

Who Cares—and Why Should They?

By learning what motivates people, animal welfare organizations can use social marketing to inspire positive change



When the Fund for Animals tested responses to four versions of its anti-fur campaign posters, the results were surprising. Though animal advocates are moved by images of raccoons and chinchillas, many fur wearers thought of them as rodents and pests. The image of the bobcat garnered a much more positive response. THE FUND FOR ANIMALS

With so many charities and companies competing for public attention and financial support, nonprofits must learn to be as marketing-savvy as their corporate counterparts. Caryn Ginsberg, a social change strategist with Priority Ventures Group, knows it's not just what you say that matters. It's how you say it and who you say it to. Drawing on an M.B.A. from Stanford University and years of experience in the business sector, Ginsberg now works with animal protection agencies to help them focus their messaging, create successful programs, and reach

their organizational potential. In this excerpted interview, Ginsberg talks with freelance writer Leslie Smith about how shelters and animal welfare groups can make the most of their resources to become effective agents of social change.

AS: What exactly is social marketing?

Caryn Ginsberg: Social marketing is the application of commercial marketing principles for the benefit of the individual and society—or in our case, animals. It addresses voluntary change, but it's not just about changing individual behavior. The same approaches can be applied to influencing organizations and political leaders who make legislation.

How is social marketing different from selling dish soap or sports cars?

Interestingly, the general principles of marketing are very similar across the board. The challenge in the nonprofit world is the ability to measure that very bottom line. For example, how can we ever know exactly how many lives are affected by a spay/neuter campaign? The lack of available data makes it difficult for us to make sure our limited resources are going to the highest and best use. It's frustrating to know we have so many people who are working so hard, but we're not sure which of our efforts are doing the most for animals.

Is it difficult to get people to care about animals when there are so many problems humans around the world face?

I think the problem is getting people to care about anything. Many people are struggling to put food on the table or are dealing with health issues in their families or are worried about their kids' education. I've actually seen some research that says that social issues are not a high priority for all but a small segment of the population. People are feeling stressed and overwhelmed, so getting them to pay attention to any issue is problematic.

From the customer standpoint, you have to answer the question, "What's in it for me?" or "Why should I care?"



Caryn Ginsberg, co-founder of Priority Ventures Group (priorityventures.com), has over 20 years' experience helping nonprofit and for-profit organizations get better results through proven approaches to strategy and marketing. Her animal protection clients include The Humane Society of the United States, the ASPCA, PetSmart Charities, and United Animal Nations.

What can nonprofits learn from the corporate world?

From the customer standpoint, you have to answer the question, "What's in it for me?" or as we look at the nonprofit sector, "Why should I care?"

We're so often marketing through our own perspective: What do *I* want for animals? Of course we need to think about that, but when we're putting a message or program or anything in front of an audience, they're only going to act based on what they're interested in. They're going to think, "What's in it for me?" And while that may include altruism and wanting to help and wanting to be compassionate, all these other considerations arise: What does this really mean for me or my family or my money or my time or my energy or my convenience?

People are customers for change as much as they are customers for a product or service. That means they change their behavior when they want to, based on what's important to them, not because we tell them to based on what's important to us.

How can animal welfare groups be better at organizing or marketing themselves?

The biggest thing that businesses look at is return on investment: Where do I put my money versus where do I get the most money out? If we're investing in a bunch of different things—putting a little here, putting a little there—we don't really know what's getting us the best for animals. I advise some really disciplined thinking about money, time, and energy.

The other thing to focus on is where you have an advantage. Think about your niche and your distinctive competence. What should your organization do and not do, given the audiences you serve and the other organizations that may be active in the community or nationally?

Finally, it's learning to say no. Most groups should be doing less but going deeper. With a shelter, there may be some things you have to do, and you may feel spread thin with just basic responsibilities. Before launching into new programs, ask if you really have the resources to do it.

What are the common messaging or marketing mistakes animal welfare groups tend to make?

One key mistake is failing to segment or target the audience. Almost anyone who's tried on a "one size fits all" shirt or dress knows that one size really doesn't fit all. The same is true of messaging. Talking to people of a different age, gender, race, income, education, or attitude requires a different approach. The spay/neuter message to a 20-year-old white male opposed to spaying and neutering might be very different from the message to a 40-year-old African-American woman who just hasn't gotten around to it yet. Because we don't have infinite resources to develop different messages for everyone, we need to target certain groups or segments. That doesn't mean we don't want everyone to spay and neuter, but segmentation is saying something to someone instead of nothing to everyone.

How do we know who our audience is?

This is the most difficult part of social marketing because there's no hard-and-fast rule. Research gives you a sense of who's where, but in general, I like to start with who seems the most inclined to make a change. We're going to get more animals spayed and neutered if we go after the people who just haven't gotten around to it, rather than the ones who are strongly opposed to spaying and neutering.

That said, behavioral-based segmentation can be very powerful, but it doesn't mean that things like demographics and geographic analysis might not give you something equally important. It may take you in an opposite direction—for example, you may find that a problem is the worst where it's also the most difficult to get anything done. But maybe you'll find that although something is a problem in terms of numbers, people actually aren't resistant to doing something about it.

Some people would rather buy a pet from a breeder instead of adopt from a shelter because the thought of encountering all those needy animals is too

difficult. How important is emotion when creating a strategy?

All marketing is emotional. Even when you're using facts and statistics to appeal to government folks about implementing change, you're really appealing to their emotions, like wanting to feel responsible for something or not wanting to have their constituents angry at them.

If you look at the corporate world, they walk a fine line. Certainly they try to make you uncomfortable—you have bad breath, you don't drive a good enough car—but it's got to be something manageable and something people feel they can address. If we push people too hard or make them feel guilty or bad about what they're doing, they don't want to engage in the issue.

How does a group get their audience to care?

It's critical to conduct research to understand what our audiences are thinking and what resonates with them. We are not our target audience. Our thoughts about animals—the messages we would find effective and the images that appeal to us—don't necessarily match those of the people who haven't acted as we have. Research enables us to both hear where people are coming from and test what would motivate them to change.

A great example is research that the Fund for Animals did for its anti-fur campaign. The campaign was to include pictures of chinchillas and raccoons with the message, "Do you need a fur coat more than she does?" While animal advocates think chinchillas and raccoons are cute, many female fur-wearers thought chinchillas were undesirable rodents and raccoons were pests. It turned out that a young bobcat evoked images of the house cat and elicited a far more favorable response.

A good resource is the Humane Research Council, which not only conducts affordable market research services, but also provides free existing research for animal advocates. Another resource is the Humane Society University course, "Building an Effective Campaign: Planning and Research,"

which I codeveloped with Heidi Prescott, Senior Vice President of Campaigns for The HSUS. (Visit humanesocietyu.org for more information.)

It seems like there's a big step between getting someone to care and getting someone to change a behavior.

That's an important distinction—attitude does not necessarily equal behavior. In making a behavior change, people go through a series of steps, from awareness to interest to decision to action. The challenge for us as marketers is to reach people repeatedly throughout the process. They say it takes hearing a message seven or eight times for it to register, let alone have impact. Therefore we need to find ways to go beyond creating awareness to help people move through the stages.

Let's say your shelter is having difficulty adopting out black dogs or getting people to come to your out-of-the-way location. While you can't necessarily change your intake or where your facility is located, look at things you do control. If you have an inviting environment and provide excellent customer service, your visitors will spread a positive message for free. If it's a negative experience, they'll tell even more people. Just think about the last time you had a really wonderful or really awful customer service experience. How many people did you tell? Word of mouth is often the most cost-effective form of marketing for nonprofits.

Do you advise large agencies differently from small organizations, and if so, how?

The principles of social marketing are the same whether it's a large agency, a community group, or an individual advocate. When working with people one-on-one, we need to think of them as customers for change, listen to them in order to understand their perceptions of benefits and barriers to change, and see how they respond to our messages.

That said, the obvious difference is budgets. I mentioned affordable market research and free word-of-mouth advertising to develop and spread effective messages, but a smaller agency might

have a more do-it-yourself approach. That's where the HSU course can be a tremendously cost-effective source of advice and ideas.

I would also try to put out feelers for low cost or pro bono assistance in the community. Is there someone in your membership who's involved in message consulting? Is there a local advertising or market research firm that would like to be involved? There, too, you can go back to what's in it for them. Maybe it's something to talk about in the community or their chance to be mentioned as a donor at an event.

How do you evaluate success?

The ultimate measure of success is how people behave and the impact it has on animals. It's important to keep in mind how much is affected by the messaging versus other parts of your marketing program. If you were measuring the effectiveness of a spay/neuter campaign to low-income individuals, you might start with how many calls were generated from people in this target audience. Then look at how many of them booked appointments, how many showed up, and how many of those calls resulted in completed surgeries. You'd need to diagnose each stage to evaluate what was and wasn't working. For example, if you have a high no-show rate, is it that the up-front messaging wasn't compelling enough or that appointments are scheduled too far in advance? Evaluating success is challenging, but an organization benefits greatly from doing so, even if it raises more questions than it answers.

What issues are you currently working on?

I'm very excited about a project I'm doing with The HSUS to increase spay and neuter rates in Mississippi and Louisiana. The aim is to identify effective messaging to target audiences in the region. We're not far enough along for me to share specific findings, but a key goal is to be able to share lessons we learn with all animal welfare organizations on effective social marketing. **AS**