

# How do you sell low-carbon living?

*If the devil has all the best tunes, we'd better start paying attention to his compositional style. Penny Walker shares some of the trade secrets from ad land, unearthed in a recent report from NESTA.*

This new report from NESTA explores the techniques and approaches which make really skilful mainstream marketing so successful, so that the music flowing out from the low-carbon living band can be as toe-tapping as that from corporate communicators.

## Social marketing

Selling low-carbon living, along with persuading people to give up smoking or to give blood, comes under the umbrella of 'social marketing'. Social marketing is "the use of marketing principles and techniques to influence a target audience to voluntarily accept, reject, modify or abandon a behaviour for the benefit of individuals, groups or society as a whole". (Kotler et al 2002).

## Low-carbon living

There are, according to Defra, 31 different target behaviours which make up low-carbon living. Defra has organised them into five priority groups and including nine

headline behaviours.

Each of these headline behaviours could be the subject of a separate social marketing campaign.

## Lady, you gotta practice

An elderly tourist asks a New York subway worker "How do I get to Carnegie Hall?" Quick as a flash he helpfully replies, "Lady, you gotta practise."

As with any virtuoso musician, it turns out that there's an awful lot of leg-work before the artistry kicks in.

Fundamental to a successful marketing strategy for a product or service are the four Ps (or five – or even seven! – depending on whom you ask). These are:

- Product
- Place
- Price
- Promotion
- (Person)

And they each have an equivalent in social marketing.

Notice how Place and Price (Accessibility

and Cost) bring us straight back to the false dichotomy between an individual-behaviour approach to bringing about a low-carbon future, and a policy approach requiring leadership from governments and action by businesses. It's the policy, legislative and fiscal framework which enables public and private organisations to put in place accessible alternatives and ensure that the benefits outweigh the costs of changing behaviour.

## Just what makes those tunes so catchy?

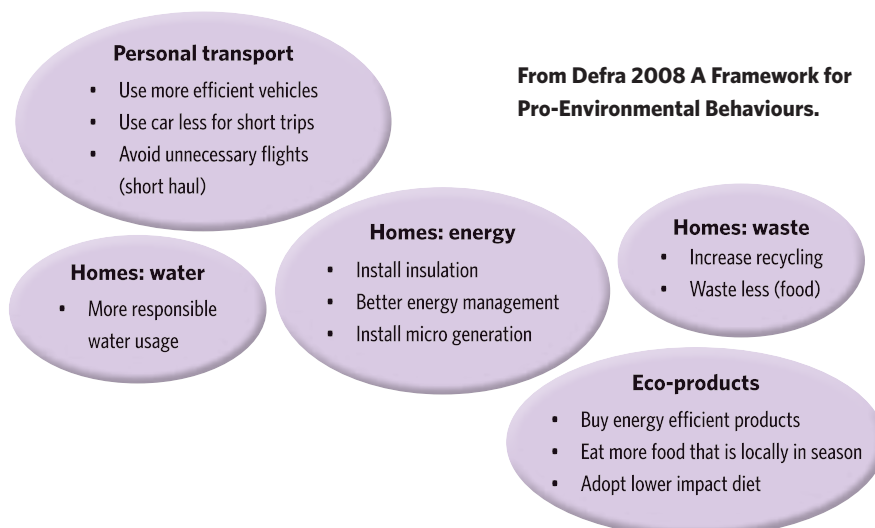
The big budgets giving access to the talented creatives and paying for the rounds of focus groups and deep-diving ethnographic research into the target market obviously help!

The most easily transferable lesson for lower-budget efforts is the 'both / and' partnership of emotional and rational.

There has to be some tangible benefit to buying the product or taking the action – the individual needs to believe that the action they are being asked to take will actually lead to a carbon-reduction (if that is the benefit which is being sold). If the target audience doesn't already fully accept this, then it needs to be communicated at some point.

They also need to feel that taking action will make them feel good. There are many ways in which it might – reinforcing their self-belief of being a 'good person', or of being acceptable and likeable to their peers, or of being canny and smart, or a pioneer... Understanding the target audience involves understanding the kind of person they see themselves as, or would like to.

The report sets out some key lessons from the field of public health (drink driving, sexual health and so on).



[www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/social/behaviour/pdf/behaviours-jan08-report.pdf](http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/social/behaviour/pdf/behaviours-jan08-report.pdf)

### Seven lessons from public health campaigns

1. Messages should be clear and simple.
2. Ensure the campaign complements related regulatory or enforcement activity.
3. Engage as well as educate, using emotional and rational content.
4. Ensure the scale of the marketing activity matches the task through adequate resourcing.
5. Plan peaks of communication activity relevant to the behaviour being targeted (eg drink driving at Christmas).
6. Understand what motivates the audience, and what the objective and psychological barriers to change are.
7. Empower people to take action with clear messages and practical help, and help them to feel empowered.

### Low-carbon highlights

There are some clear distinctions between selling a product or a service, and selling the idea of low-carbon living. There are many more potential messages, as Defra's list of headline behaviours shows, so it's harder to say what it is that's actually being advertised.

In addition, the benefits to the individual are much harder to pin down. My use of

energy efficient bulbs won't mean that my climate turns out to be better than my wasteful neighbour's.

So NESTA's report draws some lessons specific to marketing low-carbon living. The messages should be:

- Normal – as taking action on climate change is considered 'normal', more people will engage.
- Not miserable – despite the potentially catastrophic impacts of climate change, the messages need to be about positive alternatives rather than about fear or guilt.
- Fair – people are willing to consider new behaviours if they think the burden is being shared fairly, between them and other people, and between 'the people', government and business.
- Personally relevant – showing that the risks of climate change are here and now, not far away in space and time, and so are the opportunities to act.
- Opportunity-orientated – painting a picture of the potential to act differently and of benefits which flow from the new behaviour.

Other insights include framing climate change as a 'common enemy' which can unite us.

### Social marketing in context

The report also shows us how a social

marketing approach to low-carbon living depends on action from other players, for its communications to work. This is because of the well-known challenge of scale: successful social marketing communicates effective, immediate actions. The trouble is that these individual actions which are simple and personal enough for people to contemplate are not on the same scale as the size of the challenge that they are apparently designed to solve. For the messages to be credible, and for people to believe that there is congruence between the scale of the problem and the scale of their response, they need to see that other people are taking action too.

The communications need to reinforce this idea of a nation united against a common enemy – the policy context and the actions by government and other organisations need to demonstrate that we are. ■

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#### More information

*Battachary, D, et al, 2008. Selling Sustainability: Seven lessons from advertising and marketing to sell low-carbon living. London: NESTA. www.nesta.org.uk/selling-sustainability-report-pubs/ Defra 2008. A Framework for Pro-Environmental Behaviours. London: Defra. Kotler, P, Roberto, N and Lee, N 2002. Social Marketing: Improving the Quality of Life. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications. Walker, P, 2008. Audience segmentation: just who are you talking to? 'the environmentalist', issue 56 April 2008. Lincoln: IEMA.*

Product marketing	Social marketing
<b>PRODUCT</b> - the item or service which is being sold. eg a broadband package; an ice-cream.	<b>PROPOSITION</b> - the specific behaviour which the individual is being asked to adopt. eg wash clothes at 30°; recycle.
<b>PLACE</b> - the way that the product is distributed to the customer. eg a chain of high-street shops; a central warehouse in the supplier chain, a website plus home delivery; a street kiosk.	<b>ACCESSIBILITY</b> - how easy it is to access the means to the existing behaviour or the new behaviour. eg safe cycle routes; doorstep recycling collections.
<b>PRICE</b> - how much it costs to buy and use the product or service. eg initial cost; running costs; delivery costs.	<b>COSTS</b> - the costs of changing the behaviour may be financial or there may be other perceived costs (and benefits). eg grants for insulation; congestion charging; Bikeability safe cycle training and awards.
<b>PROMOTION</b> - the communication channels and approaches which will be used to get people to try, adopt, identify with and become a regular purchaser of their product or service. eg TV and radio advertising; sponsorship; editorial coverage; stalls and events; celebrity endorsements.	<b>SOCIAL COMMUNICATION</b> - using the same palette of techniques, focusing on the socially-desirable behaviour rather than the purchasing of a product or service.
<b>PERSON</b> - a clear idea of whom the product or service is aimed at. These are often given flip but memorable names (remember the Yuppie and the Dinky?) or more detailed descriptions. eg single young professionals with student loan debts living in a shared house in an urban area; retired couple currently in good health and with no immediate money worries.	<b>PERSON</b> - this takes us back to the importance of segmentation (see 'just who are you talking to', 'the environmentalist', April 08). Different segmentations are discussed, including one produced specially for the NESTA report: the environmentals, the sympathisers, the neighbourhoods, the premiums and the worldlys.

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