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Bridging the gap between service providers and people

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Abstract

A key topic for many cities is to reduce CO₂ emissions through changes in mobility patterns. There is often a gap however between change programs and the population whose behaviour is actually targeted. In the H2020 EMPOWER project, tools were developed to support cities with marketing efforts around these mobility behaviour change programs to overcome this gap. Firstly, a set of “pillars” was defined to build the campaign upon: connecting to people’s values; being present at relevant occurrences in their lives; ensuring efficacy by defining simple actions; and support recognition by a recurring message and recognisable features. A second tool is the tactical marketing plan, in which phases in a marketing campaign, from awareness to growth, are linked to these pillars to establish concrete marketing actions such as organising events for personal contact with potential participants. Lastly, a recommendation table helps to define marketing actions in comparable campaigns.

Keywords:

Marketing, Mobility, CO₂ emission

Motivating change

Besides a daily bombardment of tempting propositions from commercial industry to change our consumption behaviour, a variety of stimuli to influence our ‘non-commercial’ behaviours also aims to change our habits, our commuting behaviour being one of them. Campaign messages about choosing public transport or the bicycle instead of the car, changing our travel times or carpooling, are decorating our cities. The goal of these campaigns is mostly social; reducing pollution and creating more liveable cities being the most important.

These behaviour change programs require being viable and valuable, just as commercial ones do. Put simply; the benefits of what is on offer for people should outweigh the costs they have to incur. If not, the success of a campaign is very likely to be disappointing. Business models for a social goal often tend to rely on incentives (or disincentives) to create value. Especially when the desired behaviour is in fact altruistic (for a greater good rather than your own good), reinforcements of either a positive or

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negative nature are used to motivate people. These incentives can range from monetary rewards, to gifts, or appraisals, but they can also be fines, fees, taxes or punishments.

EMPOWER project

On pan-European level, the H2020 EMPOWER project unites municipalities, commercial companies, app developers and knowledge institutions to motivate commuters to switch from their car to other modes of transportation in order to reduce carbon emissions. This change is rewarded through positive incentives such as point schemes, loyalty programs and gamification. Personal smart devices (e.g. phones and tablets) allow for two-way information between travellers and transport authorities or providers; on the one hand to motivate travellers through gaming and feedback functions, and on the other hand for offering tailored incentives based on travellers' personal values and context. For clarity, in the remainder of this paper, the different initiating parties in EMPOWER, that are united for a social behaviour change cause, will be referred to as the 'service provider'. The service provider in this case started with developing a business model for various so-called 'lead cities' (Helsinki, Gothenburg, Manchester, Enschede). Other main stakeholders involved in these lead city business models are the providers of mobility apps, local (retail) companies whose services and products are part of a rewarding scheme; local employers, the municipality and public transportation providers. The business model answers questions such as: what is our offer, who are we targeting, what do we need to realise that and what are the costs and benefits. The first question on what is offered, and especially what this means for the intended target group(s) is the most crucial one to answer and takes shape in the value proposition.

From service provider to people: mind the gap

A solid business model is undeniably useful for setting up and evaluating an initiative to motivate social change. But this is only one side of the story. An appealing value proposition on paper, does not imply people are attracted to the cause in practice. In fact, in social change programs, people are often asked to change behaviour that is rooted in daily patterns and habits. This is what we define as the bridge between the value proposition on the one hand, and people (or at least, your intended target group) on the other. Now this is where social marketing comes in. Social marketing relies heavily on traditional marketing theory yet distinguishes itself by what is being "marketed"; i.e. a behaviour change for a social cause such as CO2 reduction.

In the above-mentioned EMPOWER project, fundamental (digital) marketing theory and social marketing theory have been applied to create a strategic social marketing approach that focuses on four pillars:

- Connection means resonating with what the intended target group values in life. If people value their own health more than CO2 reduction, then health is the way to go in the marketing strategy; from communication to prioritising activities. This pillar often requires research to understand better what drives your intended target group(s).

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- Presence is being there, either physically or digitally, at relevant occurrences in the lives of people (e.g. when an employer moves location; or provide information about the proposition at a local fitness club).
- Efficacy is about simplicity and defining easily executable actions; the target population has to feel no barrier to conduct the required behaviour. For instance “download the app” or “take the bicycle once this week” is a lot easier than asking people to completely abandon their car.
- Recognition: a recurring message and recognisable features help to plant the idea in people’s head and create interest as it becomes more familiar. Think of repeating campaigns; but also using an ambassador whom people trust and like to follow.

Consequently, a tactical marketing plan is the link between these strategic ‘pillars’ and the actual marketing operation (e.g. creating ads, events, etc.). Such a plan describes marketing activities themselves, but also who is responsible for the activity, what that activity costs, and target figures such as the intended amount of sign-ups after period X. A useful approach to creating such a plan, is by breaking the marketing process down in a few comprehensible steps. Per step, concrete actions can then be defined, which in turn should reflect the four above-mentioned principles. The steps used in the EMPOWER are:

- Pre-launch: before the actual start of a campaign, preparations are made such as a pre-sign up website or a teaser advertisement
- Awareness: as soon as a campaign has gone live, it is important to spread the word on a larger scale. In this phase, segmentation of the population into distinct groups only takes place on a broad level.
- Interest: now communication becomes more segmented and targeted towards specific intended target groups. Marketing efforts are adjusted to those groups and the places (online or offline) they frequent. This phase works towards a more specific target figure (e.g. the amount of sign-ups per group).
- Action: in this phase the focus is on the participants themselves and having them engaged for the longer-term and taking the intended action.
- Growth: participants themselves are the best ambassadors. This phase therefore is about creating and supporting ambassadors to promote the campaign to others and have them join, as well.

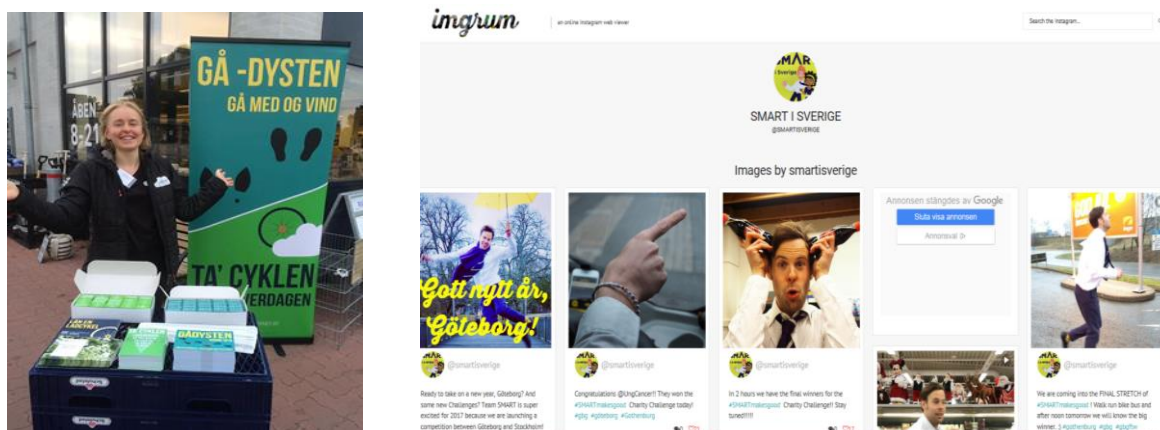
Combined, these four social marketing pillars for EMPOWER and the marketing phases, help generate a practical overview of what to do when. Currently, the EMPOWER project is in the pre-launch phase yet most cities are already working on awareness on a broader scale through marketing. Below, a matrix summarises recommendations per pillar and phase for comparable campaigns.

Table - Recommendations for tactical marketing steps per pillar and marketing phase

	Connection	Presence	Efficacy	Recognition
Pre-launch phase Preparation (phase project is currently in)	Research the most important values in the target group and use this to develop an appropriate offer upon which the marketing is based.	Tap into already ongoing initiatives. Create alliances with organizations that already have an established relationship with the target group.	Arrange for pre-sign up to attract "early adopters". (A "signing-up" is good for community feel and gathering relevant data!) Remove all perceived barriers for actually participating post-launch.	Develop a campaign that ignites an interest in the service and a "need to participate" (use a peer ambassador, for instance). Use logos and visuals that you use throughout the campaign.
Awareness phase Get attention; broad reach	People have to relate the value proposition to their own context: how would changing my behaviour impact my daily life? Ask the question (eg online) or share examples of others.	Now check for relevant events, for instance the municipality's event calendar for a festival at which you can be present for promoting the cause.	Make explicit the step you want the reader (or listener, or...) to take: "sign up here, go here for more information", etc. And make explicit what will be expected ("take the bicycle ones a week") and of course what can be gained.	Diversify in the use of channels; online and offline. Do use the same logo and slogan, but vary in length and depth of the message.
Interest phase Marketing effort is more targeted	Focus on more specific values. For example focus on health in leaflets at gyms, focus on clean urban environment in community Facebook).	Being present at relevant (life) events: for instance in info brochure for new inhabitants (through municipality), or take part in the health program of a large employer.	Make sign-up or participating easy, for instance, if an app is used, also through the app itself. Be clear on rules of the game.	Use peers with comparable routines and habits, to show how new behaviour is incorporated in their lives. And now more in-depth stories can be used in media, on what the goals are and for who it is meant.
Action phase Promote actual behaviour change	Ask participants what outcome they prefer and energise them based on that ("this week you can save / have saved...")	Now personal messages can be sent ("what are your goals for this week?"). Make sure to keep in touch on a regular basis.	Give feedback on performance and tips on how to improve and of course congratulations if results are achieved.	Besides the personal messages, it is still stimulating to be part of a larger initiative. For instance, give an update on number of participants or first results in different media.
Growth phase Longer-term engagement and social spread	People like to share: results, or actions. And humor or emotion may work well for viral (online) messages.	The current participants are present at the places where likely new participants are. Support them to make others enthusiastic, e.g. with visual material.	Referral program: "earn extra points for signing up a friend".	Create ambassadors and ask them to share their story, for instance testimonials or stories to use in new recruitment activities.

In the city of Gothenburg for instance, awareness for EMPOWER is being pursued by using a very relatable and recognisable representative (a young male) that is photographed in relevant places such as public transport. Photographs are posted in Instagram where they receive reactions from the audience. Another example, the city of Odense sparks interest in joining the cycling program by personal contact at relevant places such as schools and shopping malls. For recognition, other participating cities are working on slogans and visuals to use throughout the campaign period that address a few specific values.

Figure – Examples of marketing efforts in the cities of Odense and Gothenburg



Conclusion

Our ambition for EMPOWER is to significantly reduce CO2 emissions in and around cities, by delivering positive incentives through the use of smart devices to stimulate people to choose other means of transport. A social marketing approach that is based on a solid business model, thorough insights on personal values, and consequent practical applications for execution, helps to ensure significant impact. Although people's values may be culturally dependent, and specific activities are of course contextually defined, the method itself can be applied stand-alone. This approach can thus be transferred to other geographical areas with comparable challenges.

Figure – Bridging the gap between service providers and people

