



AHF

AIDS HEALTHCARE
FOUNDATION

Best Practices of Marketing & Mobilization for HIV Services
Rapid Testing Program
Field Guide

Introduction

UNAIDS estimates that 55% of all HIV positive people in the world are unaware of their status. There is a need for a significant scale up in the availability, accessibility and demand for free, rapid HIV testing if we are to bend the curve of new infections downward and bring the AIDS epidemic under control.

In our experience, effective marketing of HIV testing services is often neglected in the development of public health programs and testing guidelines. This is reflected in the dearth of available recommendations and best practices specific to the social advertising of testing services and the lack of funding earmarked for demand creation in the testing program budgets.

The purpose of this paper is to share AHF's extensive experience with mobilization and marketing of testing services within its Rapid Testing Program. This is not merely a theoretical compendium of best practices, but a field-tested manual of practical solutions to real world challenges of running a global HIV testing program.

Branding

Consistent branding across all marketing materials is essential for the promotion of HIV testing. It creates continuity and brand recognition among potential clients, facilitating their access to testing.

For example, AHF used the same logo and color scheme for the Test & Treat campaign, including on all testing tents, advertisements, staff t-shirts, social media messages and incentive items in different countries around the world.



After a short period of time, consumers readily began to associate the



Test & Treat marketing materials with the testing campaign and the community sites where the services were being offered. Anecdotal

reports from the field indicate that this strategy helped guide people to the testing sites and spread the information about the availability of testing to other prospective clients by word of mouth.

Branding must be simple, straightforward and limited to no more than 3 or 4 words. In most urban environments testing marketing has to compete for the split-second attention of busy clients with many other advertisements, consequently messages overloaded with words and images often get ignored altogether.



The idea “less is more” also applies to the visual elements of a brand. Logos and related elements of design should be visually catchy and clean. This approach has been successfully used by brands like Coca-Cola and Apple. Typically their billboards feature only 2 or 3 colors and the company logo as a central design element. Given the success of these global brands, this approach should be applied to the promotion of HIV testing.



“Less is more”: Cambodia Knockout HIV Billboard

While standardized design and messaging help foster brand recognition, sometimes it may be necessary to make small adjustments to ensure that marketing materials are culturally compatible with their intended audience. However, these changes should be kept to a minimum to preserve the



consistency of the brand.

Lastly, the message, as a combination of visual elements and words should be easily understandable to the intended audience. If it is too clever or vague, the consumer might misinterpret it or might not have the time to decipher its meaning.

Advertising

Advertising is a crucial component of a testing promotion strategy. It is often the first point of contact with prospective testing clients. The placement and visual appeal of the message have a direct correlation to the number of people who will respond to an ad.

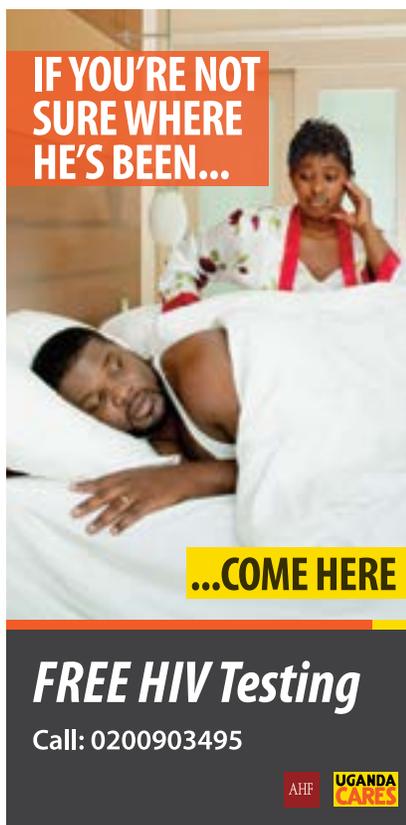
Despite advertising's ability to build demand for service and raise awareness about service availability, it is frequently an afterthought in HIV testing programs with correspondingly low budget allocations. Advertising should be developed in parallel with the service delivery model and adequately funded. Creative, targeted advertising for a testing campaign can deliver a return on investment (ROI) much greater than what is otherwise achievable with minimal promotion, such as the word of mouth by itself.

Similarly to any commercial product, testing advertising needs to be tailored to a specific medium and audience to achieve the highest market penetration. AHF advertises its testing service around the world over radio, in print, online, on billboards and television and via the social media.

Ad placement largely depends on the specific country conditions. For example, in China AHF couldn't obtain permission to place outdoor testing ads, but

we were allowed to broadcast short video clip ads on television instead. In Nigeria, we capitalized on the popularity of radio as the leading medium to broadcast HIV/AIDS testing and awareness jingles by popular local radio personalities.

In conservative countries with tightly controlled media sometimes it is challenging to use images and messages that might be perceived as controversial. Certain topics around sexuality and HIV/AIDS remain taboo, hindering the effectiveness of prevention messaging. However, these restrictions often can be circumvented in creative ways.



Uganda Get Tested Poster

In Uganda, one of AHF's billboards was censored because it encouraged spouses to get tested if they suspected their partners of infidelity. This is a culturally sensitive topic in Uganda, because the practice of multiple concurrent sexual relationships known as "side dish" is common. It poses a particularly high risk of HIV infection for married women whose husbands might be having high-risk sex outside of marriage.

HIV-related billboards in Uganda are subject to a formal review and approval process by a government body. Given the sensitive subject of the ad, AHF was refused permission to place the ad. To bypass this restriction, we used the ad online and in print, two media that are not subject to the same strict scrutiny.

Thus, even in the most challenging environments and under censorship it is possible to find creative ways to disseminate important prevention messages that can be misconstrued by authorities as controversial.

In certain markets potential for advertising may be limited by the high cost of billboards, television ads and other media. In these situations, low-cost alternatives can be used to supplement mainstream advertising. Online promotion via Facebook,



Twitter, Instagram and other social media is a cost-effective way of building an online presence, consumer interaction and brand recognition.

AHF successfully used this strategy in Latin America where advertising in urban settings proved costly. We partnered with MSM bars and clubs to place testing promotional materials, and at times even testing itself, at the venues. We also placed ads in MSM publications, which have the double benefit of relatively low ad rates and an audience demographic that is at high risk for HIV infection.

Palm cards have also proven effective in this region. Typically these cards are small enough to easily fit into a pocket and contain information on where and when one can get tested for HIV. They are inexpensive to produce and encourage one-on-one interaction between potential clients and volunteers who are passing them out.



Palm card for AHF Brazil Pride Parade

In many countries AHF deploys Mobile Testing Units (MTUs) to reach rural, remote or otherwise underserved areas with testing services. Typically, the MTUs are built from retrofitted passenger vans, buses, or campers to accommodate one or more private compartments for testing and counseling.



AHF Mobile Testing Units in India

The MTUs are often branded by being wrapped in vinyl with advertising messages printed on the outside. This has proven very effective and serves a two-fold strategy. The wrapped MTUs inform the public about the availability of testing in a given area and serve as mobile billboards, when they move from one testing location to another.



Concept Development

Developing an effective concept for HIV testing ads is perhaps the most challenging part of the marketing process. To facilitate this process, AHF created a marketing template which breaks down concept development into three stages: Identifying the problem that the ad needs to address; Identifying the target audience and the best way to reach it; Formulating the images and copy for the concept.

AHF does not create all ad concepts from scratch. Often new ad ideas arise from existing concepts that have proven to be popular and effective with clients in existing markets. Typically these ads are adapted to a local language and the imagery is modified to make it relevant to a specific market, but the overall concept remains the same. This approach saves time by eliminating the need to create many new concepts from scratch. In our experience most existing concepts that have been adapted to multiple markets have been overwhelmingly well received.

PR Agencies

In certain regions AHF contracts local PR agencies to assist it in promoting advocacy initiatives and treatment and prevention services. Competent PR companies typically have an extensive network of media contacts and can pitch HIV/AIDS related stories to reporters and publications that cover the relevant beats. PR agencies can also assist in organizing and publicizing press conferences, events and placing ads in the local media.

PR agencies should be engaged to leverage their strengths. In our experience, HIV/AIDS services and advocacy are a niche category of advertising. For this



reason, PR companies have a difficult time coming up with original ad concepts and must undergo a learning curve to develop ads that are sensitive to people who might be seeking HIV services and are at the same time effective at capturing the audience. With some exceptions, PR agencies are generally more successful when working with and adapting concepts that have been developed by AHF in-house.

Incentives

Sometimes advertising alone is not enough to draw in people to get tested. Over the years AHF has developed many colorful and attractive giveaways to incentivize people to get tested. These include pens, keychains, t-shirts, hats, bags, bandanas, dog tags and many other small, inexpensive items. The giveaways are the biggest pull for testing, with dog tags being some of the most popular.



AHF's two largest annual community events around the world are the commemoration of the World AIDS Day and the celebration of the International Condom Day. The format of the actual activities varies from country to country, but both events have a prominent testing component.

Typically, AHF's Global Marketing Department develops a theme and a package of marketing materials in preparation for each event. The theme for a particular event remains consistent throughout the world, while the marketing materials are adapted and localized to specific geographies and languages.

Once the theme and the marketing materials are rolled out, each country has the freedom to develop their own activities for a target population they are trying to reach and decide the most effective advertising medium for getting the message out about the event to that audience. AHF country office use this opportunity as a creative outlet with great success – past activities have included: marches, fashion shows, cycling events, concerts, flash mobs, puppet and magic shows, contests and performances.

Events

Community events such as concerts, flash mob dances and street performances are an effective way to attract large numbers of people to a testing site. These events have the advantage of drawing people to a centralized location by creating a festive atmosphere that helps to normalize HIV testing and dispel stigma around getting tested.



Flash Mob at Mexico City during World AIDS Day 2015.

In 2012, by using the event format AHF set a Guinness World Record by testing 3,733 people for HIV in one day in Rosario, Argentina. The use of AHF's streamlined testing model in combination with affective marketing and mobilization made this possible. Similarly, during the commemoration of World AIDS Days in 2009, AHF organized a concert in Kampala, Uganda where over 6,000 people were tested in one day, though at the time Guinness World Book of Records official were not present, hence the number was not registered as a world record.

Events are an effective tool for getting people tested. The sense of togetherness and the communal experience of participating in an event and getting tested helps community members feel that they are not alone. Events don't



necessarily need to be large, as long as they appeal to the populations most in need of testing services. Above all, the key to success is flexibility, once a common theme has been established, local teams should be allowed to adapt it as they are most familiar with the needs of their community.

Measuring marketing effectiveness

To be effective marketing must reach the right audience and prompt that audience to take a specific action. In the case of HIV testing marketing campaigns, the message needs to reach people most at risk of getting infected and compel them to get tested. This may require a considerable investment of resources, thus measuring “the return on investment” (ROI) is essential to assessing whether a particular message or creative concept is working.

Within the RTP program AHF collects relevant marketing ROI data via a client survey that has been integrated into the RTP client intake form. Typically, the testing counselor fills out an intake form for every client that contains basic information such as age, gender, reason for getting tested and other epidemiologically relevant information. At the bottom of the form there is a “How did you hear about us?” question with a selection of answers, such as “Word of mouth,” “radio,” “billboard,” “TV,” “friends,” etc. Data collected via this question can be cross-checked with the advertising campaigns running in a given market at the time of the test being performed to establish the ROI of a particular campaign.

The global AIDS epidemic can be brought under control with the scientific advances we now have, but this effort will require a massive scale up of HIV testing, so that the majority of PLWHA can learn their status and seek treatment.

Conclusion

The HIV/AIDS epidemics vary widely, from generalized in Southern Africa to concentrated in Eastern Europe, to every conceivable combination in between. Consequently, HIV testing models and

marketing strategies need to be adaptable to the circumstance of each geography and community, while still being grounded in the evidence-based best practices.

We hope this document will encourage program planners and decision makers to reconsider the role of marketing and mobilization in the scale up of testing service around the world, so that it may receive the resources and attention it deserves.

