic foods, avoid driving whenever feasible, and boycott clothes that may be produced by oppressed workers? If not, why do these behaviors seem less worthwhile or doable? We are potential customers on these issues, but we won't change until we have a favorable impression of the advantages and disadvantages of doing so. For example, a better selection of chemical-free produce, more frequent bus service, or information on catalogs with affordable garments made by living-wage workers might tip the balance. Our success depends on understanding how people perceive the potential benefits and costs of transformation on animal issues and then using this knowledge to engage them more effectively to alter their views.

Stages of Behavior Change

Seldom does a single conversation or experience prompt significant, lasting change. **People progress through five stages in changing a behavior: awareness, interest, decision, action and evaluation.** They initially emphasize potential benefits but focus more on costs as they seriously

ponder taking action. For example, many animal shelters have done an excellent job creating awareness and interest for spay/neuter programs, but face resistance as individuals contemplate such possible drawbacks as taking time off from work, traveling to a facility, and dealing with disapproval from family members.

Creating awareness is therefore necessary but not sufficient to end animal suffering. Proponents of some controversial tactics in our movement purport that anything that increases awareness is valuable. This is not true. If people are made aware of our issues in ways that make them less interested in changing their behavior, we are doing the animals a disservice.

We also fall short if we generate positive awareness, but do not do enough to help people move through the subsequent phases to decision and action. Given our relatively small numbers, it is important that we prioritize and focus to create a critical mass of supporters on our issues. Doing good work isn't enough; with the enormity of our task and the scarcity of our resources, we must choose the best opportunities.

Targeting Our Efforts

We can often get better results more efficiently by targeting people most likely to "convert," those who are actively evaluating animal-friendly changes. Assuming there are two similar individuals--one who is vaguely aware of the benefits of veganism and another who is definitely considering a change--the activist has better odds of enticing the latter person to a plant-based diet. That may seem obvious, but I've staffed tables at "generic" events where most

visitors had no leaning toward any aspect of vegetarianism. I may have had some positive impact, but how much more could I have accomplished at a health fair or an environmental event? Rather than advocate veganism for humane reasons to the general public, wouldn't it be more productive to understand the perceptions and potential of the animal loving but largely non-veg population of shelter personnel?

Research-Based Decisions

As animal advocates, we have already adopted new ideas and behaviors. The way we think is no longer the way our "targets for change" think. **In order to truly focus on people as customers and understand their needs, we must conduct research.**

For the individual activist, research can be as simple as asking questions and listening carefully in conversations. By eliciting people's opinions of the benefits and costs of what we're discussing, we can tailor the information we share in order to position change as desirable and possible for that individual. Such dialog also builds trust that makes others more receptive to our ideas.

Organizations can employ more structured research activities such as focus groups, written or online surveys, and phone interviews with a sample of constituents. In a short written survey I recently conducted for the Vegetarian Society of the District of Columbia, more than three-quarters of visitors to our table at a major local health fair already strongly agreed that a vegetarian diet would help them stay healthy and avoid disease. Most were interested in or were actively considering vegetarianism. We therefore learned that

for this event and others that draw a highly health-aware crowd, we might provide more information on how to become vegetarian--such as recipes, menu planning, and cooking class listings that help people feel able to change--even if that means displacing some of the materials on what benefits would be attained in doing so.

Since no animal protection organization is flush with cash, it's important to note that research is one of the best expenditures we can make. The investment to understand potential customers pales in comparison to the wasted time and money if our efforts are misdirected. One way to enhance our understanding of customers less expensively is by sharing research that individual organizations are doing. The Humane Research Council has an Internet Research Center with reports and other resources at www.humaneresearch.org.

Results Orientation and Tracking

Research can help us not only plan our efforts but also assess our results. At a rap session at the Animal Rights 2001 conference, a group of dedicated activists energetically debated various tactics for achieving change. Many comments took the form of, "I think we should do [whatever] because...." It's not about what we think, however, but rather about what our target customers do. Research can quantify the impact of programs and techniques so that we can have more confidence in what works best in a given situation. We can also use research and other data to measure against goals. It may be challenging to

define parameters for activities that produce long-term change, but we can monitor interim indicators. For example, a humane education initiative shapes children's viewpoints and behaviors many years in the future, but in the short term it is possible to track the number of students participating, their scores on attitudinal surveys before and after instruction, the teachers' rating of the class experience, the humane educator's assessment, and whether sessions were delivered on time and within budget.

By analyzing performance measures, we can make thoughtful course corrections as well as identify victories and shortcomings of a completed venture. Developing these insights will enable us to make better plans and accomplish more in the future. Groups and individuals who have not already implemented results tracking should do so, seeking input from organizations that have already determined how to gauge success for similar endeavors. Then we can compare our findings and pool new knowledge of the best ways to create change.

The "Business" of Change

In a plenary speech at the Animal Rights 2001 conference, SHARK President Steve Hindi stated that **now is the time for our movement to take advantage of proven business practices**. Nonprofit organizations and social change activists are increasingly turning to social marketing to advance their missions. Enhancing our customer focus, research-based decision-making and results tracking are critical steps toward increasing the effectiveness of our animal advocacy.

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Resources

"Marketing Social Change," Caryn Ginsberg, *Executive Update* magazine, <http://www.gwsae.org/executiveupdate/2004/May/change.htm>

"Selling Your Organization's Message," Kathy Savesky, *Animal Sheltering* magazine, http://www.hsus2.org/sheltering/magazine/currentissue/jan_feb99/feature_article1.html

"Introduction to Social Marketing," online, self-paced course by Caryn Ginsberg from Humane Society University, www.hsuonline.org

Social Marketing, Improving the Quality of Life; Kotler, Roberto and Lee; Sage Publications

Hands-On Social Marketing: A Step-by-Step Guide; Weinreich, Nedra Klein; Sage Publications.

Marketing Social Change: Changing Behavior to Promote Health, Social Development, and the Environment; Andreasen, Alan; Jossey-Bass.

Notes:

¹Philip Kotler, Marketing Management: the Millennium Edition, Prentice Hall, 2000, p. 175.

Priority Ventures Group helps nonprofits identify and act on what matters most to advance social change. To learn more about how your organization can achieve better results through social marketing, please contact Caryn Ginsberg at cginsberg@priorityventures.com or (703) 524-0024.

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