



Social Marketing Promotes Adoption of Green Industries Best Management Practices

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Social marketing is a process that applies marketing principles and techniques to create, communicate and deliver value in order to influence target audience behaviors. These techniques benefit society as well as the target audience (Kotler et al., 2006). This process was used to promote knowledge and improve practical application of the Green Industries Best Management Practices. Surveys, personal interviews, and focus group dialogue were undertaken to discover the commercial horticulture professional's perceptions concerning how their actions impact the environment, current practices that need to change, and how best to encourage behavior change. Knowledge and practice problem areas, how best to reach the client, and barriers to change were identified. This information promoted changes in how and where programs are delivered. New methods and materials were developed to meet program objectives. A social marketing campaign can be developed to benefit both the environment and the commercial horticulture professional by encouraging behavior change in a manner that fits with the professional's focus.

Program Objectives

Program objectives are to: 1) increase awareness of Green Industries Best Management Practices (GI-BMPs); communicate regulatory, environmental, and moral issues of GI-BMPs through education, dialogue, and social media; 3) provide practical hands-on tools promoting commercial horticulture professional behavior change; and 4) seek commitment to adopt GI-BMPs.

Methods

The target audience was identified as commercial horticulture professionals, primarily in Hillsborough County, Florida, with potential impacts to the Tampa Bay/Anclote River, Hillsborough River, Alafia River, and Little Manatee River watersheds. Commercial horticulture professionals completed 123 surveys and 42 personal interviews. Two focus groups were conducted with fertilizer and equipment point-of-sale personnel. Greater than 30% incorrect knowledge and improper practices were used to identify the knowledge and practice problem areas. How best to reach the client and barriers to change were identified. This information promoted changes in how and where training programs are delivered. New methods and materials were developed to meet program objectives.

Discussion

The surveys revealed lack of knowledge of nonpoint source pollution, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Limited Urban Commercial Fertilizer Certification,

how to correctly plant a tree or shrub, the months of the year it is appropriate to skip a week of irrigation, the amount of nitrogen to deliver in a single fertilizer application, the amount of phosphorous fertilizer that can be applied when indicated by a soil test, the importance of a buffer zone around water bodies, and pesticide drift. The surveys revealed improper practices in areas of blowing grass clippings or leaves into storm drains or water bodies, fertilizing according to client instructions even when it is not a GI-BMP, applying fertilizers and pesticides within ten feet of water bodies, mowing all turfgrass at the same height, performing preventative pesticide applications and applying fertilizers and pesticides just before a heavy rain.

The audience identified that they would be likely to view training videos on GI-BMP requirements, determining the correct amount of fertilizer to apply, calibrating a spreader and a sprayer, interpreting a fertilizer label, interpreting a soil test report, planting and pruning trees and shrubs, calibrating an irrigation system, inspecting an irrigation system and programming an irrigation timer.

Barriers to behavior change were identified as resentment to additional industry regulation, blame of others for negative environmental impacts, denial of negative environmental impacts and lack of knowledge of negative effects of current practices. Another significant barrier identified was fear of loss of clients due to declining landscape appearance and reduced income that may result from implementing GI-BMPs.

The best way to reach the audience was identified as "by any means" (as long as there is no unpaid work time), during the slower season from October to February: videos, newsletters, email, hand-on training, weekend and evening training, and at point-of-sale vendors.

Three newsletter articles were written and distributed with the theme of "Why Point the Finger at Nonpoint Source Pollution," i.e., *Stormwater Runoff*, *Managing Urban Stormwater Runoff*, and *Fertilizer Use and Landscape Management Ordinances*.

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These articles were reformulated into fact sheets and excerpts are being used for blog posts. Five 10-min videos were developed on topics of *The Green Industries Best Management Practices*, *Why Point the Finger at Nonpoint Source Pollution*, *Why Water Wisely*, *Facts, Functions and Figuring Fertilizers*, and *Smart Spreader Calibration*. Informational cards, brochures and posters were developed on fertilizer ordinances, tree planting, calculating fertilizers and integrated pest management. Commercial horticulture professionals are being urged to sign commitment pledges to adopt the GI-BMPs and to educate their clients when appropriate. Future hands-on, weekend and evening programs are being developed.

Conclusions

Initial response to printed, display, and video training material is positive. Ongoing surveys and post training quizzes will seek to obtain adoption of GI-BMPs by 70% of industry professionals. Ongoing evaluation will also be used to provide continual feedback for program adjustment. A social marketing campaign can be developed to benefit both the environment and the commercial horticulture professional by encouraging behavior change in a manner that fits with the professional's focus.

Literature Cited

Kotler, Philip and N. Lee. 2006. *Social marketing: Influencing behaviors for good*. 3rd ed. Sage Publ., Thousand Oaks, CA.