

Consumer Affairs Victoria

Social Marketing and Consumer Policy

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“ Preface ”

While many consumer agencies use information strategies to influence consumers' or trader behaviour, these strategies often fail to generate the behavioural changes desired. Social marketing is a comprehensive approach to policy development that targets behavioural change.

This paper discusses how social marketing is used in other social policy fields, such as environmental and health policy, and the potential for consumer agencies to learn from the experience in other areas. While not suited to all consumer problems, there appears to be scope for consumer agencies to expand their use of social marketing.

The research paper is one in a series designed to stimulate debate on consumer policy issues. It does not represent government policy and is intended as a basis for discussion only. It is informed by a related paper on *Information Provision and Education Strategies*, which discusses the strengths and weaknesses of information strategies and how consumers use available information.

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“ *Social marketing and consumer policy* ”

Many consumer agencies use information campaigns and marketing to influence people's behaviour and reduce the risk of consumer detriment. Such strategies involve messages such as informing teenagers about the impact of excessive debts, encouraging householders to use licensed tradespeople or informing businesses about ethical processes for conducting real estate auctions.¹ Evaluations of these information campaigns often measure the penetration and accessibility of the information, but not its success in changing behaviour. Sometimes, the target audience is aware of the messages being delivered but does not respond by changing its behaviour.

This raises a question about whether there are other, more effective ways to tackle behavioural change. One alternative could be to use strategies that focus more on the individual's behaviour and less on simply providing information, for example, social marketing. Consumer Affairs Victoria already takes social marketing strategies into account in some of its activities – for example, it is considering whether community based social marketing can be used in areas such as youth debt and the safe handling of asbestos. It may be possible to increase the use and effectiveness of such strategies by better understanding the barriers to behavioural change.

Social marketing can target consumers and traders. While relevant to all consumers, it may highlight new ways to assist vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers in particular, who are often the least responsive to traditional efforts to influence behaviour through information provision. It may also encourage compliance by creating industry environments that promote ethical behaviour, increasing consumer confidence and hence business growth, and reducing the need for other forms of regulation.

This paper looks at the potential to use social marketing tools to achieve consumer policy objectives. It discusses the following questions:

- What is social marketing?
- When do consumer policies need to target behavioural change?
- What are the tools and processes that social marketing uses to achieve behavioural change, and how do they differ from traditional consumer policy tools?
- Under what circumstances is a social marketing approach likely to reduce the risk of consumer detriment and improve traders' business practices?

¹ See section 2 of the Consumer Affairs Victoria Research Paper **Information Provisions and Education Strategies**.

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“What is social marketing?”

1

While different commentators vary somewhat in their definition of social marketing, it can be broadly defined as:

the application of marketing concepts, tools, and techniques to any social issue. (Donovan & Henley 2003, p. ix)

The objective of social marketing is to change individuals' behaviour to achieve a socially desirable goal (Donovan & Henley 2003, p. ix). The key aspects of social marketing are its approach to policy development and the way in which it applies policy tools:

- It uses policy development processes that are grounded in research and fact. Each strategy is preceded by an analysis of the problem, trialled and subject to ongoing monitoring, and evaluated for its success.
- It uses tools that encourage behavioural change and break down barriers to change, often relying on a multifaceted approach that simultaneously informs, persuades and uses incentives and deterrents.

While social marketing applies concepts, tools and techniques that are common to commercial marketing strategies, it is considerably more complex and often more ambitious in its objectives. There are four main areas of difference between commercial marketing and social marketing. First, the purpose of social marketing is to benefit the individuals who are the target of the campaign or the general community, not the organisation responsible for the campaign. It focuses on the target audience, who have a primary role in the process (Kline Weinreich 1999, pp. 4 and 9).

Second, the changes in behaviour sought through social marketing are often far more ambitious than those sought through commercial marketing. Social marketers seek fundamental, long term behavioural change; commercial marketers usually aim to induce consumers to change brands or try a new product:

If motivating people to change their health or social behaviour were as easy as convincing them to switch brands of toothpaste, then there would be no need for the subfield of social marketing. But trying to affect complex and often emotion based decisions is rather different from selling a tangible product. (Kline Weinreich 1999, pp. 9–10)

Similarly, the amount of change needed before the project is considered a success is often much greater for social marketing campaigns. Many commercial campaigns would be highly successful if they shifted market share by 2–3 per cent (Braus 1995, p. 2). The desired success rates for social marketing campaigns, however, can be 10 or 20 times higher.

Third, the product being 'sold' is more difficult to define, is often intangible and has benefits that could be delayed or difficult to detect (for example, avoiding potential harm) (Donovan & Henley 2003, pp. 33–4). Finally, social marketing strategies need to harness the involvement of many stakeholders, frequently in a politically sensitive environment:

Social and health issues often are so complex that one organisation cannot make a dent by itself. By teaming up with other groups in the community, your organisation can extend its resources as well as its access to members of the target audience. (Kline Weinreich 1999, p.17)

Despite the challenges, social marketing has been used (with some success) to encourage the adoption of environmentally friendly behaviours such as composting, recycling and conserving energy. It is also used in health policy. Box 1 presents three examples of social marketing strategies.

Box 1: Social marketing examples

Immunisation

In late 1997, the Commonwealth Government adopted the Immunise Australia Program. The program involved:

- improving immunisation practice and service delivery
- establishing a National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance
- introducing requirements for immunisation before commencement of school
- providing financial incentives to doctors, parents and guardians
- undertaking a national education campaign, and
- implementing a measles control campaign.

Following the campaign, the proportion of Australian children who were fully immunised increased from 76 per cent to 85 per cent. By 2001, the level of full immunisation was 91 per cent (Donovan & Henley 2003, pp. 334–40).

Energy conservation

The Pacific Gas and Electric Company in California offered homeowners free home inspections and advice on ways to make their dwellings more energy efficient. The advice was free and financing was available to make the recommended changes. Initially, the take-up of advice was low and the program was modified to incorporate two behavioural change techniques:

- The information provided was made more vivid and personal. Rather than simply identifying cracks under doors, ‘the auditor would compare the crack to a hole the size of a basketball’ (Aronson, p. 1).
- Auditors involved customers in the inspection, getting them to take measurements, or read meters, for example.

As a result of the enhanced program, 60 per cent of homeowners made changes to improve the energy efficiency of their houses. This was more than three times the national average (Aronson, p. 1).

Public transport use

A pilot program was introduced in the United States to increase the use of urban bus services. The most effective strategy involved:

- providing participants with information on routes and schedules, and
- obtaining an agreement from participants to ride the bus twice a week.

Free bus tickets increased the number of rides per individual, but obtaining a commitment was more effective in encouraging new passengers to take the bus (Bachman, pp. 1–2).

Social marketing recognises that behavioural change is more complex and difficult to achieve than is often anticipated. It thus emphasises understanding problematic behaviours and using multiple strategies to simultaneously target behavioural change. Community based social marketing is a good example of the systematic approach to problem solving that social marketing typically advocates. It involves the following four steps (summarised in Box 2):

1. *Identifying the barriers and benefits to an activity.*
2. *Developing a strategy that utilizes 'tools' that have been shown to be effective in changing behaviour.*
3. *Piloting the strategy.*
4. *Evaluating the strategy once it has been implemented across a community.* (McKenzie-Mohr 2005, p. 1)

Box 2: Community based social marketing

Identifying barriers and benefits to an activity

Community based social marketing begins with a review to understand undesirable behaviours and alternative positive behaviours. It analyses people's motivations, the benefits they would receive from changing specific behaviour, and what barriers to change exist. The review is based on community consultation, and the information could be gathered through literature reviews, observation of behaviour, focus groups and surveys.

Behavioural change tools

The second step is to identify tools that would be effective in promoting behavioural change. The tools selected should closely target the barriers to behavioural change, or promote the benefits of change, identified in the previous step. They should remove significant external barriers and break down internal barriers by encouraging people to commit to making the change, using prompts to remind people to continue the desired activity, developing community norms so the desired behaviour is perceived as consistent with accepted community behaviour, communicating the change message and creating incentives to change.

Piloting the strategy

The tools used in community based social marketing strategies are often non-regulatory and lend themselves to testing through pilots. This helps avoid costly mistakes.

Given the difficulty of changing complex behaviours, strategies should recognise that problems are likely. The implementation process should identify and rectify these problems before rolling out the full strategy.

Evaluation

The evaluation stage examines the strategy's effectiveness in changing behaviour, not just raising awareness or changing attitudes. It is a critical component of the process, because it is necessary to test the effectiveness of existing programs and improve the effectiveness of future programs.

Sources: McKenzie-Mohr 2005; McKenzie-Mohr & Smith 1999.

1.1 The use of social marketing in consumer policy

While there are many examples of social marketing strategies being used in the environmental and health fields, there are fewer instances where such approaches have been comprehensively applied to consumer issues. There appears to be scope, however, to increase the use of social marketing strategies in consumer affairs. Many consumer problems are similar to those in the environment and health fields:

- Consumers or traders need to make significant and lasting changes to overcome the identified problems.
- The provision of information alone is often ineffective in achieving change.
- The factors that inhibit change can be subtle and complex.
- There are significant barriers to change.

A key difference between the health and environmental fields is the identity of the primary beneficiary of the behavioural change. In the environmental area, the primary beneficiary is the community, although individuals making the change may receive some benefits (such as lower energy costs). In health, the primary beneficiary is usually the individual making the change, or the immediate family of the individual.

Consumer policy strategies that change traders' behaviour to improve outcomes for consumers have closer parallels with environmental strategies, particularly those targeted at business. They often benefit the businesses undertaking the change by improving their business practices and consumers' confidence on their products or services, while also benefiting consumers generally by reducing the risk of detriment. Strategies that empower consumers to protect themselves have similar objectives to those of health policy strategies.

“Why target consumer or trader behaviour?”

2

The overall objective of consumer policy is to reduce detriment to consumers. When both the demand and supply sides of markets work well, they deliver good outcomes for consumers, but markets that fail result in behaviours by traders and/or consumers that lead to consumer detriment. Analysing the problems that result in consumer detriment requires a good understanding of the three levels shown in figure 1.²

Figure 1: Defining problems that affect consumers

Consumer detriment: Analyse the effect on consumers if the market is not delivering the expected economic and social outcomes.



Problematic behaviour: Analyse the behaviours of traders, consumers and third parties that lead to consumer detriment.



Causes of problematic behaviour: Identify these causes, which can be deficiencies in either the demand side or supply side of the market, resulting from market failure, regulatory failure or a failure to achieve other social policy objectives (for example, poverty or individual behaviour that is inconsistent with the community's social or ethical standards).

Government action can target each of the three levels. The most effective tools are likely to be those that remove the causes of problematic behaviour, but such removal is not always possible. If it is not practicable to remove the causes of problematic behaviour, the policy could target the second part of the chain: that is, changing that behaviour. Then, if it is not viable to change behaviour, government could consider whether it should offset the impact of the consumer detriment.

Social marketing is a policy tool that can be used when the best policy response is to target behavioural change. It recognises the difficulties associated with true behavioural change and has a concrete focus on enabling that change and reducing the barriers to change.

² The Consumer Affairs Victoria research paper **Information Provision and Education Strategies** discusses this framework in more detail.

“ Social marketing processes and strategies ”

3

Section 1 briefly discussed the concept of social marketing. Those processes have some similarities with processes currently used by Consumer Affairs Victoria, but there is still scope to learn from the experience of social marketing to improve the effectiveness of consumer policy. This section compares a social marketing approach to existing strategies. It discusses:

- an information based approach to policy development
- the range of tools currently used and targeting of policy strategies, and
- social marketing tools and strategies.

3.1 Information based policy development

All advocates of social marketing stress the need to base strategies on a sound understanding of the problems, behaviours that exacerbate those problems, and the benefits and barriers to changing those behaviours:

Speculation regarding what leads individuals to engage in responsible environmental behavior should never be used as the basis for a community based social marketing plan. Prior to designing such a plan you need to set aside personal speculation and collect the information that will properly inform your efforts. (McKenzie-Mohr 1999, p. 19)

Similarly, Health Canada (2003, p. 1) stresses that its “process is strongly oriented around evidence based decision making of which research and evaluation are a key part”.

Information based policy development is advocated in spheres outside social marketing. Those involved in behavioural economics argue that a realistic understanding of people’s decision making processes is critical to developing effective policy. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) checklist for regulatory decision making emphasises the need to correctly define the problem that governments are trying to address:

The problem to be solved should be precisely stated, giving clear evidence of its nature and magnitude, and explaining why it has arisen (that is, identifying the incentives of affected entities and their consequent behaviors) ... Many problems are multi-faceted – affecting a variety of groups in a variety of ways – and in these cases regulators should document the full scope of the issue, drawing particular attention to supporting and opposing linkages between groups and their incentives. (OECD 1995, p. 7)

Consumer Affairs Victoria already collects and analyses information when it prepares regulatory impact statements and business impact assessments for new or amended regulation or legislation. Consistent with the Victorian Government guide on regulatory impact statements, Consumer Affairs Victoria analyses the problems that the regulation is trying to address, the objectives of that regulation, policy alternatives and justification for the action being proposed (DTF 2005, pp. 4–12).

3.2 Current strategies used to achieve behavioural change

While various disciplines advocate an information based approach to policy development, three key points distinguish the approach that is supported by social marketers from that used in most consumer affairs agencies.

First, social marketing advocates a full analysis of the problem regardless of the tools or method chosen to address the problem. In most Australian jurisdictions, formal requirements to analyse and justify policy responses are restricted, based on the regulatory instruments used to implement the policy. In Victoria, an agency is required to undertake a formal assessment (that is, prepare a business impact assessment or a regulatory impact statement) only where the agency is proposing to introduce or amend primary or subordinate legislation.³ This does not mean that agencies do not undertake analysis in other situations, but the nature and extent of the analysis are not subject to any formal requirements or review processes.

Many of the policy responses advocated under social marketing do not involve regulation. Whether to undertake a full analysis of the nature and extent of problems, the behaviour of those involved and the range of possible solutions is thus decided at the discretion of the agency developing the policy response.

Second, existing processes require analysis of the problems that regulation is trying to resolve and the causes of those problems. These analyses usually describe the problem faced by consumers or traders and, in many cases, the market failures (such as asymmetries in access to information) that are likely to result in those problems. In the past, they have not attempted to undertake a comprehensive analysis of consumer and trader behaviour, or the benefits or barriers to behavioural change.

As noted in the preceding section, the best policy response does not always involve trying to influence behaviour directly. But those policies that do, could benefit from initial policy analysis involving greater understanding of behaviour.

Third, social marketing places considerable emphasis on trialling marketing strategies, continually monitoring and refining their effectiveness, and evaluating their performance against behavioural change indicators. The consumer policy field sometimes uses focus groups to test publications and often evaluates its programs, but the level of monitoring and continual refinement is less than that envisaged under social marketing (Andreasen 1995, pp. 91–96; McKenzie-Mohr & Smith 1999, pp. 126–30).

Consumer Affairs Victoria already uses innovative tools that target behavioural change (Box 3). Many of these tools are consistent with social marketing principles. It may be possible, however, to improve the effectiveness of consumer policy by better targeting and increasingly using these strategies, and improving the understanding of behaviours that need to be changed.

³ Primary legislation comprises Acts of Parliament. Subordinate legislation comprises mostly the Regulations attached to Acts.

Box 3: Behavioural change tools used by Consumer Affairs Victoria

Working directly with Indigenous communities

Consumer Affairs Victoria's Indigenous Consumers Unit works directly with communities to help educate consumers about their rights and responsibilities:

In 2003-04 the ICU [Indigenous Consumers Unit] made more than 150 community visits throughout Victoria, and met with a range of Indigenous co-operatives, community organisations and service providers, including health education workers. The ICU worked with Indigenous communities to improve their capacity to recognise consumer rights, to raise awareness of complaints reporting processes, and to identify emerging consumer and tenancy problems. (CAV 2004, p. 43)

Consumer Stuff! Challenge competition

This competition invites secondary students to create information messages for young people to improve their understanding of a consumer or financial issue. Prizes are awarded to individual winners and their schools (CAV 2005a).

Consumer Education in Schools program

The program targets students and teachers and comprises a website, information giveaways for young consumers and resources for teachers. The resources focus on life skills such as money management, communication, problem solving, critical and creative thinking, and emotional intelligence. These skills provide the building blocks to empower young people to become confident and assertive consumers (CAV 2005b, p. 5). Teaching resources are available for year 9 and 10 commerce, English and mathematics students in Victoria (CAV 2005c). Consumer Affairs Victoria conducts professional development workshops to assist Victorian teachers to use this material effectively.

Direct response real estate campaign

When the regulation covering estate agents was amended in 2003, Consumer Affairs Victoria released a guide for consumers buying and selling real estate. One objective of the communications strategy was to increase awareness of this guide. A direct response advertising campaign (initially intensive) was used to leverage media and consumer attention and then was followed by an ongoing lower level campaign.

Eco-smart house

Consumer Affairs Victoria sponsored an eco-smart house at the Housing Industry Association's 2005 Home Ideas Show. Visitors walked through a life sized house that demonstrated design principles for sustainable building. Consumer advice on domestic building was available at the display (CAV 2005d, p. 12).

Retail Excellence Awards

Small, medium sized, large and franchise businesses have been recognised for their efforts to abide by Victoria's fair trading laws. The Consumer Affairs Victoria Retail Excellence Award was presented to businesses that demonstrated an understanding of the *Fair Trading Act 1999* (Vic.) and evidence of practices and processes that reinforce compliance. Zentini, Semaarn Salons, Coles Supermarkets Victoria and Bakers Delight Chirnside Park were the 2005 winners (CAV 2005e).

Community education

Consumer Affairs Victoria's Community Education Unit assists workers in referral agencies – such as community legal centres, community health centres, citizen advice bureaus, council based family and youth services, and Centrelink – to understand Consumer Affairs Victoria's services. These agencies are often the first point of contact for consumers in difficulty. For example, the Unit visited the Living and Learning Centre in Pakenham to train 17 students in its Community Information Workers Course. The session highlighted the role of Consumer Affairs Victoria and its Indigenous Consumers and Multicultural Consumers Units. Course participants can take up voluntary positions in information and referral services in Pakenham, providing support, particularly to vulnerable and disadvantaged members of the community.

The Community Education Unit also has a community speaker program, which involves talks for vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers and tenants about their consumer rights and responsibilities, and where to obtain help regarding disputes with traders or landlords. These talks are available to groups such as senior citizens' clubs, retirement village residents, and youth and school groups.

Frequently, the objective of consumer policy is to influence behaviour, but the assumptions about what is needed to generate behavioural change are often simplistic. Many policies assume that providing information or increasing awareness automatically leads to behavioural change.

These assumptions mean that consumer marketing strategies have concentrated on:

- publications targeting industry sectors
- websites
- leaflets and fact sheets
- direct mail
- publications distributed at point of sale
- shows and exhibitions
- conferences, forums and road shows, and
- media campaigns.

Individually, these strategies have varying success in achieving behavioural change. Often, it is difficult to determine whether a strategy affected behaviour, because its success is assessed on whether information was clear and accessible, increased awareness and/or changed attitudes, rather than whether it affected behaviour. The evaluation of previous information strategies of Consumer Affairs Victoria included performance indicators such as:

- the percentage of respondents who were aware of the communication
- the percentage of respondents who had read or heard the communication
- the percentage of respondents who could remember the contents of the communication
- respondents' assessment of the relevance of the information in the communication, and
- respondents' assessment of the accessibility of the information in the communication.

The criticism that marketing campaigns do not focus enough on behavioural change is common across social policy fields:

We are not even sure that it [education] works ... a few years ago Social Change Media carried out a consultancy for the Roads and Traffic Authority. We were asked to evaluate 20-odd evaluations of road safety campaigns. Every one of these campaigns had been evaluated to be a success. But, funnily enough, the proof of 'success' was whatever attitudinal change the campaign happened to achieve, even if it was marginal.

After all, "education" is really a misnomer – our aim is not to get people to KNOW MORE THINGS. We are trying to get people to CHANGE WHAT THEY DO. (Robinson 1998, p. 1)

A significant body of research demonstrates that information and communication, while an important component of any behavioural change strategy, is unlikely alone to generate sustained behavioural change:

Information campaigns have been widely used for achieving public interest goals. But they are known to be less effective than other forms of learning. Research suggests that learning by trial and error, observing how others behave and modelling our behaviour on what we see around us provide more effective and more promising avenues for changing behaviours than information and awareness campaigns. (Jackson 2005, p. xi)

While researchers agree that information alone will not motivate someone to adopt a new behaviour ... it is equally clear that a lack of information can be a barrier to changing behaviour. (Monroe 2003, p. 118)

These conclusions are reinforced by research in fields such as psychology, sociology, marketing and behavioural economics, which all note that people faced with complex decisions will not necessarily consider all of the information available to them, or respond to that information by changing their behaviour (Box 4).

Box 4: Limitations of information in promoting behavioural change

The following extract from McKenzie-Mohr and Smith (1999, pp. 9.9–9.10) illustrates the limitations of using information to promote behavioural change:

In response to the energy crisis of the 1970s, Scott Geller and his colleagues studied the impact that intensive workshops have upon residential energy conservation. In these workshops, participants were exposed to three hours of educational material in a variety of formats (slide shows, lectures, etc.). All of the material had been designed to impress upon participants that it was possible to significantly reduce home energy use ... Upon completing a workshop, attendees indicated greater awareness of energy issues, more appreciation for what could be done in their homes to reduce energy use, and a willingness to implement the changes that were advocated in the workshop. Despite these changes in awareness and attitudes, behavior did not change. In follow-up visits to the homes of 40 workshop participants, only one had followed through on the recommendation to lower the hot water thermostat. Two participants had put insulating blankets around their hot water heaters, but they had done so prior to attending the workshop. In fact, the only difference between the 40 workshop participants and an equal number of non-participants was in the installation of low-flow shower heads. Eight of the 40 participants had installed them, while two of the non-participants had. However, the installation of the low-flow shower heads was not due to education alone. Each of the workshop participants had been given a free low-flow shower head to install.

Households who volunteered to participate in a 10-week study of water use received a state-of-the-art handbook on water efficiency. The handbook described wasteful water use, explained the relationship between water use and energy consumption, and detailed methods for conserving water in the home. Despite great attention being paid to the preparation of the handbook, it was found to have no impact upon consumption.

In practice, internal and external barriers must be overcome before people will change their behaviour (Appendix 1). Social marketing advocates a more sophisticated approach to behavioural change. Three key aspects of its strategies and tools distinguish it from other policy approaches:

- It focuses on the consumer and understanding the behaviours that the policy is trying to influence.
- Its tools focus on influencing factors that have been demonstrated to encourage behavioural change.
- It is a multifaceted approach that often involves multiple organisations and uses several strategies simultaneously.

3.3 Consumer and trader orientation

All social marketing decisions must emanate from a consideration of the target customer. (Andreasen 1995, p. 37)

In social marketing – particularly in fields such as health and consumer policy – the objective is to generate benefits for the target audience, not for the organisation initiating the program. Because social marketing is trying to change important behaviours that individuals care about, it has to start by considering what consumers want and need, not what the organisation wants and needs (Andreasen 1995, pp. 38–41).

Because social marketing strategies target the benefits and barriers to behavioural change, they need to recognise that what motivates and inhibits change can vary greatly across groups of consumers or traders. Segmenting the audience is thus important. Often, audiences are segmented according to demographic characteristics, age, sex, income level and/or ethnic background, but this may not be the most effective split. For some problems, traders might be divided according to their size, for other problems industry segments may be more relevant or the traders current business approach. It may be worth dividing consumers according to their attitudes or behaviours (Kline Weinreich 1999, p. 53). A program targeting car buyers, for example, may benefit from dividing the audience into new car buyers, second hand car buyers using dealers and second hand car buyers considering private sales.

3.4 Targeting factors that encourage behavioural change

Alternatively, consumers could be split according to the stages they are at in the decision making process. As noted by Andreasen (Appendix 1), which is the best marketing strategy to use may vary depending on whether the consumer is unaware there are alternative behaviours (precontemplation), is actively considering change (contemplation), has decided to change and is trying to implement that decision (action), or has made the change and is considering continuing the activity (maintenance). A strategy targeted at teens who are accumulating excessive mobile phone bills, for example, could divide the audience according to their awareness of the potential to get into financial difficulty. Such a strategy might distinguish between teens who are:

- intending to buy a phone and unaware of the risk of excessive use
- locked into a phone contract and phone use habits, and at risk of accumulating debts they cannot afford
- in financial difficulty, and
- changing their phone use habits but need assistance to resist the pressure to revert to unsustainable habits.

The best approach to, and extent of, segmentation depends on the problem and the audience in each case:

If the population you are addressing is fairly homogeneous to begin with, then extensive segmentation might not be necessary. But if you are dealing with a diverse population, or if your program has a national or state scope, segmentation can help make sense of the complexity.
(Kline Weinreich 1999, p. 53)

The tools used in social marketing are designed to remove barriers to behavioural change and encourage and reinforce positive behaviour. These tools include common policy responses, such as regulation, and information and marketing strategies. They also include more direct, individual focused strategies that galvanise shared feeling and motivations within communities. Community based social marketing, in particular, emphasises “initiatives delivered at the community level which focus on removing barriers to an activity while simultaneously enhancing the activities’ benefits” (McKenzie-Mohr 2005, p. 1).

McKenzie-Mohr identified six categories of behavioural change tools that “have been extensively researched by social scientists and are known to be effective in promoting behavioural change” (CISE Task Force 2001, p. 6):

- commitment
- prompts
- norms
- communication
- incentives, and
- convenience.

It is also important to consider whether it is possible to remove external barriers to behavioural change (McKenzie-Mohr & Smith 1999, p. 116).

Commitment

The theory on commitment notes that once a person commits to a course of action, they are more likely to undertake that action. Also, once they have made a small commitment, they are more likely to agree to a larger commitment (Box 5). People follow up on commitments because they want to be perceived as trustworthy and reliable, because “individuals whose deeds match their words are viewed as being honest and having integrity” (McKenzie-Mohr & Smith 1999, p. 116). Commitments are most effective when they are voluntary and made public.

Box 5: Examples of the use of commitment techniques

Recycling

Randomly selected residents in New Zealand were asked to participate in a curbside recycling trial. Before the trial, they received a letter that explained the trial, a telephone number for more information, a recycling bin and a curbside recycling kit. The kit included a bumper sticker and a mailbox sticker. There were three groups of participants. The first group was given the bins and the recycling kit. The second group was given the bins and the recycling kit, and asked for a verbal commitment. The third group was given the bins and the recycling kit, asked for a verbal commitment and asked to mail \$8.00 to pay for their bins.

While there was no significant difference in recycling behaviour between those who paid for their bins and those who did not, the two verbal commitment groups recycled considerably more than did the control group (who were not asked for a verbal commitment) (Bryce).

Medical treatment

In an experiment on the effect of verbal commitment in medical treatment, parents of children with inner ear infection were asked to promise to give their children all the prescribed medication. Self-reports at follow-up visits indicated that obtaining a verbal commitment significantly increased the likelihood of all medication being administered and improved the children's recovery rates (Kulik & Carlino 1987).

Volunteering

Residents of Bloomington, Indiana, were asked by phone whether they would consider, hypothetically, working three hours as volunteers to collect money for the American Cancer Society. When a different caller contacted these individuals three days later, they were far more likely to volunteer than were another group of residents who had not been asked the initial question (31 per cent versus 4 per cent respectively) (McKenzie & Smith 1999, p. 47).

In previous social marketing campaigns, obtaining commitment has involved strategies such as:

- displaying signs or stickers that say the person is involved in recycling or water saving
- obtaining verbal commitments, for example not to litter, or to exercise
- publishing the names of people who install energy saving devices, and
- having people sign a pledge to quit smoking.

Prompts

Even when people intend to engage in a particular activity, habit or a busy lifestyle may mean they forget. Consumers may forget to read products' warning or ingredients labels, for example, even after deciding they should check this information before they buy or use products.

Prompts can thus be important memory joggers, but they work only when the consumer or trader is already committed to the behaviour. Prompts work best, therefore, when combined with other behavioural change strategies:

Research has not shown prompts to be very effective as the sole behavior change strategy. Although they may have an immediate effect, they lose their impact rapidly and do not create durable or long lasting behavior change. The authors suggest that prompts might be more effective if they are combined with other techniques. (Bloch et al. 1993, p. 28)

Prompts can be signs or stickers located near the targeted behaviour – for example, a sign on a light switch to remind people to turn it off, or next to a product that has special safety features. They may also be verbal – for example, a clinic nurse or shop assistant reminding consumers about action they need to take in relation to the product or service they are purchasing.

Norms

People often look at the behaviours of others when considering how they will behave. They do things because others believe it is the right thing to do and because the behaviour is consistent with that of their peers. Psychological experiments have illustrated the impact that others can have on decision making. One of the most renowned is an experiment on social conformity conducted by Solomon Asch in 1958 (Box 6).

Box 6: Asch experiment in social conformity

Asch showed bars, similar to the diagram below, to groups of eight to 10 college students.



Asch told the groups that he was studying visual perception and they needed to identify which bars were the same length. Only one of the students was the subject of the experiment. The answers were given verbally and the other participants gave incorrect answers 12 of the 18 times. Seventy-five per cent of the subjects altered their answers at least once to concur with the incorrect answers given by the rest of the group.

Source: McKenzie-Mohr & Smith 1999, pp. 9.9–9.10.

The impact of norms means social marketing can influence behaviour by changing or emphasising community norms. In curbside recycling, for example, distinctive bins are used for the collection. As the number of people putting out recycling bins increases, others are more likely to follow as they see the increasing number of bins and are influenced by a perception that recycling is the appropriate thing to do. Strategies that influence norms include those that make desirable behaviours more obvious, prompt people to display stickers to show involvement in the activity, use demonstration projects to illustrate what others are doing, get members of the community to discuss their involvement, and advertise the proportion of the community undertaking the activity.

Communication

While the advocates of social marketing are critical of behavioural change strategies that focus too heavily on communication (particularly mass communication), they still recognise the importance of communication in a broader, multifaceted strategy. Social marketers, therefore, combine communication with other tools and look closely at the type of communication used and the way in which messages are presented and delivered.

Good communication in a social marketing strategy has many of the characteristics of good communication more broadly. The US Department of Health and Human Services publication *Making Health Communication Programs Work* is a detailed discussion of how to develop effective communication strategies to achieve social policy objectives. Social marketing, however, particularly emphasises some elements of communication:

- Information is used to generate awareness of the problem and potential alternative behaviours, to make the audience responsive to efforts to change behaviour (Andreasen 1995, p. 201).
- Information is provided to show people how to carry out the new activity, because a lack of practical knowledge can be a significant impediment to behavioural change (de Young 1989, pp. 349–50).
- The mechanisms for delivering information focus less on mass media and broadcast campaigns, and more on targeted audience segments and the specific behaviours to be changed (Costanzo et al. 1986, pp. 526–7).
- Where possible, the information is more personal, vivid and concrete. It also emphasises the costs or losses from not acting (Costanzo et al. 1986, pp. 523–4).
- The delivery mechanisms are both personal and credible. Avenues are sought to deliver information through interpersonal contacts and by modelling effective behaviour. These mechanisms facilitate social diffusion, which is an effective way of encouraging behavioural change (Costanzo et al. 1986, p. 527).

Incentives

Behavioural change can be encouraged using incentives to promote the desirable behaviours and deterrents to discourage unwanted behaviours. Incentives and deterrents can be financial and non-financial – for example:

- Taxes on tobacco and alcohol discourage the overconsumption of potentially harmful products.
- Subsidies to financial counsellors encourage vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers in financial difficulty to seek the assistance of a counsellor.
- Publishing the names of rogue traders increases the perception that rogues will be caught, and discourages other businesses from engaging in rogue activity.
- Presenting public awards to companies that demonstrate an understanding of the Fair Trading Act and evidence of practices and processes that reinforce compliance encourages others to consider similar compliance.

Many commentators caution, however, against overreliance on financial incentives:

Social marketers must be very cautious in using positive extrinsic rewards. A practical reason is that such rewards can wear out quickly. A prize offered every week soon loses its salience and effectiveness. A variety of rewards usually has more impact. Further, it may turn out that consumers come to carry out the behaviour just to achieve the reward and not because the behaviour is internally satisfying. This is especially the case if the reward is perceived by the consumer to be excessive for the behaviour being rewarded. Overjustification of behaviour can lead consumers to believe that a behaviour is less intrinsically rewarding in the future. (Andreasen 1995, p. 285)

In these circumstances, consumers or traders may revert to the original behaviour, particularly if the reward is withdrawn, and it would be harder to get them to commit voluntarily to change this behaviour in the future. Rewards are less likely to have negative consequences if they are relatively small and used to motivate a change that consumers or traders would choose to continue once they try it.

Convenience and other external barriers

Even if consumers or traders wish to undertake an activity, and are ready to change their behaviour, external barriers may prevent them from carrying out their intentions:

- A low income borrower who wants to avoid using high interest short term lenders would have difficulty if he or she were in financial crisis and were refused credit from other types of lender.
- A consumer who wants to check whether a letter offering a new weight loss product is genuine would have difficulty if he or she could not obtain reliable advice on the product.
- A home renovator in a rural area who wants to remove and dispose of asbestos safely would have difficulty if the necessary equipment were not available in the region.
- A trader that wants to change its contracts to remove clauses that are unfair to consumers may be unsure about the legal implications of such changes for other aspects of its contracts.
- A consumer who wanted to ensure a second hand car was mechanically sound would have difficulty if he or she lacked the skills to make that judgement and could not find someone trustworthy to assist with the assessment.

Where possible, therefore, social marketers identify and remove barriers that prohibit consumers and/or traders from changing their behaviour, make desired behaviours more attractive or convenient, and make unwanted behaviours less convenient. The research behind a social marketing strategy should identify the external barriers and realistically assess the significance of, and potential to overcome, those barriers. Effort should concentrate on significant barriers that can be reduced; if it is not possible to remove significant barriers, then social marketing may not be the best policy for tackling the problem.

McKenzie-Mohr and Smith stressed the importance of identifying and reducing external barriers:

In summary, because the nature of external barriers can vary dramatically across communities, strategies for removing these barriers will have to be tailored to each situation. Begin by identifying what external barriers exist and then seek information from other communities on how they have dealt with the external barriers you have identified. Next, determine whether you have the resources to implement similar initiatives. If you determine that you do not have the resources, you should seriously reconsider your options. As mentioned above, a community based social marketing initiative that ignores external barriers is a recipe for failure. (McKenzie-Mohr & Smith 1999, p. 119)

3.5 A multifaceted approach

Social marketing is multifaceted in two ways:

1. A range of tools is used simultaneously to encourage behavioural change.
2. Often, multiple organisations are involved in implementing the strategy.

Given the complexity of the behaviours that social marketing campaigns seek to change, and the range of influences that affect consumers' decisions to change their behaviour, policies that rely on a single behavioural change tool are unlikely to be successful. Appendix 1 summarises Andreasen and Robinson's views on the preconditions for behavioural change. No one policy tool can ensure all these preconditions are met:

A toolbox of strategies is used to reduce barriers, increase motives, obtain commitment, support social norms, provide information and increase intentions to perform the target behaviour. Most reports indicate that combinations of these tools are more effective than a single tool. (Monroe 2003, p. 118)

Similarly, given the complexity of behavioural change and the resources available to individual agencies, social marketing strategies often benefit from cooperation by organisations:

Social and health issues often are so complex that one organisation cannot make a dent by itself. By teaming up with other groups in the community, your organisation can extend its resources as well as its access to members of the target audience. Figure out which organisations have similar audiences or goals to yours – although not necessarily the same goals – and identify ways in which you can work together so that both can benefit. (Kline Weinreich 1999, p. 17)

Government agencies, in particular, can benefit from working with community groups to increase agencies' understanding of the real barriers to, and benefits of, behavioural change. In addition, messages delivered through community or business groups are more likely to be concrete and personal, and so more likely to influence consumers (see the above discussion on communication). The US Department of Health and Human Services listed the following benefits of developing strategies in partnership with other organisations:

- *Access to an intended audience*
- *More credibility for your message or program because the intended audiences consider the potential partner to be a trusted source*
- *An increase in the number of messages your program will be able to share with intended audiences*
- *Additional resources, either tangible or intangible (e.g., volunteers)*
- *Added expertise (e.g., training capabilities)*
- *Expanded support for your organisation's priority activities*
- *Co-sponsorship of events and activities.*
(US Department of Health and Human Services, pp. 35–6)

“Using social marketing in consumer policy”

4

As noted, Consumer Affairs Victoria already adopts strategies to influence consumers and traders to behave in ways that reduce the risk of consumer detriment improve business practices. It is continually expanding the policy tools used, improving its approach, changing delivery techniques and using long term skills development, as well as simply providing information. But even this effort is insufficient in some circumstances. Other approaches may be necessary to replace or augment existing strategies, which is where social marketing is potentially relevant.

Like all policy tools, social marketing is not a panacea for all consumer policy problems, and the costs of adopting any social marketing strategy need to be weighed against its benefits:

As with any tool, social marketing cannot be expected to solve every type of health and social problem ... A social marketing program might not be as effective for certain issues such as complex problems with many contributing or confounding factors, problems not under individual control (e.g. genetic flaws), and addictive disorders. (Kline Weinreich 1999, p. 4)

But for those problems where behavioural change is necessary, social marketing can provide useful insights into ways of improving policy effectiveness. The process of identifying when to use social marketing should recognise the following:

- The detail in the analysis that underpins social marketing means this approach is best suited to problems that are generating significant costs, and where it is possible to identify specific behaviours that need to change.
- Social marketing involves identifying and engaging with individuals or communities of individuals. It is practicable for Victoria to use social marketing strategies to target only groups that it can identify and communicate with. This criterion would exclude overseas traders, for example.

- Social marketing works only when it is possible to influence people to want to change. Where there is strong opposition to change (among rogue traders, for example), strategies aimed at achieving voluntary change would be ineffective.
- In some cases, it is impossible to remove the key barriers to behavioural change. Social marketing strategies are likely to be ineffective in these cases.
- Social marketing is a long term strategy, because behavioural change takes time to initiate and become embed into people's routine.

Thus, social marketing is most suited to changing consumer and trader behaviour in situations that meet the characteristics in Box 7.

Box 7: Problems suited to social marketing strategies

Social marketing is best suited to problems where:

- it is necessary to change behaviour or improve business practices to reduce consumer detriment
- the consumer detriment is considerable
- behaviours and people's motivations can be identified and analysed
- it is possible to identify and target traders, individuals or communities of individuals and convince them of the desirability of change, and
- it is possible to identify and remove the key barriers to change.

A key benefit of a successful social marketing campaign is that consumer detriment is often reduced as a result of voluntary changes among consumers or traders. This reduces the need for more explicit regulation.

While social marketing has much in common with conventional consumer policy approaches, there are key differences in the process for developing and implementing the strategy, and in the policy tools considered (Table 1).

Table 1: Comparison of social marketing and traditional policy approaches

Social marketing	Traditional consumer policy responses
Policy development is preceded by a comprehensive review of the problem, behaviours in the market and the benefits of, and barriers to, behavioural change.	Policy development is not always preceded by an assessment of the problem and the possible policy responses. Often, this assessment does not focus on factors that affect behavioural change.
Strategies are trialled, continually monitored and evaluated for their impact on behaviour.	Monitoring and evaluation of programs usually focus on awareness raising and changing attitudes, not behavioural change.
Where possible, cooperative approaches among government and non-government agencies are used.	Cooperative approaches are less common.
The audience is segmented and tools are tailored to segments.	The tools are often higher level and the approach is usually less disaggregated.
Tools focus on factors known to change behaviour: generating commitment, using prompts, changing norms, using effective communication, using incentives and penalties, and increasing convenience. They seek to remove external barriers to behavioural change.	Tools focus less on behavioural change and often more on providing information. The ways of making information accessible and delivering it are becoming more sophisticated.

“Appendix 1: Achieving behavioural change”

Consumer policy often tries to reduce the risk of consumer detriment by informing consumers and traders about the benefit of changing their behaviour or by making it easier for consumers to access the information they need to inform their choices – for example:

- Fact sheets are produced to warn consumers not to buy unsafe products or inform consumers about how to safely use potentially dangerous products.
- Media releases, website information and publications are used to inform consumers about scams so they can identify and avoid them.
- Conferences are held to inform traders about changes to regulation.
- Guides are published on building and renovating, buying and selling property, buying cars and renting homes to encourage people to comply with their legal obligations and to empower them to protect their interests.

Consumer information and education strategies are similar to strategies that have been used for other social policy, such as those encouraging people to protect the environment or change their lifestyle to improve their health. Social marketing too is now used in environment and health policy, for example, following a recognition that information does not automatically lead to behavioural change:

Communication efforts alone cannot achieve all objectives. Appropriate purposes for communication include:

- *Creating a supportive environment for a change (societal or organizational) by influencing attitudes, beliefs, or policies*
- *Contributing to a broader behaviour change initiative by offering messages that motivate, persuade, or enable behavior change within a specific intended audience.*

Raising awareness or increasing knowledge among individuals or the organisations that reach them is also feasible; however, do not assume that accomplishing such an objective will lead to behavior change. For example, it is unreasonable to expect communication to cause a sustained change of complex behaviors or compensate for a lack of health care services, products, or resources. (US Department of Health and Human Services undated, pp. 21–2)

The assumption that information and education strategies encourage people to act differently is based on two theories of behavioural change: the attitude model and the rational economic model (see Costanzo et al. 1986, p. 521; CISE Task Force 2001, p. 3).

The attitude model assumes that increased awareness changes people's attitudes and that an attitude shift in favour of an activity would be followed by a change in behaviour. The rational economic model assumes that people use information to inform their actions if the information is available and if the benefits of using it are greater than the costs of using it. This model holds that providing more accessible and understandable information would lead more consumers to use that information in their decision making.

Both models are inadequate, however, because they cannot fully explain what is observed about behavioural change – for example:

Recyclers and non-recyclers were similar in their pro-recycling attitudes, extrinsic motivation, and the degree to which they viewed recycling as a trivial activity. They differed significantly, however, in the degree to which they required additional information about recycling. Non-recycling respondents indicated a lack of information on how to carry out the activity. The study is also of interest due to the isolation of attitudinal and behavioural aspects of recycling. (de Young 1989, p. 341)

A1.1 Behavioural change theories

Although the rational economic model is able to predict behaviour in many situations, it has limitations. Certain situational factors can override the formal logical properties of a situation and cause people to endorse preferences that are not economically rational. (Yates & Aronson 1983, p. 436)

These problems arise as a result of two deficiencies in the two models. First, simply providing information does not necessarily mean consumers will use it. As discussed in the Consumer Affairs Victoria research paper *Information Provision and Education Strategies*, people faced with complex information often use proxies or shortcuts to deal with an inadequate ability to incorporate all the relevant information in their decisions. They rely on a simplified set of principles to make complex judgements. But the chosen shortcut could lead consumers to choose products or services that do not meet their expectations. Also, shortcuts in decision making may be so ingrained that consumers do not realise they are not identifying the right product for them. In these circumstances, simply providing information may have little effect on consumers' actions unless that provision is accompanied by a strategy to convince people of the relevance and importance of the information.

Yates and Aronson supported this view:

The average citizen does not properly integrate all information relevant to any given decision ... consumers tend to use a simplified strategy which, though intuitively appealing, produces systematic errors in quantification. (Yates & Aronson 1983, p. 439)

People may also ignore information if they do not know they need to change their behaviour, perhaps because they think that their current behaviour is not a problem or is only a problem for other people, or that the new behaviour is inconsistent with their basic values (such as religious beliefs) (Andreasen 1995, p. 199).

Second, even if people read, understand and remember the information and agree that behavioural change is desirable, there may be other barriers to making that change (McKenzie-Mohr & Smith 1999, p. 11). Social marketing recognises that generating sustained behavioural change is more complex:

Social marketing is different from alternative approaches to behavioural change such as education, persuasion, behaviour modification, and social influence, although it incorporates many of their principles. Social marketing emphasises behaviours as the bottom line for everything it does. It does not settle for merely changing awareness or attitudes. It is fanatically consumer centred. It uses a combination of influence factors to bring about change. (Andreasen 1995, p. 33)

Many models are used to illustrate why behavioural change is difficult and the conditions for achieving such change.⁴ To illustrate these theories, this appendix summarises two models:

- Andreasen's stages of behavioural change (Andreasen 1995, pp. 141–69), and
- Robinson's seven steps to social change (Robinson 1998).

Andreasen argued that behavioural change, from a marketing perspective, involves four important stages:

Consumers do not undertake high-involvement behaviours rapidly and in one step. They move toward the desired outcomes in stages. So, at any point in time, the social marketer's challenge is to move the consumers to the next stage of the process. (Andreasen 1995, p. 167)

He described how consumer thinking and the policies that influence consumers differ in each stage. He noted that social marketing can make the greatest contribution at the contemplation and action stages because social marketers "are especially adept at understanding how consumers make highly complex decisions and how they can be influenced to make the preferred decision and motivated to undertake the desired action" (Andreasen 1995, p. 150).

- *Stage 1: Precontemplation* – The target population is not aware of the possibility of behavioural change. The social marketing challenge is to build (1) awareness of the desired behaviour and (2) acceptance that the behaviour would be consistent with people's values and culture. The objective is to get people to actively contemplate behavioural change. Andreasen proposed that key tools at the precontemplation stage are education and promotional information (Andreasen 1995, p. 149).
- *Stage 2: Contemplation* – consumers actively consider change. Several factors influence consumers' thinking at this stage:
 - the perceived benefits of the action
 - the perceived costs of the action
 - what others think (social and cultural pressure), and
 - whether the consumer could make the action happen.

⁴ See Donovan & Henley (2003, pp. 91–120) for a discussion of several models.

Andreasen divided contemplation into two phases: early and late contemplation. He argued that social marketers should concentrate on highlighting benefits at the early stages of contemplation, because people will not consider a new behaviour further if they do not perceive it as beneficial. During the later stage, it is more important to help people overcome barriers and resistance to change. This effort could include reducing the perceived costs of change and harnessing social pressure to encourage change (Andreasen 1995, p. 168).

- **Stage 3: Action** – For people to move from considering a behaviour to undertaking that behaviour they must believe that the actions needed to make the change are within their power and skills, and are not constrained by external factors. External constraints might include the unavailability of necessary products or services, or a lack of cooperation from others. Social marketing tools include providing people with skills and knowledge on how to make the change, and reducing either external constraints (if real constraints are a problem) or the perception of external constraints (if this perception is unfounded) (Andreasen 1995, pp. 161–3).
- **Stage 4: Maintenance** – In most cases, social marketing seeks to permanently change behaviour. Sometimes, consumers or traders trial a new behaviour but later revert to their original behaviour. The challenge is to get consumers and traders to commit to long term change. Social marketing can help reinforce consumers' and traders' belief that their choice to change behaviour is correct, and facilitate continuation of the desired behaviour.

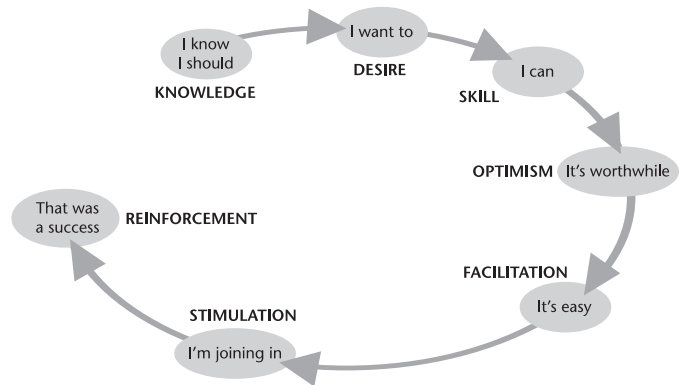
Another model of behavioural change was developed by Robinson, who described seven obstacles, or preconditions, to changing behaviour (Figure A1.1):

- **Knowledge** – The person is aware of the problem and that there is a practical solution. They know the personal costs of inaction and the benefits of action.
- **Desire** – The person wants to change.
- **Skills** – The person can easily visualise the steps required to achieve the goal.
- **Optimism** – People will not act if they believe their efforts are futile, so the person needs to believe that he or she is likely to achieve the benefits of change.

- **Facilitation** – The barriers to change need to be reduced so achieving change is as simple, quick and low cost as possible.
- **Stimulation** – Something needs to initiate action to break the inertia of habit.
- **Reinforcement** – Feedback and recognition are needed to maintain action and build on success. (Robinson 1998, pp. 5–7)

Robinson argued that the role of social marketers is to clear these obstacles, rather than pass on wisdom about the right course of action.

Figure A1.1: Seven steps to social change



Source: Robinson 1998, p. 4.

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