
Strategies of Media Marketing for "America Responds to AIDS" and Applying Lessons Learned

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Synopsis

The Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) public service announcement (PSA) campaign on acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), entitled "America Responds to AIDS," has provided an opportunity to examine various media marketing techniques and their effectiveness in setting and sustaining a national media agenda for public health. The overall objective was to enlist the media as a partner in the effort to establish a clear national public health agenda on AIDS by reaching

as many Americans as possible with disease prevention information in a credible and acceptable way.

In order for the media to become interested in a subject traditionally treated as health information rather than a "news story," CDC identified and employed various methods and tools to generate coverage. These included the use of news conferences, video and audio news releases, satellite interviews, and press kits developed for each phase of the campaign. News "hooks" were used to grab attention; for example, the use of well-known public health spokespersons in media events or the promotion of free collateral materials.

The marketing approach undertaken for each phase of the campaign varied, and lessons were learned and applied along the way. A model emerged indicating that a combination of techniques could result in maximum exposure in both news stories and public affairs programming. Because the model allowed messages to be delivered credibly and consistently, the result was increased usage of the PSAs to coincide with the media coverage.

THE ACQUIRED IMMUNODEFICIENCY SYNDROME (AIDS) epidemic has offered unique challenges in marketing public health messages to the media. Richard Manoff, in his book entitled "Social Marketing," wrote of the importance to public health education of the "use of the mass media in the fashion of the commercial marketer. That means *planned* use of the media to deliver well-designed messages consistent with predetermined strategies" (1). Similar marketing techniques employed with the "America Responds to AIDS" (ARTA) public service announcement (PSA) campaign have proven successful in setting and sustaining a national media agenda on AIDS—that is, media attention to AIDS and how that attention influences public opinion. To understand the factors contributing to the effectiveness of the various approaches, it is necessary to examine how the different phases of the campaign were marketed to

the media and the prevailing climate and understanding of the epidemic at the time.

Phase I

Climate. Early in the epidemic, the media, like the rest of the public, were seeking information in the midst of panic and fear. During 1987, interest in the subject was at its highest point since the disease surfaced in the early 1980s, yet confusion levels were equally high. Myths and inaccuracies about transmission modes had been perpetuated for 6 years. A perception had been created of certain population groups being at risk, as opposed to certain risk behaviors endangering those who practiced them. Without strong, clear public health messages, the media established their own agenda in terms of how the disease was to be defined and addressed in news accounts. The CDC, under the congressional

mandate to educate the public about AIDS, needed to take the lead by generating accurate information for dissemination by the media.

Response. The first media “launch” of the ARTA campaign came in September 1987. A national news conference with high-level public health officials, including the Secretary of Health and Human Services, was held the last day of the month to coincide with the beginning of “AIDS Awareness Month,” designated as October. Representatives from 50 major national television, radio, and print outlets were in attendance.

In conjunction with the news conference, CDC used standard media techniques to help shape the broadcast coverage of the PSA campaign. Two video news releases (VNRs) were produced and distributed to 650 television stations. VNRs are short (usually 2 minutes or less in length), informational news packages about a specific issue, event, or product. Television stations in small- and medium-size markets will usually air the VNR in its entirety, while the larger market stations may excerpt portions from the tape as their news anchors or reporters read the script. In either case, the story is portrayed just as it is intended with little room for interpretation or confusion.

Another technique was the use of live and recorded satellite news interviews. Television stations were offered the opportunity to interview, via satellite, top public health officials. The stations could then air the interviews live or tape the interviews and replay them later in their evening newscasts. This arrangement also afforded CDC the ability to send the PSAs directly to the participating stations via satellite as opposed to through the mail, thereby drawing attention to the public service materials and making them readily available for use.

A total of 38 television spots, 8 radio commercials, and 6 print advertisements were distributed to the U.S. media. The materials were accompanied by a letter to public service directors of stations (those who handle placement of PSAs on the air) and editors who handle print placements encouraging them to use the materials. Realizing that the media receive hundreds of such requests each month, the CDC and its contractor, Ogilvy and Mather, developed a special ARTA logo to make the materials instantly recognizable as part of the Federal Government’s campaign to combat AIDS.

Results. The news media were extremely responsive in providing coverage of the first launch. More

than 222 stories were published, resulting in 49 million reader impressions. (Impressions are based on the publication’s circulation figures. They are an estimate of the potential number of people who had access to the story at least once.) News pieces were broadcast on network nightly news shows on NBC, CBS, ABC, and CNN. Radio reports aired on major public and private national radio outlets. At least 66 television stations in 43 markets used the VNRs.

With the unveiling of CDC’s national AIDS education and information campaign, the media became aware of a national public health agenda on the subject. Misinformation and unwarranted fears were beginning to be appropriately addressed, and a foundation based on facts was laid.

Phase II

Climate. Despite the favorable media response to the October 1987 launch, a feeling among the media prevailed that not enough was being done by the government to educate people about AIDS. The PSAs had been disseminated, but there was still public confusion on issues of prevention and transmission. The need continued to increase the media participation in the AIDS dialogue. It was at this time that Congress mandated that CDC distribute an AIDS brochure to every American household.

Response. The national mailing of the brochure, “Understanding AIDS,” provided an opportunity for extensive media coverage for a number of reasons. First, the mailing was the first of its kind—an unprecedented mailing by the Federal Government of a health-related document to every U.S. household; in itself, this was an enticing news hook. Second, the brochure gave the media a tangible product to promote. Third, its promotion by a highly visible public health figure, U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, further attracted the media.

On May 4, 1988, another national news conference with top health officials, featuring the U.S. Surgeon General, was held to launch the mailing. Embargoed press kits were mailed to arrive the day of the news event to ensure a controlled, simultaneous release by the media. Endorsements from major national and community-based organizations were included in the press kits to enhance the credibility of the brochure, as well as to provide the media with other story angles.

Four television PSAs announcing the upcoming June mailing and encouraging readership were developed and marketed to the major networks and

local stations. Print advertisements were distributed in advance to national publications. A newsletter, detailing the previous phase and the upcoming mailing, was sent directly to the media. The National Association of Broadcasters assisted CDC by delivering the PSAs, via satellite, to its 600 affiliates.

Results. The national mailing received extensive media attention in both national and local markets; 1,376 articles appeared in general audience publications, 86 in black publications, and 86 in the Hispanic media. Reader impressions exceeded 350 million. Television and radio coverage resulted in 144 broadcast stories, generating more than 700 million audience impressions (similar to reader impressions but based on Nielson ratings for the various broadcasts).

As a result of the intense marketing, print PSAs received placement in such nationally known magazines as Time and People. National networks gave television PSAs free air time equivalent to \$3.7 million worth of advertising.

Phase III

Climate. During 1988, the media were still focusing on modes of transmission for the disease, and there was great alarm about such issues as casual contact. Sensational stories were occasionally appearing, sustaining the public's fear level. In addition, the media were zeroing in on the disproportionately high rates of infection among blacks and Hispanics. This publicity tended to increase dangerous stereotyping and reinforce the myth that only certain groups were at risk for the disease.

Response. Originally, CDC intended to launch this phase of the campaign at two separate events targeting two different audiences. One event, for the campaign segment targeting women at risk, would be held in May 1988, and the other, targeting sexually active adults, in the fall of that year. However, the congressional mandate calling for the national mailing to occur by June 30, 1988, necessitated postponing the May launch. Ultimately both target audiences were combined, and the campaign was released at a single event in the fall.

On October 17, 1988, the Assistant Secretary for Health and the Director of the CDC held a national news conference in Washington, DC, to launch "Women at Risk and Multiple Partners/Sexually Active Adults." It was attended by 24 broadcast reporters and 18 print reporters from national

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and local outlets. Another predeveloped VNR was distributed.

The media marketing for this phase of the campaign also included special outreach to the minority media. A separate media event was held in December in New York to launch the campaign specifically to the black community. A press kit was developed in Spanish and mailed to more than 400 Spanish-language media outlets.

Results. The media coverage of this phase of the campaign, while positive in content, was the lowest in volume of any phase to date. However, articles were carried by Jet magazine, the Associated Press, and the Miami Times, partially due to the special efforts to involve media predominately serving racial or ethnic minority audiences.

Important lessons were learned from this phase. Unlike the previous phases, this one offered varying messages for different target audiences. There was no central theme for the media to grasp and present in a clear story. Without a single "hook," the result was less coverage.

In addition, this was the CDC's first attempt at relying heavily on State health departments to market the ARTA materials to their local media through distributing materials directly to the States. In recognizing the important role that the States could play in the campaign, CDC also recognized the need to improve their capacity to work with the media for future efforts.

Phase IV

Climate. During early 1989, the issue of AIDS had been relegated to a less prominent position in the media. It was viewed as a disease striking mainly the urban poor and minorities. The topics of prevention and transmission had been addressed. The subject seemed to have become practically unnewsworthy.

Response. While the prevailing attitude was approaching apathy, scientific researchers were un-

covering some revealing facts. Statistics indicated that the fastest growing proportion of people being diagnosed with AIDS was in the age group between 20 and 29. Scientists warned that many of these people became infected as teenagers.

On May 25, 1989, CDC launched the fourth phase of its ARTA campaign targeting parents and youth. The news conference, held again in Washington with top public health officials, was attended by more than 50 national media representatives.

A VNR, with a Spanish-language translation, was produced and distributed. Three audio news releases were developed for radio and produced for general audience, black, and Hispanic media. Television stations in different markets took part in satellite news interviews with top health officials from the Department of Health and Human Services and CDC.

An integral part of this phase of the campaign was the "AIDS Prevention Guide," an informational tool that parents and other concerned adults could use to educate young people about HIV infection and AIDS. The Guide served as an important support piece to the campaign, giving the media a tangible focus (similar to the national mailer sent in 1987). Advance copies of the Guide and press kit were sent to nearly 1,200 national and local media, including 375 television health reporters and nationally syndicated advice columnists. Endorsements for the Guide were obtained in advance from 28 national organizations and included in the press kit. This endorsement listing helped make the issue relevant and credible. It also assisted in marketing the campaign because the organizations felt ownership of the materials and were willing to promote their distribution and use.

Sustaining response. After the initial launch, CDC undertook several activities to keep parents and youth in the forefront of media attention. These included

- A luncheon with key editors and reporters from national magazines such as *Mademoiselle*, *Family Circle*, *Seventeen*, *Parents*, and *American Health*. CDC officials discussed the AIDS epidemic and distributed phase IV print materials and the Guide.
- Meetings with major television and radio networks executives in New York, including general audience and minority outlets. An update on the disease was presented, as well as a preview of the new broadcast materials.
- A similar meeting with reporters, science and

health editors, and the Sunday editor of the *New York Times*.

- A meeting with 75 public service and community affairs directors from a cross-section of markets to give an overview of the epidemic, as well as a special preview of the new PSA materials well in advance of their release.
- Outreach to media that predominately serve racial or ethnic minority audiences. This outreach took place in meetings in Chicago with major black print publications, and a special media launch in Miami of a Spanish-language music video that was produced as part of the campaign. In addition, two photos with captions featuring public health officials and Miss America 1990 (who is black) displaying the Guide were released to black print outlets.
- The development of a handbook to assist State health departments and other organizations not only in using the materials but also in building effective media coalitions.

Results. The media response to the phase IV launch and the "AIDS Prevention Guide" was universally positive in terms of the content of the stories that they ran. The three strategies designed to obtain television coverage—the news conference, the VNRs, and the satellite news interviews—worked effectively. Highlights of the broadcast (TV and radio) coverage included

- Evening news reports on ABC, "USA Today on TV," CNN, and the "MacNeil-Lehrer News Hour," reaching an audience of 38 million.
- Use of the VNRs, representing nearly 2.5 million potential viewers, by 33 stations in 29 markets.
- The satellite news interviews aired on 21 stations in 20 markets, potentially reaching 2.4 million people.
- On the day of the launch, the nationally syndicated television program "Geraldo!" taped a program on AIDS, which featured materials from "parents and youth" and the National AIDS Hotline number. The program generated 6,775 calls to the Hotline on the day that it aired.
- Major radio networks, including National Public Radio, ABC, CBS, and Pacifica, attended the news conference and filed reports with their affiliates.
- The audio news releases were accepted by 127 stations and 15 networks in 38 States. More than 1,500 radio stations received a parents and youth campaign message, generating a potential audience of 5.5 million listeners.

Sampling of print coverage of the parents and youth phase has identified more than 400 news articles, creating at least 154 million reader impressions. Some of the print highlights include

- Representatives from the Associated Press and a number of major newspaper syndicates, including Hearst, The L.A. Times, and Knight-Ridder, attended the news conference and prepared stories. The Guide was front page news in USA Today.
- On the campaign phase, 321 different print publications (6 national and 315 local) carried articles. Four of these publications have a circulation greater than 1 million.
- A story on the Guide appeared in the October/November 1989 issue of *Modern Maturity*, which goes to more than 19 million members of the American Association of Retired People.
- The January 1990 issue of *Good Housekeeping* included information on the Guide in the free booklets column in its "Better Way" section. The magazine has a circulation of 5 million.

Conclusion

As the ARTA campaign messages were developed and different media marketing techniques were employed to deliver them, a strategy for obtaining maximum exposure was emerging. The parents and youth phase of the ARTA campaign combined and expanded upon proven elements of success from previous phases. The strategy included enlisting the support of national organizations, community-based organizations, and AIDS service providers, resulting in credible endorsements. These endorsements were included in the press kits and used to market the materials. Advance promotional efforts included meeting with national and local news media or public service representatives to discuss editorial opportunities and to encourage public service donations. The technique of combining a news conference with a VNR, an audio news release, satellite news interviews, and press kits generated close to 200 million audience impressions from television and radio audiences. Coordination with State health and education departments in the distribution of the PSAs and supporting materials contributed to the initial momentum and the sustained effort.

The editorial exposure in the news media (that is, stories on the new phase being covered in newscasts) generated an awareness of the issues and increased government credibility. This in turn re-

sulted in acceptance and increased use of the PSAs. Monthly donated air time set aside for the PSAs rose to a 13-month high in July 1989 after the introduction of the parents and youth phase in May of that year. As a result, July 1989 was the fifth highest month for donations since the introduction of the ARTA campaign in October 1987. Print placements of parents and youth PSAs as of November 1989 totalled a value exceeding \$300,000.

The strategies employed in the media marketing of ARTA served to create and foster a national media agenda on AIDS as well as establish the government as a credible public health information source and leader. The attention generated through the news media also had an impact on public affairs programming, resulting in the increased use of the campaign's public service announcement materials. The messages were marketed to the media deliberately and consistently. This translated into giving the public important basic information on the prevention of HIV infection.

The media marketing techniques employed by ARTA can be combined and used as a model for other campaigns in the health communications arena. The first step is to identify the news hook or angle of the health information or prevention message to be relayed. This angle should be a predominant, clearly understood message that is closely related to the overall theme or direction of the campaign and its target audience. It can be further bolstered through the use of support materials and recognizable spokespersons.

The next step is to launch the campaign through the news media by employing a combination of the available tools (that is, advance media briefings, news conferences, video news releases, and so forth). Sustained marketing of the campaign is achieved through the inclusion of "partners" (that is, States, national organizations, community-based organizations, and so on) in the development and implementation stages. Special efforts to provide briefings and materials (that is, broadcast quality tapes and camera-ready artwork) to the public service directors, both initially and post-launch, ensure the continued exposure of campaign messages.

Reference

1. Manoff, Richard K.: *Social marketing: new imperative for public health*. Praeger, New York, 1985.