Social Marketing for Archives: The Austin History Center Experience
W. Bernard Lukenbill

SUMMARY. The author outlines the basic concepts of social marketing and describes how the Austin History Center at the Austin Public Library in Austin, Texas has used those concepts to build an outreach program for its targeted market. The discussion especially considers how the staff has identified problems that have historically hindered its relationship with some elements within its minority population and how it has developed programs and services which address the needs of Austin’s minority groups. Examples are provided that illustrate how the Center applied social marketing concepts and suggests that these techniques can be used by other archives and libraries. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2002 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS. Austin History Center (Austin, Texas), Austin History Center–social marketing, Austin History Center (Austin, Texas) outreach programs

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PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Managers of archives and libraries have known the power of marketing for decades; and as competition for resources and public support becomes more intense all aspects of marketing takes on new significance. This discussion addresses the concept of social marketing and how it can be and is being used by archives today in their overall marketing and public relations campaigns. The Austin History Center, a division of the Austin Public Library located in Austin, Texas will be used to illustrate some of the concepts that are important in social marketing.

BASIC DEFINITIONS

Marketing is the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promoting, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational goals. The next important term in understanding marketing is exchange theory. This is the process in which two or more groups in society voluntarily provide something of value to each other. The term marketing refers to individuals and organizations that have the desire and the ability to purchase or use a particular good or service. Consumers are the people who buy or use the goods and services for themselves or their households.1

Social Marketing is the application of the principles of marketing to special problems where the object is to change social behavior for the benefit of a target audience and for society.2

Social marketing seeks to influence behavior in several ways. The first of these is to change an action. This means that by social marketing strategies marketers, and in our case archives, attempt to influence a group of people to either stop doing something or to encourage them to start doing something. An example of social marketing is the positive effect of a social marketing campaign undertaken by United States government to discourage smoking launched in the 1960s. Through various social marketing strategies and laws, this policy has met most of its goals as today only about a third of the adult population smoke.

A second goal of social marketing is to change individual or group behavior, attitudes, or beliefs. This might be to chance the general attitudes held by a group of people about an archival program in the community. Perhaps the archives are considered by a group of people not to be very important in everyday life. They might feel that the archives are nice for a community, but that it really has nothing to offer them as they
go about their lives. An archival social marketing campaign might then be directed at changing this attitude or belief to one of viewing the archives as important to one’s life because it can satisfy real needs. A third type of social marketing is behavior re-enforcement. This is designed to reinforce and encourage behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs and other social objectives that are considered necessary for social progress. Such social agendas as often set through government policy. Such policies are generally communicated to the public through educational activities and public information management. This kind of information management is often referred to as public service information or as a public service message.

**BEHAVIOR-CHANGE: AN OBJECTIVE IN MARKETING**

Marketing is a management process and as such it needs to be guided by goals, objectives, and monetary consideration. Marketers generally follow a model called the AIDA model. It is based on the concept that a market message must be designed with these responses in mind:

- **A** Attention
- **I** Interest
- **D** Desire
- **A** Action

The market message must be noticed and it must attract attention. It must generate interest in the organization and in the product or service. The message must show that the product or service will be of benefit to the client now or in the future; thereby it creates a desire for the product or service. The last element is action. The potential client must be motivated to take positive action regarding the service or product. For social marketing campaigns, this model must educate and inform. Social marketing does not indoctrinate, but it does educate and inform possible users about choices and potentialities for betterment of both the individual and the group.

**METHODOLOGY**

The methodology used in this study is that of natural inquiry with the investigator assuming the role of impartial, outside observer. Data collection consisted of his experience as user of the Center both as a researcher and teacher. In addition to personal observations based on
use, data also included review of the center’s descriptive, published literature, visits to their website, and interviews the current administrative staff. News stories and accounts and references made to it in the local media also provided data.

**DESCRIPTION OF THE CENTER AND ITS MISSION AND SERVICES**

The Austin History Center is a part of the Austin Public Library. It was organized many years ago. In fact its been in existence so long that no one is really sure when it started. What is known is that it grew from small collections of items about Austin, comprising no more than a few shelves to a large collection now containing over 1 million items. Included in this collection are personal and family archives, books, photographs, maps, newspapers and ephemera all documenting Austin’s history from its founding in 1839 to the present. From the beginning the staff was very aware of the way archives needed to be organized and managed and from the beginning standard archival principles were established and followed. The current staff feels that this is not only a powerful legacy for to them, but that it solidified the importance of the Center to the power base of the city early in its development.

The stated mission of the Center is to collect and preserve materials about Austin and Travis County and to make them available for research to the local citizenry. To meet this mission information about local governments, businesses, residents, institutions, and neighborhoods is collected daily. Its audience is the individual citizen, the student and amateur researcher, as well as the professional scholar.

Included in the collection are such valuable materials as the papers of some former Texas governors and other persons of governmental and civic importance. The papers of short story writer O. Henry who lived in Austin for a number of years are also included. In addition, the center is recognized nationally for its outstanding collection of more than 600,000 photographic images. In addition, the center serves as the official repository for the records of the City of Austin and Travis County as well as for past issues and photographs of the major newspaper serving Austin and the area, the *Austin American Statesman*. Through its extensive exhibit program which is continually changing the Center has involved itself in the story of Austin people, places, issues, and events—both past and present.⁵
As mentioned earlier, libraries and archives have been aware of marketing for decades. We have evidence of this in the early writings of librarians as they sought to extend the library to many elements of American society. The society of the early 20th century was changing and complex, and marketing was needed to promote libraries to a largely uninformed public. With the growing complexity of the current information economy, marketing still maintains its importance and no cultural and educational institution can ignore it for long.

**APPROACHES USED IN SOCIAL MARKETING**

The administrative staff agrees that social marketing plays an important role in meeting the overall mission of the Austin History Center. One of the first principles used by the center in their approach to social marketing is to promote name recognition and to ensure that positive attitudes about the center are developed within certain target user groups. Although all user groups are important, the administration has identified minority populations as their primary target for social marketing.

One interesting technique used by the staff is to pose questions to the community about Austin and Travis County that can be answered through resources held by the Center. Using this strategy the staff has developed a set of questions about the city and country which they mount on their website periodically and which they ask of audiences whenever they speak to groups. These questions also appear on pencils that are given out to members of the audience and to others. A recent innovation is to have these questions asked on a local radio program with the first call-in listener who gives the correct answer winning a prize.

This radio station selection was fortunate for the Center. For some time, the Center had been attempting to reach out to racial minority groups in both the city and the county. To expedite this effort, the Center had just hired a neighborhood liaison officer to work with the African-American population. Soon after her assuming the position, she learned that a disc jockey on an early morning program was asking questions of the audience. It was apparent that he was having trouble coming up with interesting questions. She then had the idea to provide the questions about Austin and Travis County that could be answered from the Center’s resources. The station agreed to the format and a local business provides the gifts or prizes. Demographically, the station serves a largely African-American audience and its music format is rap-hiphop. The Afro-American population is a segment of the citi-
zenry that the Center wants to serve better and to build better attitudes about the Center among the populations. This station and its program format offered them a way to tap into that group. In theoretical terms, this strategy allowed the Center to both create awareness about the Center and to help change negative attitudes about it.7

**APPLYING SOCIAL MARKETING PRINCIPLES**

As mentioned, social marking is based on the general principles of marketing. Two principles of social marketing which cannot be ignored by any institution that plans social marketing are the ideas that marketing is customer driven and that quality services and programs must be offered.8

*Marketing Is Customer Driven*

Good marketing, including social marketing is customer driven. That is, it addresses customer needs and desires. Social marketing can also educate and inform customers about new ideas and procedures as well as products.

In business where profit is essential and where competition is intense, it is necessary to have a good marketing plan to identify correctly customer needs and desires and to inform and educate.

People have choices about the types of information sources they select. If archives and libraries are to survive they must sell their services and products based on correctly identified needs that reflect their major markets. To be successful in marketing, archivists and librarians must have good products and services and an important social institution to promote.

*Quality Products and Services*

In business marketers must be concerned about the quality of their products and services. We all know that in a market-driven economy it is difficult to market and to sale inferior products and services. Just as with any business, archives and libraries must have good products and services to present to consumers.

Over the years, the Austin History Center has developed an impressive array of products or services which it offers to the community. These include:
General Collection—including books, reports, budgets, directories, minutes and statistical complications.

Archives—2,000 linear feet of records and papers (mostly primary research materials of city and county departments, families, civic organizations, businesses and institutions; these comprise approximately 150 collections.

Photography Collection—more that 600,000 photographic images which visually demonstrate the people, events, architecture, topography and social customs of the area.

Periodicals—more than 1,101 titles of magazines, newspapers, and publications issued by local governments, civic organizations, and neighborhood groups including a complete run of the Austin American Statesmen since 1871.

Austin File—a vertical file of 9,500 subject folders containing clippings, pamphlets and ephemera which document local groups, businesses, events, and places.

Biography—a vertical file of folders containing information about the lives of more than 12,500 area residents who have made contributions to the community.

Architectural Archives—approximately 25,500 drawings and documents from project designed by local architectural firms.

Maps—more than 1,000 maps of Austin and Travis County from the mid-1800s to the present, including street, zoning and other special maps.

House/Building File—approximately 650 files of information about buildings and structures in the area, arranged by street address.

Recordings—approximately 1,000 disc and tape sound recordings, including oral history interviews and the music of local musicians; also, 1,600 videotapes of City Council and commission meetings and local news broadcasts.

Telephone Reference—questions about Austin/Travis County answered by telephone.

Photography Laboratory—Austin History Center offers an in-house photographic laboratory which produces copy negatives, slides, and prints for the Center and, on a commercial basis, for patrons requesting copies of photographs and other documents from the collections.

Meeting Rooms—meeting rooms are available for use by local nonprofit organizations.
MARKETABLE ATTRIBUTES

These are outstanding resources and programs and they serve as excellent examples of marketable products and services. Perhaps they are conventional in terms of what archives might be expected to offer. The Austin History Center, as is possible with any archives, has used these conventional collections to market its program as unique services available to the community.

In terms of social marketing there are several strategies and plans to use when planning a social marketing campaign. Among others, these include the physical place, goods, services, ideas, and promoting the archives as a social and cultural institution.  

The Physical Place

The physical place where the archives is located can be marketed. But before one attempts to market the archives as a physical place, one needs to ask these questions: is the archives located in a historic neighborhood; is the archives housed in a building that has unusual architectural features; and is the archives physically appealing. Management can’t really be successful in marketing a place unless it has appeal. Managers must first make sure that have an attractive space, worthy of marketing.

The Austin History Center is located in one of Austin’s beautiful historic districts. It is within easy walking distance of the Governor’s mansion and the state capitol complex. It is surrounded by an array of beautiful Victorian mansions, and it is across the street from a small, well-kept park, with an old fashioned bandstand in the center. The park itself dates back to 1839 when it was designated as one of four public squares for the new city.

The current building which houses the Center was begun in 1932 and it is a part of the Bremond Block Historic Walking Tour prepared by the City of Austin. The building is Italian Renaissance style, constructed of Cordova cream limestone. Much of the interior woodwork was carved by a local Swiss master woodcarver. In addition to the woodwork, local artisans also created ornamental wrought iron work and stone carvings for the balconies, windows and doors. Other local artists painted porch frescoes of mythological subjects that suggest learning. A renovation of the building in 1979 was careful to restore the building to much of its original design.
Good Services, Programs and Ideas

Good programs and services are fundamental to successful social marketing. Local archives can promote activities that support local pride and group identification through collection of materials and through displays, exhibits and web pages which highlight significant developments in the community. Ideas are promoted through the selection of information displays, discussion groups, and current awareness programs.

In terms of services and programs, one of the significant steps taken by the Austin History Center is the establishment of neighborhood liaison officers. As mentioned earlier, the African-American community liaison officer is now on staff, and a Hispanic community officer is to be hired soon. The roles of these officers are to specifically plan services and programs for these two minority groups. Several means to meet these goals have already been taken. First of all, the officers act as deputies for the Center. They go out into the community with information, programs, and services.13

Archives as a Cultural and Social Institution

Archives presented as a cultural and social institutions can be marketed. Archivists can seek to identify archives as an important cultural and social institution in the community and they can define archives as a social and cultural institution in ways that are marketable and understood by the target market community. The Austin History Center reaches out to the community in many ways. It is now working with the Austin Jewish community in preparation for the 125th year celebration the founding of the first Austin synagogue. It has a number of traveling exhibits that go out into the community. These are portable and easily assembled exhibits that can be taken out into the community for display and which reflect cultural and social activities of the community. It also encourages local groups to gather oral histories and offers instruction in oral history techniques. It has a program of focus groups whereby groups are encouraged to gather and share their remembered experiences. A Photo Heritage Day is an ongoing activity. This program encourages individuals to bring their family, business, or organization’s photographs and other memorabilia to a neighborhood center for copying by the Center staff. The Center not only makes copies of materials for its collection, but it makes duplicate copies for the owners. The Center has found this an ideal way to collect materials for the collection that probably would never come into the collection, and at the same time re-
inforcing the concept that the Center is a vital part of community life. Similarly, this program offers participants a sense of being involved with Austin and its culture.

**RECOGNIZING AND ADDRESSING PROBLEMS**

Neglect Through Government Action and Policy

One of the Center’s immediate mandates is to reach the leadership within these minority communities and to encourage them to promote the Center to their constituencies. To do this, it is obvious to management that they must understand the community and acknowledge some of the historic problems that have prevented positive communication between the Center and minority populations.

The Center now has a working relationship with the Black Historical Society in Austin and is seeking to better relationship with the Hispanic community. Because of historical reasons, this is not always easy. Hostilities toward the Center do exist because of its association in the minds of many with the white, power establishment.

A report by the consultant firm of Koch and Fowler prepared for Austin’s City Planning Commission in 1928 was uncovered a few years ago in the Center’s archives and this report clearly shows that a deliberate, official policy was adopted in the early 1930s by the city which forced minority populations, especially the black population and later the Hispanic population to reside in a designated “Negro district” of the city known as “east Austin.” The policy also encouraged heavy and unhealthy industries to locate in this area. How could a city encourage a population to live in one part of the city? The city and the school system simply stopped providing services to enclaves of minority people living outside the designated area. In other words, schools for minority children would not be built outside the area, roads would not be improved or even provided, and other public services would not be offered to meet the report’s objective of solving the “segregation problem.” The report reads:

> It is our recommendation that the nearest approach to the solution of the race segregation problem will be the recommendation of a Negro district; and that all the facilities and conveniences be provided the Negroes in this district, an incentive to draw the Negro population to this area. This will eliminate the necessity of duplication of white and black schools, white and black parks, and other duplicate facilities.
In recent years the result of this policy has become both clear and problematic. The city government of today must now address problems of pollution, health problems, poverty, and educational problems that can be traced directly to the location of industry within east Austin.

In recent years the city’s Civil Rights Commission has used this 1928 policy to outline the historic neglect of the minority populations by the city and to help a more enlightened city government to make corrections. Although the city is making efforts to undo the wrong, the documented evidence of city policy uncovered in the Center has again reminded the minority population of their historic neglect by the social, cultural, and political power structure of the city. Melvin Wrenn, a current planning activist who has served on several city planning panels and who has researched east Austin extensively says that “There isn’t much the new society can do until it looks back to undo what the old society did 70-plus years ago.”

Misunderstanding Archival Processes

Another problem that the minority liaison officer must face is a basic lack of understanding among many in the community about how archival materials are processed and made available. The time required to prepare materials for public use and the tools which are necessary so that materials can be found when they are needed is not well understood and this often promotes the perception that the Center has little interest in minority materials because they are not visible.

One immediate project which the African-American neighborhood liaison officer has been doing is surveying the collection and identifying specific African-American materials. This is important because the attitude in the African-American community has often been that the Center holds nothing that reflects their community or achievements. The liaison officer must not only convince the community that materials do exist in the collection, but she must also prepare specific finding guides for this materials.

Because the minority communities have not always treated well by the Austin power establishment, the Center faces a certain level of hostility. There are old myths and misperceptions about the Center and its relationship to government that must be addressed. Negative attitudes, mistrust and hostility exist within the minority leadership and these must be recognized. Some of these are long-standing, while others come from recent decisions made by city or county government. There is still a feeling that any government action is just another game that the
white establishment is playing. The destruction of much of the minority community’s culture and neighborhoods through urban renewal projects of the 1960s is well remembered, as are recent decisions by city government which closed off certain section of the community’s areas customarily used by many in the area for recreation. The Center’s strategy is to seek to overcome these attitudes with programs, services, and a clear and honest mission. The Center would like to reach large groups of people, but they also realize that the minority leadership must be reached first, one-person-at-a-time, and that trusts must be built.²¹

CONCLUSION

Social marketing is really not a mystery. It has been with society from the beginning of human communication. Much of social marketing is simply the applying of common sense in presenting a good product to an audience. The Austin History Center has met the challenges of social marketing well and its program can well serve as a model for other local history centers.

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