

## A Mix of Old and New: Applying Traditional and New Media Strategies to Reach Vulnerable Populations

*Lindsay Hallett, MPH, Nalini Padmanabhan, MPH,  
Heather Pitorak, Katy Roberson, MPH*

The case studies in Volume 3 focus on vulnerable populations – groups distinguished by unique characteristics, cultural values, languages, health conditions, or social challenges that put them at risk for specific health disparities. Besides being at risk, vulnerable populations are often difficult to reach, both physically and psychologically. One of the biggest challenges in public health is to reach these populations and create receptive audiences. Often, vulnerable populations are not exposed to health messages or media channels, lack access to media, or possess social, cultural, or individual factors that create barriers to accessing or accepting public health messages. Thus, the more often public health messages reach and communicate with these unique populations, the higher the likelihood of improved health outcomes.

The following case studies illustrate several effective strategies to do just that. These techniques include both traditional promotion via health fairs, curricula, and radio Entertainment-Education (E-E), and newer media such as user-generated content on the Internet. This volume of *Cases* shows that both traditional and new media are

effective health communication and marketing strategies. The two are not mutually exclusive, and selection of which strategies to include in a campaign is often dictated by the specific characteristics and situation of the target population.

The case study “Impact of a Community Dental Fair” highlights how traditional health education and promotion efforts can be culturally and linguistically tailored to effectively reach vulnerable populations. Identifying apparent oral health disparities among low income Hispanics along the U.S.-Mexico border, the practitioners sought to increase dental health knowledge and promote preventive behaviors through participation at a community health fair. Health fairs can cost-effectively disseminate information using a range of tactics, from flashy interactive activities and free giveaways to medical screenings and basic print materials. Admission to health fairs is often free, allowing equal access and encouraging participation from low-income populations. Although health fairs are time- and location-limited, the case confirms that this conventional promotion and dissemination of materials and messages can posi-

tively impact knowledge and be enjoyable for participants. In this case, the practitioners reached their priority population by including prominent Hispanic community members in the dental booths, carefully crafting bilingual messages and materials, and incorporating culturally relevant values. Formative research suggested capitalizing on the normative cultural value of collectivism and family first, or *familismo*, to facilitate learning and adaptation of healthy behaviors among Hispanic health fair participants.

In the case study “Designing an Agricultural Safety Intervention Program for Ohio Amish Youth,” low-tech marketing and principles of social marketing were deemed the most appropriate way to reach Amish youth about health and safety. Amish communities have high rates of agricultural injury and death resulting from occupational hazards on farms. Because of their culture, Amish populations are “hard-to-reach” audiences; they are not commonly exposed to large-scale public health campaigns or other mainstream mass media. The authors used focus groups with Amish stakeholders and questionnaires completed by Amish youth to develop a pilot agricultural safety intervention administered in a day-camp setting. The four “P’s” of social marketing were used to address this unique population.

High school students in Dakar, Senegal, were trained in new media techniques in the case “Health Communication via New Media.” After taking part in a ten-week summer course that focused on audio and video production, photography, and journalistic writing, participating students used these techniques to produce health messages and materials about HIV/AIDS for their peers. Messages focused on the stigma

and discrimination surrounding HIV/AIDS, the importance of voluntary counseling and testing, and the role of peer support. After completing the summer program, participants returned to their high schools and recruited their peers to form student clubs and further disseminate their messages. Pre- and post-test questionnaires found significant improvements in students’ competence in new media techniques, knowledge about HIV/AIDS, and intentions to engage in various Internet activities. As digital technology becomes increasingly available in Africa, training young people to use these innovations empowers them and allows them to produce materials that are tailored and attractive to their target populations.

The case study “BodyLove: The Impact of Targeted Radio Educational Entertainment on Health Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behavior among African Americans” applies social marketing principles through a radio broadcast serial drama. This health communication intervention aims to address the well-documented health disparities present among African-Americans in 15 Alabama communities. Radio offers a culturally significant medium for communicating with this typically under-reached subgroup. The goal of the serial drama was to reduce the risk of chronic disease by modeling healthy and unhealthy behavior along with positive and negative outcome expectations. The episode scripts applied Social Cognitive Theory to shape listener outcome and efficacy expectations related to screening, exercise and healthy eating. BodyLove recorded 83 fifteen-minute episodes that aired weekly. Preliminary results show that frequency of listening improved BodyLove’s influence on intended health behaviors.

Vulnerable populations are diverse subgroups of larger populations, and yet, they are a significant segment of public health audiences. Identifying the most effective and appropriate means to communicate and market public health messages to vulnerable populations are important public health goals in the effort to reduce health disparities. The case studies in Volume 3 address a diversity of populations. Tak-

ing into account cultural sensitivity and competency can increase the impact of a public health communication or marketing intervention. How can both traditional and new media methods be effectively applied to address vulnerable populations? Read *Cases in Public Health Communication and Marketing*, Volume 3 to learn about strategies to involve vulnerable populations into public health campaigns.