

MARKETING WEED AWARENESS TO URBAN AUDIENCES

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Summary Sunday 15 October 1995 represented the official Weedbuster Day 'action' date across Queensland. The campaign was a tremendous success with over 3000 Queenslanders participating in weed awareness activities at 90 events throughout the State. Activities centred around encouraging urban residents to work together to clear local creeks and bushland areas of weed infestations. The Weedbuster Day campaign was co-ordinated by the Land Protection Branch of the Department of Natural Resources. It is part of an ongoing, pro-active Weed Awareness Project which adapts proven methods to an existing problem and is unique to Australia.

The project commenced in May 1994 and has been developed and enhanced over time. It forms a strong component of integrated weed management by aiming to equip the general public with the skills and motivation to help combat weed problems. Weed awareness is now 'sold' to specifically chosen targets in the same way Coca-cola markets its products. At present, the Project is limited to the state of Queensland however the Project offers great potential to be adopted by other Australian states. This paper will provide an overview of how the Land Protection Branch is marketing weed awareness to urban audiences.

INTRODUCTION

While Weedbuster Day is one of the more high profile communication tools, numerous other marketing and communication strategies form equally critical components of the Weed Awareness Project. The objectives of the Weed Awareness Project are to:

- inform the public of weed problems,
- help the public make the connection between their gardening habits and potential land degradation,
- provide the public with the information and skills required to play a responsible role in the sustainable use of the land resource, and
- encourage 'whole of community' commitment to the benefits of preventative weed management.

Queensland's urban residents represent 85% of the State's total population – a statistic which mirrors other Australian states. Although all members of the community can contribute to the weed problem, the bulk of the financial and social cost of weed problems has been predominantly borne by rural landholders. Due to this fact,

weed information has traditionally been directed towards those rural landholders. Urban residents, however, have received a limited amount of information on this issue.

This meant that the majority of the population had little knowledge of their contribution to the growing pest situation, and subsequent economic and environmental implications for the future. Consequently, a large segment of the voting public were denied the opportunity to develop an informed opinion on land sustainability issues. To overcome this problem, the Land Protection Branch, in conjunction with a range of related organizations including the National Landcare Program, developed a project to target urban residents.

MARKETING COMPONENTS

While Coca-cola has a tangible product to sell, Weed Awareness – an intangible – requires slightly different strategies. Marketing an intangible for the goal of social change is known as 'social marketing'. Briefly, there are four main components to social marketing. These are:

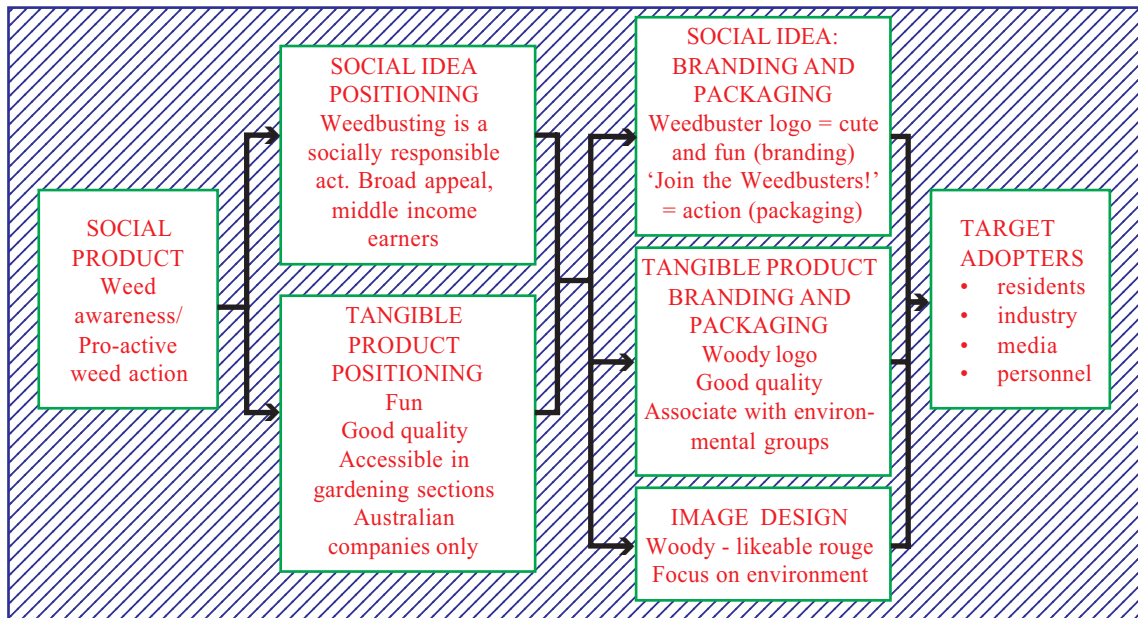
- product
- target markets
- delivery channels
- measurement/evaluation.

PRODUCT

Kotler and Roberto (1989) highlight the breakdown of social products and how the various components can be used to market that product, effectively maximizing adoption by the target market. Accordingly, Weed Awareness consists of three components:

- *Idea* – Responsible people do not plant, import, buy, sell or spread weeds; weeds are a major environmental hazard; weeds cause great difficulties to landholders in rural areas.
- *Practice* – Participation in community clean-ups, disposing of garden waste correctly, not growing exotics.
- *Tangible object* – Promotional material; weed identification material; 'Woody-the-weed' mascot.

The above Weed Awareness product components need to be 'bought' or 'adopted' by the target market. This is achieved via positioning, branding and packaging the various components in a way which is attractive and enticing to the market. Figure 1 summarizes how Weed Awareness components have been developed.

Figure 1. Social product positioning, branding and packaging.

TARGET MARKET

The above positioning, branding and packaging was achieved through researching target markets. However, research into selected markets will not be useful unless the markets are correctly identified first. The Weed Awareness Project's markets have been carefully identified and compartmentalized. For the purposes of this paper, the markets are split in to four main categories – residents, industry, media, and personnel.

Residents The 'residents' market consists of people living in cities and towns across Queensland. In many cases, residents who consider themselves 'rural' would still be targeted through a focus on 'practices' as well as locations. For example, an important message is to educate the public about the impact of their gardening practices. While rural residents might be aware of the problems associated with mesquite, prickly acacia and rubber vine, they may not realize that asparagus fern cuttings from their garden could result in a serious environmental weed infestation in their area.

Industry This market includes all members of the 'plant' industry as opposed to the 'crop' industry. It consists of the landscape, aquarium, nursery and cut flower industries and includes grocery and hardware retail garden outlets.

Media Consists of both the general as well as the 'trade' media and covers both 'controlled' and 'uncontrolled' media. Controlled media includes newsletters, expositions, and manuals. Uncontrolled media includes major print and electronic vehicles such as radio and television. Like all target groups, each 'sub-group' requires a different approach, different information and a carefully planned strategy.

Personnel Includes affiliated organizations and societies, local government, federal government, other state government departments as well as staff of the Department of Natural Resources, both within and outside of the Land Protection Branch.

All markets are studied to identify their individual needs, competitor attitudes, beliefs and practices as well as the price of adoption – that is, what the target would forgo to adopt the social product. Obtaining information of this type, known as 'target market triggers', is an essential component of marketing a social product. This information influences not only product development but also product delivery.

DELIVERY CHANNELS

In order to maximize adoption of a social product such as Weed Awareness, the product has to be made accessible to the target market. The days when a product was advertised and then purchased randomly by the general public

are gone. These days, effective marketing organizations deliver the product to their selected markets, sometimes right to their door. Land Protection Branch staff have always delivered specific weed information to rural audiences. The Weed Awareness Project's audiences receive their information in a similar way. In the main, because the Weed Awareness product is generally an 'intangible', the product 'distribution' system is comprised of various communication vehicles.

Direct Weed Awareness is delivered direct to selected targets by sending speakers to meetings and participating in field days, workshops and a variety of other events. This form of communication is used to deliver the most detailed, comprehensive and specific information to specific audiences. The Project also targets specific exhibitions, such as the Brisbane Flower and Garden Show (residents audience) and the Queensland Nursery Industry Association's Green Expo (industry audience). The final direct communication form, labelled 'word of mouth', is the most effective as it holds the most credibility with target groups. Consequently, one of the Project's major objectives in this area is to increase the 'word of mouth' base as quickly as possible.

Selective Although all of the Project's communication and marketing is selective, this category mainly refers to direct mail, newsletters (articles are sent to over 20 newsletters directed towards both industry and community audiences) and weed identification products (for example Pest Facts or identification cards) as opposed to personal contact. The information is usually not as detailed as that delivered in 'Direct' communication. Printed material, stories and products are targeted to a particular audience and delivered to a specific group for a specific purpose. Also, a growing database of information about the Project's audiences is maintained in order to service each audience's needs more effectively in the future.

Mass Mass marketing can inform and persuade a large group of people in a brief time. In many cases, however, the information disseminated is even more filtered than that delivered in 'Selective' communication. But before various forms of mass marketing can be used effectively, an attention grabbing event is required. This helps to interest not only the media but other relevant parties such as local personalities, plant industry members and those members of the general public the Project would not normally be able to cost effectively reach. Weedbuster Day has been developed to meet this specific need. Local community groups organize Weed Awareness related events specific to their own area, needs and environment.

Through the Project's central office, events are promoted and publicised to encourage community members to join in and help, usually with a 'clean-up' activity at a local creek or park.

Weedbuster Day achieves a number of other goals. The community weed clean-ups are obviously a way to clear local areas of weeds and adopt ownership of the area. The clean-up activities are also a way for residential audiences to obtain first hand knowledge and understanding of weed issues and how to deal with them. Organizing groups receive publicity for their contribution and often gain new members in the process. In effect, Weedbuster Day provides an opportunity for a range of community groups, related organizations and all levels of government to work together as well as delivering Weed Awareness to target audiences.

In addition, the fact that pest plants do not respect state borders points to an obvious opportunity to move the Project towards a national focus. The 'Clean Up Australia' campaign is an example of how this type of campaign could be successful nationally. As the major groups and organizations involved in the Queensland campaign – for example government, Landcare and Greening Australia – are established nationally, national expansion would be easily facilitated. Furthermore, the Project's targets, for example, industry associations and home garden retail outlets (such as Woolworths, Coles and BBC) have national structures which would ease distribution of materials and other communication items.

MEASUREMENT/EVALUATION

All strategies, including the Weedbuster Day event, are analysed to evaluate and track progress. Baseline data were collected on the target markets and combined with a range of Australian Bureau of Statistics information to determine the Project's goals. Weed Awareness, as a product, is constantly monitored and evaluated to determine its position in the market. Feedback is collected and critiques are conducted on the Project's outputs. At this point in the Project, there is a focus on increasing recognition. The major goal is to help the public recognize that pest plants are a problem and to equip them with some skills so they can do something about it. Therefore, measurements include testing what people can identify, which groups they belong to, where they obtain their information and how they would prefer to obtain more information.

A strategy such as the Weedbuster Day campaign is measured by a broad range of criteria. For example, attendance and event numbers as outlined previously, the tonnage cleared or amount of area replanted during an event, as well as other measurements such as a cost analysis.

On a promotional budget of \$A12 000, it is estimated the 1995 Weedbuster Day campaign reached approximately one sixth of the Queensland population, representing 600 000 residents. That is a cost of \$A0.02 per head. Weeds inflict a significant cost to the Queensland economy in lost agricultural production each year. There are also significant, rising environmental and social costs. The comparatively small financial investment in the Weedbuster Day campaign could have a big impact on reducing these costs in the future.

During the month of October 1995, over 110 print media pieces were published and 26 radio interviews were recorded. In Brisbane, 12 television pieces went to air on programs such as Brisbane's Extra, Channel Nine 6.00 pm News, Today Tonight and Burke's Backyard. The combined media coverage was valued at well over \$A100 000 in equivalent advertising space.

CONCLUSION

Weed Awareness has been developed as a good quality, 'fun' commodity. Based on sound research, it has been positioned for broad appeal with colourful, action-oriented 'packaging'. Weed Awareness is now acceptable to the public and has vast market growth potential. The project has evolved from its initial set-up stage and has been soundly placed for success.

Pest plant land degradation has been a burgeoning problem for many years, not only within Queensland but Australia-wide. In the same way as 'Clean Up Australia' has been nationally successful, the Weed Awareness Project has great potential to be expanded into all Australian states. The benefits of co-operation in this area are numerous and would contribute enormously toward reversing the damage pest plants have caused.

Via the Weed Awareness Project, all members of the public will have the opportunity to take an informed stand against the problem – effectively linking rural and urban communities.

As noted in the introduction, Weed Awareness strategies are enacted all year round, however the most overt tool is Weedbuster Day. This year Weedbuster Day will be held on Sunday, 6 October and will be celebrated by a range of events across Queensland. It is hoped that the 1997 campaign will include other Australian states. The Land Protection Branch of the Department of Natural Resources will aim to link in with similar government bodies in other states of Australia in order to launch a national campaign.

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