

# There's an easier way to **save water**

## Accentuate the **Positive:** How **Social Marketing** Makes a **Difference**

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On Tap Editor

Social marketing is a promotion strategy that we'll be hearing a lot more about in the coming years. This marketing technique combines commercial marketing practices with social change and communication theories to alter particular behaviors. The ultimate goal of a social marketing project is to benefit the selected target audience, not the marketer.

Presently, most environmental education programs rely on education and communication, but most have had limited success. "We tell them that water conservation is important. We send brochures out with the water bills. We make every effort to educate people, so why don't they stop wasting water?"

Social marketing uses wisdom, humor, and common sense to get people to listen, remember, and respond.

"Knowledge alone doesn't harm or help the environment. Human attitudes don't harm or help the environment. Human behaviors, on the other hand, have greatly harmed yet hold a great deal of hope for helping, the environment," says GreenCOM, the environmental education and communication project of the U.S. Agency for International Development. Therefore, it's in addressing behavior that environmental education programs will be successful. And that's what social marketing does.

### Give Me an Example

The St. Johns River Water Management District in Florida was struggling with a dilemma: being able to provide affordable and adequate supplies of water to an ever-growing population. After much thought and consideration, the district determined that it could not guarantee it would have enough water for the future if it did not begin promoting water conservation now.

"Currently, almost all public use water within the district comes from fresh groundwater," says Malissa Dillon, regional communication coordinator for the district. "Using too much groundwater can result in wetlands drying out, reductions in lake levels and spring flows, and water quality problems from salt water intrusion."

Dillon notes that by the year 2020, at least 40 percent of the district may not be able to meet its projected water needs.

Leaving the water running while brushing your teeth can use up to six gallons of water.



# Florida's Water

## It's Worth Saving

Water conservation can extend the current water supply, reducing or delaying the need to develop costly new supply sources and treatment facilities. The district decided that it needed to produce and execute a water conservation education plan that would change the behavior of its residents. A social marketing program seemed like it might hold some answers.

### Change the Way People Think

"Social marketing makes people think about things differently," says Jeff Hoffman, president of the Hoffman Agency, a public relations firm in Jacksonville, Florida.

"What social marketing can do is persuade people to believe that they are a part of the solution because it uses positive messaging.

"In many educational campaigns, the message is punitive," continues Hoffman. "For example, the message that wasting water is against the law implies a punitive standpoint.

"People do not like negative messaging," he explains. "It makes them feel like they are being preached at, and it doesn't drive people to change their behavior. In fact, it may even force an outcome that you did not expect, like intentionally wasting water. People do not want to be told they are bad. They want to be a part of the social good. What we need is a supply of information that is motivational and educational to change human behavior.

"When we began working with the district, they wanted to know if they were developing a message that would motivate people," he says. "The St. Johns River Management District has great vision and is very progressive."

According to Dillon, prior to the social marketing campaign, the district,

utilities, and local governments had implemented traditional types of education programs, such as seeking free media coverage, producing public service announcements (PSAs), giving presentations to community groups, hosting seminars, managing displays at community events, and distributing literature.

"While these efforts were successful in reaching a certain segment of the population, a much larger percentage of the population was either not receiving the message or still felt water conservation was not important to them," says Dillon.

"Broad-based communications were needed to educate, motivate, and change public behavior regarding water conservation," she continues. "The district began implementing a paid media water conservation public awareness campaign in 2002.

### Florida's Campaign Recognized for Excellence

The 2002-04 campaign has been recognized for innovation and creative excellence with a number of awards, including the Council for Sustainable Florida Award, International Wildlife Film Festival Award, an Addy Judges Award, nine Telly Awards, a Silver Microphone, and a Summit Award.

### What is social marketing?

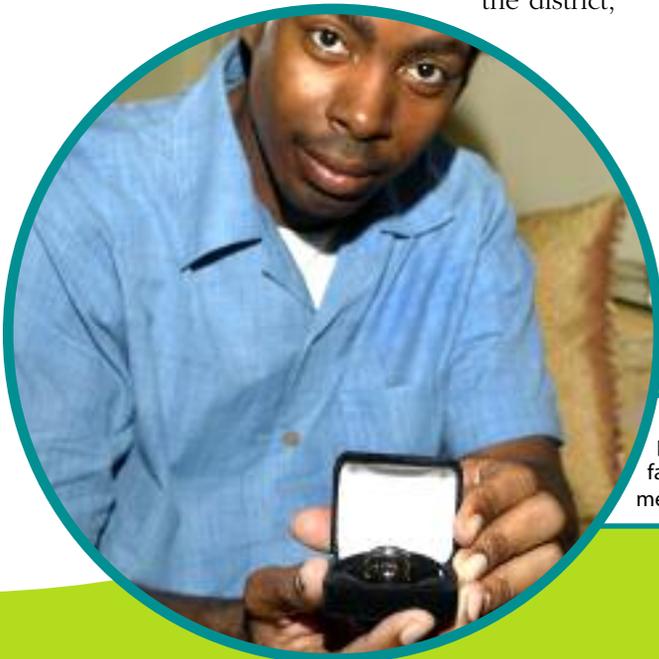
Social marketing has been around for a long time. In the U.S., it has typically been used in the health promotion industry by organizations such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health. Now, however, social marketing is making its way into the environmental industry.

Marketing is typically defined "as all activities and communications designed to inform, persuade, or motivate behavior changes for the marketer's purposes. It is based on theories and strategies that include: benefits/exchange and persuasion theories; competition; segmentation by lifestyle; and the marketing mix—product, price, place, promotion, and positioning."

So, social marketing can be defined as:

- the adaptation of technologies/techniques from commercial marketing (i.e., address benefits/exchange theory; competition; segmentation by lifestyle; and the marketing mix—product, price, place, promotion, and positioning)
- to inform, persuade, or motivate behavior changes
- that improve societal welfare, i.e., for the public good.

Adapted with permission from Marketing Partners, Inc., Burlington, VT.



Accepting a proposal to use a faucet aerator means saving water.

“Using paid media is the most effective and controllable way to communicate a consistent message to the broadest audience,” she explains. “Elements of the campaign include television, radio, newspaper, and other forms of mass media. The campaign is not meant to replace traditional educational efforts but to enhance them.”

### District Had Some Challenges

The district had a number of challenges in developing this comprehensive conservation awareness campaign, including:

- reaching four million residents in an 18-county area,
- seeking agreement, buy-in, and financial support from local governments and water supply utilities,
- managing message dissemination in two of Florida’s most expensive media markets: Orlando and Jacksonville,
- coordinating messages with the South Florida Water Management District

and Southwest Florida Water Management District, because media coverage in central Florida overlaps those districts’ area of responsibility, and

- developing messages that would be memorable, have impact, and support the district’s mission in water conservation.

“There are more than 100 large water supply utilities within the district,” says Dillon. “Prior to this campaign, each utility implemented its own conservation program. This coordinated campaign allows the opportunity to present a clear, consistent, conservation message throughout the district. Having water suppliers and the district speak with one voice reduces public confusion and heightens public interest.

“The synergies of a unified theme and consistent message are more easily remembered and acted on by the public than is the

### Why use paid media?

“It has been suggested that we see and respond to some 3,000 messages per day, including billboards, TV advertising, and radio messages,” says Jeff Hoffman, president of the Hoffman Agency, a public relations firm in Jacksonville, Florida. “We have to break through all of that noise to present a message that people will remember.”

Paid media allows a social marketing campaign’s messages to be delivered at an exposure level that will provide the necessary impact. Messages can appear during primetime TV shows, as well as in prominent sections of the local paper. While there is no “magic formula” for establishing exactly how many times people need to see the message, says Hoffman, “the secret in all advertising is repetition. The main thing is to repeat the message. It takes at least three exposures to recognize it and seven to own it.”

Overwatering your lawn can stimulate weed growth.



historic system of multiple messages overlaying each other,” she says. “The ultimate goal of this effort is to change water-use habits and make conserving water a practice demanded by society at large.”

### Four-year Campaign Begins

The district contracted the Hoffman Agency to conduct its campaign. Initially, the agency conducted research to learn how water conservation messages are presented around the country, what has proved effective, and how the district and its water supply utilities have educated the public in the past.

“The district was already using an educational approach to communicate water conservation and was doing a fine job,” says Hoffman. “But they wanted to reach a broader audience.

“We found that creating behavior change requires painful occurrences, like extreme drought or astronomical prices,” he says, adding that long-term messaging is the only other way he knows of to make new behaviors socially acceptable.

“Modifying behavior takes an incredible amount of time,” Hoffman explains. “It takes years, and that’s a reality that policy-makers are going to have to accept.”

“In many cultures, high consumption of electricity and water is an acceptable social norm,” according to GreenCom. “People feel that they have worked hard to obtain their income and deserve to consume all the resources they can afford. They may construe conserving electricity and water as incompatible with their socio-economic norms.” In addition, there may be other barriers that make changing behavior difficult.

“Florida is a water-rich state,” says Hoffman. “It’s hard to get people to realize that water conservation is important.”

Because of this obstacle, Hoffman says they needed to get people closer to the environment. “We began the campaign with awareness and general educational issues, like water-saving tips,” he says.

Dillon says that the campaign’s tagline “Florida’s Water: It’s Worth Saving” was created to promote general awareness, but the campaign also included other issues, such as water supply concerns. In addition, the campaign incorporated educational components to inform residents about simple ways to

change their water-use behaviors and to instill a sense of social responsibility to conserve water.

### Social Responsibility Sought

During campaign years 2002-04, objectives included:

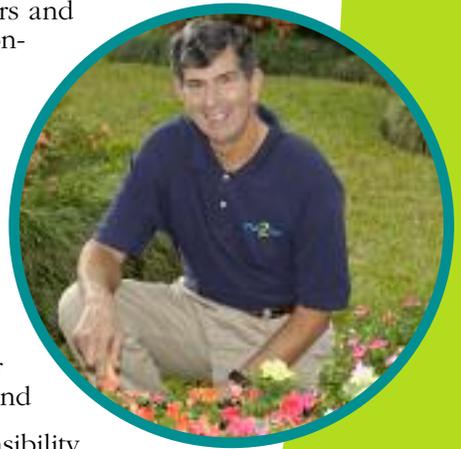
- increasing awareness of water issues and the need for conservation,
- providing educational tips on how to save water and why it is important, and
- encouraging social responsibility to further the idea that saving water benefits all district residents.

“In the second year, we continued with the educational portion and provided more [water] saving tips,” says Hoffman.

“By the third year, we wanted to create a sense of social responsibility,” he explains. “We let people know that small changes are what make the difference, and people do not have to change their lifestyles. If we all do a little, it makes a big difference, and we can save Florida lots of water.”

According to Dillon, the district wanted to use humor to accomplish campaign goals. “Characters were created that were used throughout the campaign on television, radio, print, and collateral communications, such as brochures, flyers, and the Internet. The objective was to create a message that would be memorable and that would have an impact on behavior change.”

“The characters are shown in situations where they are also evolving,” says Lauren Lucas,



### The Campaign’s Yearly Focus

**2002**—Create awareness of water-use issues and the need to conserve (understanding the aquifer, promoting the message that it is simple to conserve and that conservation is important to everyone)

**2003**—Offer educational tips on how to conserve (lawn watering, fixing leaks, water-wise landscaping, and various indoor water-saving tips)

**2004**—Create sense of social responsibility (turning off sprinklers when it rains/rain sensors, installing faucet aerators and low-flow fixtures)

**2005**—Appropriate lawn and landscape irrigation techniques (water lawns only up to two times a week, using up to of  $\frac{3}{4}$  an inch per watering)

Ph.D., an environmental psychologist with the Hoffman Agency. “We wanted to show development in the characters, so we used the same characters throughout the campaign. That way, people got to see these characters developing new behaviors.”

According to a September 2000 article in *Environment and Behavior*, to really change a target audience’s behavior, it takes far more than simply supplying information. We also must address the target audience’s attitude and values, which will then result in changing behavior.

Taking this into account, the district shifted its original focus from awareness to specific messaging that paid attention to the target audience’s values and attitudes, and that required audience participation.

### What do they want?

According to GreenCOM, people want to participate in decisions that directly affect them. “With a growing community wariness of consultants, governments, and authority in general, it is paramount that residents design their own communication strategy and messages. Their participation not only improves the program and adds credibility, but also strengthens the audience’s skills to do similar work in the future.”

To nail down what the district’s residents were truly in tune with, focus groups were held. What the district learned from the groups would prove to be invaluable to the campaign.



Lawns only need to be watered twice per week.

# Think **2** Two

“Focus groups held prior to message development indicated that residents are very particular about their lawns,” says Dillon, adding that they were more concerned with how to keep their lawns healthy than they were with water conservation.

### A Practice Versus a Behavior

Distinguishing between a practice and a behavior also was key to the district promoting a successful campaign. According to GreenCOM, a behavior is a single, observable action that an individual performs. Although a behavior may be performed out of habit, it could be the outcome of a conscious decision. Practices, on the other hand, are a series of related behaviors. For example, water conservation is a practice made up of a number of behaviors, such as shutting off the water during tooth brushing, taking five minute showers, and only watering the lawn twice a week.

Armed with this information, the district chose to target lawn watering rather than water conservation as a whole. It’s far easier to get people to only turn on the sprinklers twice a week than to expect them to adopt an entire water conservation practice overnight.

“The district’s goal is to ensure the efficient use of water,” says Linda Burnette, director of the district’s Office of Communications and Governmental Affairs. “Our market research demonstrates that many people irrigate more often than two times a week. We want people to use what they need to maintain their lawns but not to over water their lawns.”

To add credibility to their campaign, the district enlisted the aid of an expert from the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences who supported their message that lawns only need water up to two times a week with up to  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch per watering.

"I agreed to participate in the district's educational efforts because our message is the same, and we can reach more people with the message by working together," says Tom MacCubbin, an environmental horticulturist from the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, in a district press release. "Over watering your lawn results in a shallow root system, which means your lawn is far less drought and stress tolerant."

The message included information about what happens when you over water your lawn, such as weed growth, fungus, and disease. It also became a series of humorous PSAs that grab the attention of the viewer. Using characters such as the Water Hunter, a play on the Crocodile Hunter, the district used the tagline "Think Two." The song "It Takes Two" also was used in the campaign. (The PSAs may be viewed at [floridaswater.com](http://floridaswater.com).)

"The messages were upbeat, positive, and memorable," says Dillon.

### Was the campaign a success?

When the district conducted an evaluation of the campaign, it found that for years 2002-04, surveys demonstrated that 50 percent of the public recalled the advertisements, and 17 percent admitted to changing their water-use behaviors as a result of this campaign. "These percentages mean that approximately 700,000 people within the district improved their water-use practices as a result of this campaign," says Dillon.

Further, she notes that for campaign year 2005, 81 percent of the public recalled the advertisements and public awareness of the campaign message (water lawns only up to two times a week) increased significantly from 66 percent to 83 percent from previous surveys.

To find this information, the district used public awareness surveys in the campaign's evaluation. They initially conducted nine random-digit-dial telephone surveys (with error margin plus or minus 4.9 percent at a 95 percent confidence level) to establish baseline measurements prior to campaign implementation and then again to measure the campaign's effectiveness.

"Mass media communication is the way to reach the broadest audience," says Dillon. "Survey results indicate the water conservation message is being heard and behaviors are changing."

"We are pleased that it appears to be working," says Hoffman. "It's a matter of educating the public about the needs and solutions in a way that they will own the lessons. This is, indeed, the heart of social marketing—using traditional advertising and marketing strategies to bring lessons to the public that communicate the notion that 'we all benefit if we all participate' in a positive behavior change."



### For More Information

For more information about social marketing, contact the Hoffman Agency at 1056 Hendricks Avenue, Jacksonville, Florida. You also may call them at (904) 398-9663; or visit their Web site at [thhoffmanagency.com](http://thhoffmanagency.com).

For more about Florida's water conservation program, contact the St. Johns River Water Management District at (386) 329-4571. You also may e-mail Dillon at [mdillon@sjrwmd.com](mailto:mdillon@sjrwmd.com).

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