

PRODUCT ADVERTISING VERSUS IDEAS ADVERTISING

By Phil Harvey

Social marketing programs promoting the use of a product have distinct advantages over programs attempting to change behavior through the promulgation of ideas and arguments. Perhaps the most critical of these advantages is measurability. If increased use of contraceptives (i.e., higher contraceptive prevalence) is the objective of a social marketing program, and subsidized, good quality contraceptives can be made conveniently and ubiquitously available, then the sales of project contraceptives provide an immediate and clear way of measuring the effectiveness of an advertising campaign.

It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of this point. Most programs designed to alleviate poverty or advance social aims are extremely hard to measure and the result is frequently inefficiency and even undetected failure. When a socially motivated program, on the other hand, depends on the sale of products, those sales can be quickly measured. The sales, in the case of contraceptives, can be converted into a common measurement yardstick called couple years of protection (CYPs) and the relative cost-effectiveness of various programs quickly assessed. The tabulation of CYPs from sales statistics is not sufficient for measuring everything we need to know about the impact of family planning programs. This requires follow-up surveys to determine contraceptive prevalence—that is, the rate of contraceptive use in the society as measured by surveys of scientifically selected samples of the population. But sales statistics are an excellent proxy for the family planning “bottom line” and they tell us great deal about relative program efficiency very quickly (Harvey & Snyder, 1987).

Brand Advantage

In addition to this critical aspect of measurability, there are a number of other reasons why it is easier to promote and sell branded products than to attempt to achieve similar objectives through a generic campaign. A few of these reasons are:

- Brands convey quality, build confidence.
- Brands invite (useful) comparative claims.
- Brand names, especially for condoms, can become generic and facilitate purchase.
- Promoting branded products never seems — and is not — patronizing.
- Brand permits market segmentation and image building.
- Branded products are easier to keep stocked at retail, making them more convenient.
- Brand advertising subsumes the advantages (benefits) of the entire category.
- Brands help define and focus a campaign.
- Brands may be amenable to play on words.

First, brand advertising conveys quality. Although many individuals know intellectually that generic brands of some products are likely to be just as good as advertised brands, they still tend to believe that an advertised brand is of higher quality. In the case of condoms, for example, they are likely to think that Trojans or — in Bangladesh — Raja condoms are significantly superior to “condoms,” particularly if

the latter are supplied by the government or other social agency.

Second, brand advertising lends itself to comparative descriptions, which further impute quality: "Use Trust, the Strong Reliable Condom" sets Trust apart from run-of-the-mill products in the same category and creates a good spearhead for a campaign.

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Third, in the case of condoms particularly, a heavily advertised brand can become generic, especially in underdeveloped economies like Vietnam and Ethiopia, with the result that embarrassment at point-of-purchase can be lessened. A successful campaign in the Philippines, for example, was built around the slogan "Don't Say Condoms, Just Say Trust." Similarly, the Nirodh in India, Raja in Bangladesh, and Hiwot in Ethiopia have reached the level of generic terminology that provides definite point-of-purchase advantages. It is less embarrassing to ask for Trust or Hiwot than for "condoms," in part because these brands are heavily advertised.

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course, good message advertising, with no product, need not be patronizing either, but it easily can be and often is, whereas brand advertising strongly discourages this tendency. Most governments tend to be patronizing anyway, and when they advocate family planning (or, of even less interest to consumers, population control) their campaigns and viewpoint are often seen by consumers as an imposition rather than a benefit. Thus, the Indian government campaign over many years relied on the slogan "Two or Three Children Are Enough."

This struck many ordinary Indian citizens as being quite beside the point when it came to their own lives and reproductive habits. The same government unit has promoted Nirodh brand condoms as "The Safe Way to Love," a slogan that suggests a real consumer benefit. Also compare "Until You Want Another Child, Rely on Preethi," which was a successful brand advertising slogan for contraceptives in Sri Lanka. The latter conveys a substantial benefit to the consumer, whereas the "Two or Three Children" slogan is preachy and much less likely to have a useful impact. In the summary, it is hard to write a social marketing ad promoting a behavior ("Quit Smoking," "Buckle Up," "Have Only Two Children") without conveying to consumers the sense that they are being asked to do something that someone else thinks is good for them. The promotion of a branded product, on the other hand, easily lends itself to, indeed strongly encourages, a 100 % consumer orientation.

Branding facilitates market segmentation and image building. For example, in the Bangladesh project, the Raja condom was well-established as Bangladesh's "mainstream" condom brand and then the Sensation brand was introduced at a higher price to appeal to a more upscale market. (As is frequently the case, the "upscale" characteristics also appealed to low income markets in that country.) Branding also facilitates image making. If the Sensation condom is associated with the good life in an urban set-

ting (TV ads featured a well-to-do Bangladeshi man getting into a Mercedes), then this not only imparts quality to the product but, at the same time, contains the important message that even the wealthiest and best educated in society use condoms and their lives are better for it. Similarly, some condoms may be associated with sex and sensuality (the Panther brand in the Philippines; the Kama Sutra Brand in India). This expands the market, particularly in the context of AIDS prevention.

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It is much easier to keep branded products stocked in retail outlets. One of the great advantages of social marketing as a way of providing family planning is that it makes the product convenient. In Bangladesh, for example, the Raja condom is available in more than 120,000 retail outlets — major pharmacies, tiny stalls, or even crate-top “stores” offering only condoms and cigarettes. The retail trade is strongly influenced by mass media advertising and it is much easier to persuade retailers to buy and stock branded products than generics, if for no other reason because this is what storekeepers expect.

Brand advertising subsumes the benefits of the entire category. When promoting a categorical benefit (“Use condoms to space your children”), copywriters do not have the luxury of particularized brand advantages (“Use Zaroor condoms to space your children; Zaroor is manufactured to ISO 4074 standards”). But there is nothing in the brand promotion to prevent taking full advantage of the generic benefit. If using condoms conveys a benefit, then using a particularly good condom conveys an even greater benefit.

A campaign dealing with brands like the Raja condom or Choice oral contraceptive helps define organizational activity and focuses that activity in such a way as to significantly increase the use of those brands. Brand names generate their own ideas and identities and facilitate the creative process.

Brand names can also be selected and described so as to impart desired qualities or attributes, which may include the use of plays on words. The Prudence brand in Brazil, for example, has been incorporated into slogans that make effective use of the meaning of the word (“Use Prudence, it may save your life.”)

For these reasons, and the all-important matter of measurability, social marketing programs focused on brands have usually succeeded better than family planning campaigns built around ideas alone.

About The Author

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EDITOR'S NOTE:

William Schellstede, of Family Health International, and Thomas Merrick, of the World Bank, also participated in the panel on Contraceptive Social Marketing.

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