Analyzing the Austin, Texas “Scoop the Poop” Initiative

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When discussing social marketing one must look at the one thing that differentiates it from other stereotyped marketing, influencing for good. Where good can be argued back and forth between who views it, I think we can all consider less poison in our water a good thing. That’s what the social marketing process “Scoop The Poop” in Austin, Texas did. Kotler and Lee (2011) highlights the biggest problem dog feces causes as that it “contains dangerous bacteria such as *Salmonella* and *E. coli* as well as harmful parasites such as *Giardia* and roundworms.” (pg.33) Austin, Texas had a problem with people picking up after their dogs and created a social marketing plan that not only worked, it created a greener environment for their community.

The goal of Scoop the Poop initially targeted park goers and aimed to change three behaviors: Scoop the poop, bag it, and place it in the trash (Kotler & Lee, 2011, pg. 34). Eventually it expanded it audience to include all people walking their dogs in the parks and community neighborhoods. They surveyed and interviewed all around the Austin County and discovered the reasons as to why people were not doing what they were supposed to. Kotler and Lee noted that they include “a) not having convenient access to disposable bags, b) not having enough trash cans around for quick disposal, c) finding the task messy and smelly, d) not believing one little pile is a problem, and e) considering dog waste a good/natural fertilizer.” (pg. 34) They go on saying potential benefits that would make people pick up the poop are pressure from others, more bag dispensers, more trash cans, more info about why they should, and enforcement of fines.

So the team behind Scoop the Poop did just that and put up 25 Mutt mitt stations, which feature bags that go around the hand just like a glove. They also gave out trash bag holders that held these bags and fit right onto the leash of your pet. To help the enforcement of fines the County put up signs noting a 311 number where citizens can call and report someone not doing their duty. All of this would do nothing if people did not know about the problem. That’s why there were different promotional elements that helped spread the word about what the problem is, what to do, and what this initiative was doing to help. There is an extensive reach of promotions used, some even today, that Kotler and Lee noted. They include broadcast media, public events, outdoor media, print media, signage, brochures, flyers, an enhanced web site, program mascot, social media, articles in the local paper, face-to-face promotions, direct mail, and additional distribution channels for program materials (pg.35 & pg. 36)

Their initiative started in 2001 and recorded the results as the amount of pounds collected and properly disposed. From 37,500 pounds at the beginning to 1,200,000 pounds in 2009 they were definitely successful. Not only that but they also initiated a “green” movement by having an initiative. If the city does any one of the items listed in its Green Neighborhood program including storm drain marking and adopt a park they get a free Mutt Mitt dispenser (Kotler & Lee, 2011, pg.34 & 35).

In conclusion, this movement was well thought out, researched, planned, and commenced. If there could have been any improvements it would have been a 100% completion rate, but no one is perfect. From learning why people are not doing it, how can they help, and targeting the right people they started off strong. They went on to do a strong promotion with a series of different events that put what they were doing far outside of Austin. They even went so far as to make a green movement while they were at it making their homes safer, cleaner, and health conscious. The one item that marks social marketing as different from all the other marketing views is influencing for good and “Scoop the Poop” undeniably triumphed.

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Citation

[Kotler, Philip, and Nancy Lee. *Social Marketing: Influencing Behaviors for Good*. 4. ed. Los Angeles [u.a.: Sage Publ., 2011. Print.](http://www.bibme.org/)