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INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES IN ONLINE ENVIRONMENT: PLANNING SOCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

This paper aims to provide nonprofit organizations and practitioners in the field with a starting point in designing online social programs. The purpose is to integrate online marketing techniques in planning of activities for nonprofit organizations. The article provides a comparison between the steps needed to be taken over the classic social marketing programs and those of social programs with online component. Practical evaluation of the results shows that efficiency is the direct result of following the stages related to social marketing planning.

Keywords: online strategies; social marketing; marketing planning; nonprofit organizations.

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ІННОВАЦІЙНІ СТРАТЕГІЇ В ОНЛАЙН-СЕРЕДОВИЩІ: ПЛАНУВАННЯ СОЦІАЛЬНОЇ ДІЯЛЬНОСТІ НЕКОМЕРЦІЙНИХ ОРГАНІЗАЦІЙ

У статті представлена відправна точка для планування соціальних програм "онлайн" для некомерційних організацій. Мета такого планування – інтеграція засобів онлайн-маркетингу. Проведено порівняння засобів роботи у традиційному соціальному маркетингу та онлайн-маркетингу. Оцінювання практичних результатів показало, що ефективність є безпосереднім результатом слідування запланованим етапам соціальної маркетингової програми.

Ключові слова: онлайн-стратегії; соціальний маркетинг; маркетингове планування; некомерційні організації.

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ИННОВАЦИОННЫЕ СТРАТЕГИИ В ОНЛАЙН-СРЕДЕ: ПЛАНИРОВАНИЕ СОЦИАЛЬНОЙ ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТИ НЕКОММЕРЧЕСКИХ ОРГАНИЗАЦИЙ

В статье представлена отправная точка для планирования социальных программ "онлайн" для некоммерческих организаций. Цель такого планирования – интеграция приемов онлайн-маркетинга. Проведено сравнение приемов работы в традиционном социальном маркетинге и в социальном онлайн-маркетинге. Оценка практических результатов показала, что эффективность является непосредственным результатом следования запланированным этапам социальной маркетинговой программы.

Ключевые слова: онлайн-стратегии; социальный маркетинг; маркетинговое планирование; некоммерческие организации.

1. Introduction. Social marketing is based on the principle that efforts to promote social causes should meet the needs, the preferences and the lifestyles of target consumers. Social marketing concepts, unlike traditional marketing concepts, describe

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the intangible elements and take into account the society welfare (Andreasen, 1995). The key component of social marketing responds to the needs of nonprofit organizations and to consumers' desires.

The rise of the Internet has developed radical shifts in the way companies interact with their customers (Perju et al., 2011). Its development added to social program a new component: the online one. This paper aims to analyze the social marketing program from the online perspective. Thus, the paper describes the impact of marketing program on communication of nonprofit organizations online. In achieving this, the paper presents the required steps to be followed in building effective social programs in the virtual environment. The purpose is to support nonprofit organizations in meeting customer needs objectively and quickly. The practical dimension of the paper analyzes the effectiveness of the social program "Program for a Healthy Lifestyle", organized by NAC (National Audiovisual Council) and IAA (International Advertising Association) between April 2008 and October 2009. "Program for a Healthy Lifestyle" is analyzed in terms of correctness in compliance with the stages required for online social marketing. At the same time, the paper describes how the stages of the program influenced the final results of social actions.

2. Marketing Programs. Market mobility and rapidly changing economic and social phenomena of modern society have led many organizations to get involved in the analysis of market mechanisms. Attempting to adapt to this dynamic environment, organizations have developed specific activities: organizational activities, planning, forecasting etc. In the systematic study of internal and external markets, a particularly important role is played by marketing techniques and tools: marketing plan, marketing strategy or marketing program. The first of these, the marketing plan is used as the substantiation of proper decisions in organizations as well as to increase economic efficiency of market activity. Marketing program is a part of a marketing plan, an instrument used for execution and control over marketing activities (Dragon, 2002).

In social marketing, marketing program is established as a central marketing strategy for nonprofit organization. Expressed as a plan for complex marketing activity, social marketing program consists of an assembly of practical actions aimed at achieving a goal or a set of predetermined objectives. Social marketing program requires continuous monitoring to ensure consumer satisfaction and periodic evaluation of the extent to which it requires modifications due to appearance of new needs or changes in them. A successful marketing program must reflect social benefits for both parties: for consumer as the central component of the program as well as for an organization that promotes social cause, whenever it's a nonprofit organization or private corporation (Anghel et al., 2011).

3. Stages in elaboration of social marketing programs. In order to bring benefits to all parties involved in a social marketing program, the best way would be to cooperate with nonprofit organizations in order to develop strong communication campaigns (Serban, 2011). Given as a starting point the organization's marketing plan, the process of elaboration of a social marketing program involves the following steps:

a. Defining social problems to be addressed. Defining the overall context for elaboration of a social marketing program involves primarily the study of consumer behavior in society. Thus, to initiate a social program, nonprofit organizations must

examine consumer perception of various aspects of community problems. According to Andreasen (1997) the purpose is to create a social program that has to have in its core the consumer needs and desires. Therefore, nonprofit organizations are studying the way in which the economic, cultural and educational context influences consumer perceptions of various social problems. After that, consumers' perceptions, beliefs and opinions about a particular social issue will be integrated in a strategy, slogan and messages for a social program.

b. *Setting the scope and objectives of a social program.* The purpose and the objectives of a social program must be realistic and should help changing the consumer behavior in a positive way. According to Leveton (1996), establishing an objective within a program must include information about:

- i) Determining the target population;
- ii) Setting the promoted social behavior;
- iii) Identifying the moment of information dissemination;
- iv) Determining the manner of program implementation.

An important aspect in determining realistic goals is to ensure cultural relevance for a concerned social program.

c. *Population segmentation.* Population segmentation is the process of identifying target groups to which a social communication program will be addressed. Description of a target population implies determination of common features generally applicable in a group. In population segmentation criteria can be used such as population size, average age, family structure, affiliation groups, group behavior. According to Leveton (1996), among minorities, such criteria may include immigration status, family structure, degree of assimilation, language, religion, views on social issues, educational aspirations.

In population segmentation, nonprofit organizations should focus on: getting relevant information about a target group, sorting the information obtained, determining the most relevant segments, choosing a segment or several target segments and addressing them through practical activities. Depending on the budget and specific attributes of a chosen target group, nonprofit organization will develop social programs that contribute to society welfare.

d. *Analysing the needs of target population.* This step, particularly important in achieving the proposed objectives, refers to the study of target groups perceptions about their needs. Description of a target segment can be achieved by considering demographic, geographic and psychographic characteristics of consumers. In this analysis statistical data are available but equally necessary is finding out the target population opinions about social issues that require attention.

e. *The analysis of communication channels.* According to Leveton (1996), this stage aims to study the channels of communication with targeted groups as well as their effectiveness in achieving a purpose. Nonprofit organizations should identify the influence of various communication channels on the targeted groups as well as the stage of a program for which they are recommended. To reach social objectives, multiple communication channels are required to be used. According to the research conducted by Rogers (1983) on the effectiveness of communication channels, media (television, radio, print etc.) are particularly important in the process of informing consumers about a social problem, while interpersonal communication is effective in taking the decision on a new behavior (e.g, quitting smoking).

f. Defining a market strategy. At this stage the components of social mix are considered: product, price, promotion, distribution. According to Kotler (2008), in social mix, a product has 3 dimensions: the product itself, the current product and the improved product. The product itself is the difference between the benefits that consumers believe they will receive as a result of the action promoted and the benefits that nonprofit organization promotes. The current product describes the desired behavior in a comprehensive manner while improved product refers to any good or service included in a program or which will be promoted to the target group.

The second component, the price, includes both materials costs (of a poster, a booklet etc.) as well as immaterial costs (time to implement). The distribution of program represents the place and the time when a consumer will adopt the desired social behavior. Last component, promotion, describes persuasive communication strategies applied by nonprofit organization in social programs. In strategy development of a market, an important role is played by consumer expectations regarding a social program that will be launched.

g. Development of a program. Development of a social program involves transformation of marketing strategy into effective actions. Encountered as "real marketing plan" (Kotler, 2008), the social program development stage offers a clear vision on marketing activities, responsibilities, time and budgets that will be used. For programs that take place over longer periods of time, real marketing plan will present in detail the proposed activities for the near future, as for the other periods will specify only the general aspects.

h. Evaluation of a program. This stage is setting out the criteria underlying the assessment. Furthermore, an organization will decide how the evaluation procedures will be applied including the time of program assessment. According to Kotler (2002), there are 3 types of evaluation measures used in social marketing:

- i) Internal evaluation measures (evaluation of undertaken activities);
- ii) External evaluation measures (evaluation of consumer reaction);
- iii) Measures to assess the impact of a program (contribution of a program to public welfare).

4. Stages in development of social marketing programs in online environment. In the online environment, of social marketing programs must have the following stages:

a. Defining the social problems which will be addressed. As in the traditional communication environment, in online environment it is a necessary stage to define the social problems which will be the subject of social programs. In establishing the program theme, nonprofit organizations will study the extent of various social phenomena in the community, starting from environmental issues (global warming) and continuing with health (obesity), road safety (seat belt usage) and education.

Depending on specific activities of nonprofits, partnerships concluded and the urgency of informing consumers on a particular social phenomenon, an organization will establish the social problem which will be addressed in a program.

b. Defining the scope and objectives of a social program online. The goal of a social program involves establishment of a particular statement which reflects benefits of promoting social program in the community. Thus, based on this, smaller areas of action are defined that a nonprofit organization plans to develop. Therefore, an organization chooses some options that may help to achieve the stated purpose (e.g,

increase the number of high school graduates) and defines a set of specific objectives (e.g, improving access to education, promoting the value of school etc.).

c. Establishing communication axis. By establishing communication axis, non-profit organization aims to choose a single theme, a slogan, which will distinguish the program at the market. The slogan must be strong enough to have an impact in consumers' minds. Also into this category will fall the key messages and messengers of marketing communications. Key messages express what is intended to be communicated while messengers are public figures, partners or sponsors that send these messages to target audience.

It also should be noted that, in a social program, equally important are promotion of consumer benefits by adopting new behavior (e.g, quitting smoking) or community involvement (e.g, blood donation).

d. Establishing the target population. Target population requires research. Online environment research tools are powerful, flexible and easy to use. Available at low prices, compared with research tools in traditional communication media, online research tools provide statistics and detailed reports of website traffic, traffic duration, periods of maximum audience, most accessed pages, most demanded articles etc.

e. Media planning. By establishing a media plan we intend to understand the target population patterns, the habits of using media channels, knowledge regarding the opinion leader's profiles, namely those who have necessary knowledge and credibility to influence others in decisions of adopting new behavior.

Establishing media plan requires the following steps:

- choosing the media channels to be used in an online social program;

At this stage we determine proper channels and forms of communication. The online tools are extremely generous in options: websites, e-newsletters, e-mailing, online banners or recent techniques such as RSS.

- selecting the media;

To the media used online we can include: SEO, links, search engines, Romanian or foreign web directories, developing systems for affiliation networks, advertising banners, blogs.

- determining the manner of using selected media;

This refers to: inclusion in major search engines, Romanian or foreign web directory submission, growing popularity of links, capitalize program messages through partner websites or placing banners of an organization at other websites with relevant content.

- purchasing advertising space;

An effective media plan must allow, within the available budget, broadcasting social message as many times as possible precisely to the target segment and with maximum valorisation.

f. Evaluating the effectiveness of online social program. Testing the effectiveness of a social program message can be achieved by sending multiple versions to all individuals within the target group. Comparing the results obtained and analyzing consumer reaction, the message can be recovered and media planning stage can be reconsidered.

During the course of a social marketing program close monitoring is recommended of the results and effectiveness of each instrument separately. Therefore, nonprofit

organizations use the program performance indicators (KPI), such as number of visitors, number of newsletter subscribers, number of downloads etc. Through a daily analysis, the most effective instruments can be determined and then resources can be relocated.

Evaluating the effectiveness of a social program also requires comparing the results with the objectives and feedback received from public. It provides a diagnostic analysis of the initiated social program. If done correctly, the assessment may reveal the effectiveness of each marketing tool and the stages of a program that require changes.

5. Assessment of online social marketing program dimension. "The program for a Healthy Lifestyle" is an initiative of National Audiovisual Council (NAC) with IAA Romania (International Advertising Association) and Foundation for Healthy Food (FFHF) seeking awareness of the risks associated with inappropriate diets and lack of motion, which provide solutions to counteract their effects.

In this part of the paper we will consider the effectiveness of this program in terms of online communication. The stages of this online social program will be studied and the way they have been adapted to current social problems.

a. Defining social problems to be addressed. According to Foundation for Healthy Food (FFHF) in Romania, unhealthy lifestyle is a major cause of many disorders and diseases. Daily stress, spiritual and moral imbalance, smoking, excessive alcohol and drug abuse are the main reasons for inadequate diets.

From this aspect, NAC with FPAS decided to launch a social program to attract people's attention to the negative effects of excessive eating and lack of sport in daily life.

b. Defining scope and objectives of this online social program. The purpose of this program is to promote a balanced lifestyle with suitable food consumption and more exercise. The organizers aim at raising public awareness and propose at least one hour of physical exercises every day. The objectives include the following:

- informing the public about necessity of a healthy lifestyle;
- educate the public about the following concepts: nutritional balance, healthy nutritional behavior, the importance of physical exercise;

Financial objectives of the program include:

- achieving a high degree of awareness – over 50% of women and 40% of young people;
- generate traffic on its website (www.putindinfiecare.ro): at least 10,000 unique visitors per week after the first 4 months since release.

c. Establishing the communication axis. The promoting message of the social program "Program for a Healthy Lifestyle" is "a little of each, and plenty of movement". This post is intended to inform the general public about the risks associated with unhealthy lifestyles.

In promoting the benefits of adopting a balanced nutritional behavior, "Program for a Healthy Lifestyle" uses the Internet as a communication medium with youth. On the www.putindinfiecare.ro website, young people can find out more about balanced nutrition, physical exercise and benefits brought by healthy lifestyle.

Also on this website, the organizers created a survey that aims to help the Romanians be aware of their lifestyle. The approach was chromatic, so the action was named "Chain of color." 4 colors defined the following lifestyles: red – sedentary people with unhealthy diet, yellow – balanced individuals, green – active people with

healthy diets, black – indifferent people. On the website of the program, the respondents who completed the survey have been asked to choose the little man color icon which matched his/her lifestyle.

Another approach to the online communication with target consumers was the organization of questions and answers sessions. Within these sessions, many nutritional experts answered the consumers' questions about healthy nutrition.

d. Establishing the target population. The target population represented consumers in Romania, the program being applied both for those who practice healthy lifestyle, in which balanced nutrition and physical activity play important roles, and those who pay less attention to these issues. Although the general population is the general public, NAC and IAA adopted 2 major directions in communication: women and young people. Since, within families, women have greater interests to food, affecting opinions of others, "Program for a Healthy Lifestyle" included in the first component of the program, activities designed for women.

The second segment of the population covered by the "Program for a Healthy Lifestyle" was the youth, a social category in the development of which physical exercises and proper nutrition play a key role.

e. Media planning. Execution of the media planning included the next steps:

- choosing media channels;

The main communication channel in the online environment was the program's website – www.putindinfecare.ro. Further types of online communication were: newsletters, e-mailing, online banners and RSS. Through the website, consumers could learn about healthy lifestyles and read the latest news of the program.

- selecting the media;

The media used within the program were: links, search engines, Romanian web directories, partner websites, advertising banners and forums.

- determining how to use the selected media;

The media used have been listed in the main search engines, in Romanian web directories and the program messages and banners were capitalized by partner websites (www.topsanata.ro, www.cotidianul.ro, www.protv.ro or www.csid.ro).

- purchase advertising space;

Within the available budget, the social message "A little of each, and plenty of movement" was promoted through banners and advertising media on the partner web sites for a period longer than one year.

f. Evaluating the effectiveness of the social program "Program for a Healthy Lifestyle" in online environment. The effectiveness of the program in online environment was analyzed through the following indicators: the number of visitors, the number of subscribers to e-newsletter, the number of requests within questions and answers sessions on issues of nutrition and the number of respondents to the online survey "Chain color".

The main indicator of effectiveness was the online survey program, involving over 2400 respondents. The survey results showed that the respondents were quite concerned about their lifestyle. Therefore:

- 34% of online respondents try to eat balanced food and do physical exercises;
- 28% are active and careful to nutrition;
- 25% are sedentary and have an unhealthy diet;
- 13% are indifferent to their lifestyle.

In terms of age, the category of people aged 25-54 is less concerned about their lifestyle. The main reason is time, most of them being full-time employed.

Also through the website over 13,000 votes have been collected on the color representing the lifestyle of each person. Currently, the lifestyle of the Romanians is represented through over 10 km of colored ribbons.

6. Conclusions. In this paper, general aspects have been presented concerning the manner of designing the management activities within social organizations. Since marketing planning is a must for any nonprofit organization, the authors chose to present in detail one of the main components of the marketing plan: the marketing program. In this respect the steps have been outlined to be followed in implementation of a social marketing program as well as the manner in which these steps can be used in linking with target segments. At the same time, a model of a social program in the online environment is recommended.

In the practical part of the paper, we analyze the effectiveness of the online component in the social program "Program for a Healthy Lifestyle". The results show that the organizers of "Program for Healthy Lifestyle" followed the steps proposed in the section regarding the elaboration of an online marketing program. Moreover, the effectiveness of the program has confirmed the need to follow these steps in future online social marketing programs.

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