

Catfish in the Mainstream: Social Marketing and Change

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Abstract

Water education is ‘real life’ education. If Tennessee’s population continues to grow as it has in the last ten years, we will soon be approaching a crisis situation regarding clean, potable water. Our economy, the health of our citizens, and wildlife habitat are dependent on plentiful and safe sources of clean water.

This year *WaterWorks!* – a new initiative in outreach education for the Center for Environmental Education at Middle Tennessee State University, funded by the TN Department of Agriculture Nonpoint Source Program – was launched, focused on improving water quality in Tennessee. *WaterWorks!* models social change through focused marketing to an audience of Tennessee households and homeowners, with specific components designed to promote and reinforce the message of individual responsibility. Highlights:

- a series of video and audio public service announcements promoting clean water quality through responsible action
- a website showcasing public service announcements, youth projects, links to water-related groups and sites in TN
- “Stream Savers,” a recognition program for youth groups completing projects that improve water quality
- a state-wide survey providing baseline information about citizen water quality attitudes and actions
- brochures focusing on homeowner, builder, developer, contractor, and agriculture practices
- an interactive watershed map with watershed links, groups, stormwater information, and county/city contacts
- stakeholder meetings with NPDES Phase II representatives and others involved in water quality efforts in Tennessee

Introduction

Social marketing=advertising? The average person may equate the two terms, but according to an expert in this field, Les Robinson (1998), advertising is “not about changing behavior. It’s about changing *brands*”. In thinking about solutions to environmental issues and problems, the focus is usually on a change in *behavior*, one brought about either through a revision of attitudes or a forced compliance to a rule or law. Robinson’s focus is not on building awareness but on removing barriers to behavior

change. An excellent source about the theory and application of social marketing techniques is *Fostering Sustainable Behavior* by Douglas McKenzie-Mohr (1999), who advises those interested in social marketing techniques to study benefits of, and barriers to, the desired behavior.

WaterWorks!, a new education initiative funded by the TN Department of Agriculture Nonpoint Source Program and implemented through the Center for Environmental Education at Middle Tennessee State University, was launched to improve water quality in Tennessee, and has a multi-faceted approach with components added and strengthened over the project period. The *WaterWorks!* education campaign is designed to change behavior by first promoting awareness, then adding knowledge and skill-building with subsequent messages, so that citizens are brought to an awareness that individual decisions affect water quality, their actions make a difference, and that together, responsible attitudes and actions can change water quality for the better.

The Project

The first phase of the project was to develop a series of video and audio messages promoting clean water through responsible action, a statewide survey to create a baseline about what Tennessee citizens know and *do* about water quality, a recognition program for youth, and stakeholder meetings with others involved in water quality statewide. A website to showcase the messages and provide an information base for the program was begun, with links to other helpful watershed organizations and state agency sites. Additionally, currently on the website is a watershed map in its basic form, with plans to add information about whom to contact locally for information on particular municipalities as well as volunteer watershed groups within a county or a watershed.

Project Components

Video and Audio Messages

Three video messages and four radio messages were created and were aired for the first time September 16, 2003; they are aired as non-commercial sustaining messages through the Tennessee Association of Broadcasters (TAB) and were sent to 321 radio stations and 33 commercial television stations across the state. During the first two months of the program (October and November, 2003) the television spots aired more than 460 times and radio announcements had 4,519 airings.

The television spots featured Chuck the Catfish, a gruffly lovable character who in one message, a la Dr. Seuss, exhorts citizens to “abstain from putting bad stuff in the drain” in order “to maintain my wet domain”; in another message, Chuck admonishes adult citizens who exhibit irresponsible behavior that hurts water quality; in the third message, he is teaching clean water tips to a classroom of children who are already very aware of the correct behavior.

Two of the radio messages are the voice of Chuck the Catfish; the other two are based on an original song, “I Am the River” by Nashville singer/songwriter Dan Tyler (“Bobbie

Sue,” “Hearts on Fire,” “Twenty Years Ago,” “The Light in Your Eyes”) who graciously donated the use of his song for this campaign.

Statewide Survey

In 2003, the Social Science Research Institute at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, conducted a telephone survey of adult residents of Tennessee regarding perceptions of water quality across the state and household habits pertaining to the disposal methods of potential pollutants. Additionally, respondents were asked about their knowledge of nonpoint source pollution and preferences for the financing of water quality improvement. The survey was conducted using the Random Digit Dialing method. A total of 871 randomly-selected adult residents of Tennessee were interviewed with a resulting +/- 3.3% margin of error. The cooperation rate for the survey was 35.9% (Social Science Research Institute, 2003).

Results of the survey indicated that while over 85% of respondents were satisfied with the quality of their drinking water (almost 45% ranked it “good”), 36.8% of those surveyed ranked the water quality of their rivers and streams as “fair” and 30% “good.” Over 76% of Tennesseans surveyed believe that everyday activities in our homes, workplaces, and cars cause most water pollution. Just over 80% believe that small changes in people’s daily habits will improve water quality, with the likelihood of disagreeing with this statement increasing as age increases. Over 93% of Tennesseans surveyed were not familiar with the term “nonpoint source pollution” but once the term was explained, respondents expressed agreement as to important sources of nonpoint source pollution: agricultural chemical runoff, automobile fluid runoff, construction runoff, and lawn chemicals. A finding of significant importance to stormwater managers across the state is how Tennesseans prefer to pay for the costs of improving water quality: over two to one prefer an assessed fee rather than a general tax increase.

Trained personnel, using a Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) System, conducted all interviews. The survey was designed and analyzed by Dr. Michael M. Gant, Director, Social Science Research Institute and Linda M. Daugherty, Program Director, Social Science Research Institute for the *WaterWorks* Program at the Center for Environmental Education, Middle Tennessee State University.

Youth Recognition Program

In fall 2003, *WaterWorks!* began its “Stream Savers” program. Youth groups, both formal and informal (classrooms, clubs, Scouts, 4-H, Boys and Girls Clubs, etc.) in Tennessee could win \$300 for their water quality project; monthly winners are eligible for further recognition in 2004 by competing for an annual award of an additional \$500.

Eligible projects include, but are not limited to:

- River or stream cleanup
- Water testing
- Stream bank repair/restoration
- Education or awareness project

From fall 2003 through spring 2004, six school or club groups were awarded ‘Stream Saver’ status. Winners included clubs and classes from elementary, secondary and home-school groups, with projects such as:

- bundling trees for distribution with an accompanying informational brochure for streambank restoration
- stream cleanups
- macroinvertebrate sampling
- water sampling and testing
- maintaining annual records of aquatic wildlife and macroinvertebrates
- river trail maintenance
- water education programs

Many of the awarded projects were ‘combination’ projects that accomplished more than one of the above activities.

Stakeholder Meetings

WaterWorks! is connected with a variety of water-related organizations and groups, and has had representation at state, regional, national and international levels. Sample groups include: TN Environmental Education Association, Environmental Education Association of Alabama, TN Council of Social Studies, TN Educators of Aquatic and Marine Sciences, TN Section of the American Water Resources Association, National Conference Nonpoint Source Pollution Information & Education Programs, North American Association of Environmental Education.

Website

WaterWorks! website (www.tennesseewaterworks.com or www.mtsu.edu/waterworks) is unique in that its homepage showcases beautiful water features of Tennessee, with the permission of the photographer, Mack Prichard. Opportunities for others to share their Tennessee water pictures are available; credit is always given to the photographer.

Website features include:

- About *WaterWorks!*
- Public Service Announcements
- Youth Recognition
- Brochures (under ‘construction’)
- Survey
- 10 Water Tips
- Watershed Map
- Watershed Groups
- Links

Watershed Groups

Watershed groups, friends' groups, and other water-related organizations are listed on our website; updates are made as groups asked to be listed or linked. Additional links are/will be made to state (and other agencies) and organizations on the "Links" page. As the "Watershed Map" page becomes more interactive (county names in green are a hot button to a GIS-generated map of the county and main waterways, watershed groups and MS4 contacts), watershed group contact information is checked and rechecked, making sure that the information is consistent and current.

Watershed Map

One of the most interesting features of the website is a state map with watersheds overlaid on the counties. Plans for developing this page include adding contact information about watershed groups in each watershed, city/county officials in charge of stormwater permits, whom to contact for suspected pollution, etc.

Waterworks! in the 'Mainstream'

Opportunities for the Tennessee Phase I and Phase II MS4's (municipal separate stormwater sewer systems) to fulfill their public education and outreach commitments are available through the use of *WaterWorks!* video and audio messages.

To ensure that radio and television stations would air the announcements, *WaterWorks!* entered into a contract with the Tennessee Association of Broadcasters (TAB) to utilize that organization's Non-Commercial Sustaining Announcement (NCSA) program. Once *WaterWorks!* provides TAB copies of the television and radio announcements, TAB handles distribution of the spots to over 331 member stations. Under terms of the contract, *WaterWorks!* is guaranteed a four-to-one ratio of advertising value generated to cost. In other words, a \$10,000 investment would yield at least \$40,000 in advertising value.

During the first two months of the program (October and November, 2003), the actual results show that the advertising value of the *WaterWorks!* campaign was \$88,800 (the cost to *WaterWorks!* for these two months was \$1,667). The television spots aired more than 460 times and radio announcements had 4,519 airings---over 53 times the value paid.

Because not all stations report the airing of these announcements, we are confident that the true value of this program is actually much higher.

We plan to use the survey form again in the spring of 2005, including questions which indicate whether respondents remembered seeing or hearing the television and radio spots. Additional ads will be created and released in the year 2004-2005, so respondents to the spring 2005 survey will have two years to have heard or seen the ads.

Conclusion

WaterWorks! is a unique partnership between private and public entities, providing a usable, affordable way for municipalities to implement a uniform public outreach plan statewide that helps meet their stormwater education plan requirements. Through a recognized and respected agency, attention-getting and informational messages are created and aired with the help of the Tennessee Association of Broadcasters. Through the Stream Savers' program, *WaterWorks!* recognizes, in a meaningful way, projects of formal and informal youth groups that improve water quality; the watershed map, groups page, and links on the website provide additional information in an easily-understood format for citizens and municipal officials alike.

Resources

McKenzie-Mohr, Douglas. 1999. *Fostering Sustainable Behavior*: New Society Publishers.

Robinson, Les, *A 7-Step Social Marketing Approach*, a presentation to Waste Educate 98 Conference: Social Change Media, <http://media.socialchange.net.au/strategy/>.

Social Science Research Institute. 2003. *Tennesseans' Perceptions of Water Quality and Knowledge of Nonpoint Source Pollution*: University of Tennessee, Knoxville.