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### From Selling Soap to Selling Sustainability: Social Marketing

Everyone has heard that there is a problem with how America is consuming at a faster rate than healthy for our Earth. We know a few facts, but little of us actually take time to look at our personal behaviors and starting revising our bad habits in order to be more sustainable. There are different kinds of marketing and ways to promote environmental sustainability, and we need to focus on the one that will reach to the most people and start changing their habits today. Now, with social media and technology at the tips of our fingers, it should be easier to market a better way of living so that future generations can live on this great planet with plenty of resources.

Over the decades, America has faced many victories and tragedies that have changed the consumer's wants and needs. Americans were forced to be thrifty during the wars and depression, but then in the 1950s a reorientation of cultural values and beliefs caused for Americans to be huge consumers made possible through identity-based storytelling marketing. People wanted to be these figures they saw on TV, read in the newspaper, or heard on the radio. They thrived on buying new appliances, cars, and everyday goods. This kind of change was dramatic and it is the kind of change we need now for environmental issues.

Story-based campaigns must capture how millions of people see themselves and what they are defined by. Joseph Campbell believes that humans from birth, view their everyday life and the world through stories. He also believes that these stories motivate behavior and identity. When it comes to issues of sustainability and other environmental issues, emotional stories that people can relate their lives to are needed in order to effectively change their prior choices. In the United States, we spend millions of dollars on advertising but little of that is spent on promoting sustainability. Studies have shown over and over again that participants in educational lectures may understand the problem better, but fail to make changes in their behavior. Hopedance, a website created to communicate problems of sustainability and open the eyes of people around the world to solutions and organizations to promote the well-being of our planet is a great step towards social marketing. In the article *Social Marketing and Sustainability: Understanding Barriers* in the website's archive, author Lualainen says: "In the early '90s, many organizations began spreading the word about a sustainable lifestyle. Brochures, flyers, and presentations with stark facts about our consumption and our wasteful habits admonished us to "recycle," "replace incandescent bulbs" or "drive less." And thus, today, people are more knowledgeable about concepts of sustainability, but this familiarity has yet to spur real action – that is, significant change in daily routine" (Lualainen). Marketers need to recognize that in order to reach the consumers, they must use emotional elements in their marketing so that the consumer identifies with the problem. Two researchers did recognize this problem after fail attempts and finally launched a website; [www.350.org](http://www.350.org). This website casts environmental issues as the health of a single organism. They show that when you know there is a problem, but

don't do anything about it, that the problem may not seem to be getting bigger but that eventually it will become unstoppable. Also the website is a great tool to learn about what is happening in other countries and a way to communicate and be more Earth friendly.

The internet has opened up so many opportunities and new tools of social media. Now, with Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, (and the list goes on), it is easy to interact, comment, integrate, and share all sorts of information. Tools and users growing by the minute are redefining the way people communicate, and learn with each other. These social media tools allow people all over the world to learn about events happening in other countries that would have never been known before. By a larger audience being able to view these kind of events with ease in the comfort of their home makes for a larger public response which is more effective than most other sources.

I completely agree with the author that we should reflect on our older efficient ways of social marketing and create relatable stories that combine both blatant and subliminal messages about the health of our Earth, and the way we are treating it. The stories should also give successful solutions where the goals are attainable so that the audience doesn't get discouraged when they don't see change immediately. I agree with Campbell that we humans are inspired and motivated by these stories and identify with a particular character. I believe that many people are highly influenced by media and mimic the characters they see on television. It would be very easy for certain television shows, movies, and lyrics to songs to teach humans of the harm they are doing to the environment and applaud those who are sustainable. Even painters and photographers can evoke many emotions using art and billboards to promote being

“green”. The author used real examples of products sold through story-based campaigning that were successful over the years to support his ideas. He describes how American men wanted to carry Marlboro cigarettes at all times because of the “hero” the Marlboro Man was portrayed in the campaign. Another one of his examples was how Americans were exposed to the dangers of not wearing seat belts after seeing Vince and Larry, the crash test dummies show the severity of car crashes. These campaigns changed the behaviors of people everywhere through a story of “real people” in a real accident. People are heavily influenced by media and by stories but also they are influenced by each other. “Social marketing must offer both tools and perspectives that enable people to encourage each other to make positive change. This is a key point: people helping their peers to make better decisions is exponentially more powerful than any top-down marketing pitch” (Laulainen). Having community or neighbourhood organized activities or fundraisers would help neighbours talk and work together to better their community and overall Earth. Seeing the people around you participate in a good cause would influence the people who were less interested to participate. Friends can encourage friends to join social gatherings to make being sustainable exciting. Once people understand that “being green” is very self rewarding, they will want to continue this lifestyle.

We have a great chance with all of our technology and communication to sustain our environment for future generations. We just need to be more creative when marketing it. By using what we have learned over the years through marketing experiences, and integrating today’s social media, story-based social marketing about sustainability has the ability to change the way American’s consume and live on this

fragile Earth. If America drastically changed the cultural ways decades ago, it is definitely possible to do the same in today's society. People use social media tools daily, and when integrating social marketing into frequently used sites, people can start learning more and changing their unhealthy ways. Community members and friends can influence each other on the ways to be more sustainable, making the success phenomenal. We all know every day that we harm mother Earth, let's all work together to change that.

### **Works Cited**

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