

Chesapeake Bay Social Marketing Initiative

2004-2005 Final Report

August 31, 2005

The Challenge

Facing booming population growth and ambitious nutrient reduction goals, the Chesapeake Bay Program wanted to persuade average citizens to help protect the bay. Efforts were already underway to reduce pollution from farmers, developers, local governments and others, but nothing specifically targeted the watershed's growing residential base. At first glance, residents appeared supportive: Nine out of ten watershed residents reported being concerned about the Bay's health. Almost half – 48% -- described themselves as "very concerned." Yet, most continued to behave in ways that threatened the bay's health – over-fertilizing lawns, neglecting septic tank maintenance and leaving pet waste to flow into the bay. In the end, the concern was nice, but people's individual actions were damaging the bay regardless of how anyone felt.

The Chesapeake Social Marketing Initiative set out to change how residents act. The first challenge was deciding exactly how the program wanted residents to behave. A few dozen stewardship behaviors were identified and ranked according to their simplicity, their impact and the ability of individuals to engage in the behavior. Initiative leaders decided to target one simple yet important behavior as way to begin building a larger campaign. The goal was to begin building a brand identity with a stronger appeal than standard environmental messages. Straight environmental messages appear to resonate with a specific psychographic (those who most identify as environmentalists), but fail to encourage stewardship actions with a larger audience. By creating a new brand identity – one NOT associated with an environmental appeal – the initiative could truly reach a new audience in a more persuasive way, then the Chesapeake Bay Program could leverage this same brand to encourage other stewardship behaviors.

Initiative leaders decided to target the use of fertilizer in the spring because it is so frequently misused and over-applied, leading to a spike in nutrient runoff during the spring. The greater DC area has about two million households with roughly 530,000 acres of lawn. Every year, it is estimated that excess lawn fertilizers in the DC primary metropolitan statistical area (PMSA) contribute about 4.7 million pounds of nitrogen and 560,000 pounds of phosphorous to local streams and rivers that lead to the Bay. An estimated 11% of the total amount of nitrogen loading from this area comes from lawn fertilizer (Chesapeake Bay Program, 2002 data).

Choosing lawn fertilization as a target behavior made sense for a number of reasons, including:

1. Lawn care is among the most controllable individual actions that most affects Bay water quality.
2. Changing lawn care behavior by waiting until fall to fertilize is not hard to do.
3. Lawn fertilization is a visible, public behavior that is subject to social reinforcement.

A one-day retreat with local watershed managers and other stakeholders was convened to present the concept of targeting this behavior (and other behavioral options) for the campaign, and there was consensus that changing lawn care would have the greatest potential to impact Bay water quality. Two simple behavioral goals emerged:

- (1) Putting off the use of fertilizer until the fall; and
- (2) Requesting a specific environmentally friendly standard of lawn care service.

Both behaviors were marketed under a single brand so that, even after the campaign concluded, the program would be left with an important asset – a non-environmental brand that appealed to an audience the program had not effectively reached before.

Thus the initial challenge was three-fold:

1. The initiative sought to break through the large number of current Bay messages and reach a segment of residents the program had not successfully reached in the past;
2. The initiative sought to persuade these residents to refrain from using fertilizer in the spring or to request a specific environmentally friendly standard of lawn care service; and
3. The initiative sought to create a new “non-environmental” brand that appealed to a new audience and helped the program draw new allies into the cause.

The Campaign

The cornerstone of the campaign was to reframe the issue as a lifestyle, rather than an environmental, question. Research showed that while environmental concerns were not correlated with lawn care behaviors, lifestyle choices were. The campaign made an effort to frame the choice in the same context in which lawn care decisions were being made. The core message: You should put off fertilizing until the fall not for environmental reasons, but because of the culinary and lifestyle implications – most specifically, damage to a regional icon, the Blue Crab. As one newspaper ad put it: “Save the Crabcakes.”

The messages were humorous and somewhat irreverent, rather than dour and serious. The idea was to make putting off fertilizing the “cool” choice of the locally knowledgeable. The decision was not an environmental one, it was something done by those who understand and enjoy the local seafood. “Save the crabs,” the TV tagline suggested, “then eat ‘em.” In this way, the holier-than-thou tone that sometimes accompanies environmental messages – and drives the target audience away – became the butt of the joke, and the intended behavior became a way to show you like entertaining and having fun (an aspiration linked to fertilizer use).

To reinforce this positioning, the campaign brand was not the Chesapeake Bay Program (an environmental group) but the “Chesapeake Club,” which was described as a group concerned with preserving the traditions of the area. This was an attempt to create a sense of membership, participation, and practicing a behavior that is the accepted social norm – a sense that “this is what people like me do.”

Residents were exposed to the seven-week campaign, launched in late February to coincide with the most popular season for fertilizer decision-making, primarily through a television buy of the four major network stations in Washington, D.C. The TV ads were supplemented by newspaper ads in The Washington Post, transit signs on the orange and blue Metro lines, outdoor advertising in Union Station and earned media. The media buy was, by far, the largest expense in the budget, accounting for more than half of the overall budget. Yet, given the significant cost of advertising in the Washington market, the purchasing power was limited. To

boost rating points, the campaign decided to produce two 15-second spots (which air for two-thirds the cost of 30-second spots) and dedicate two-thirds of the television buy to those spots. Yet, even with those techniques to stretch the buy's purchasing power, the initiative was only able purchase 1,200 rating points over the seven-week period, beginning with a two-week launch at 250 rating points a week. This translates into reaching 83% of intended television audience an average of 14 times over the campaign period or about twice a week. By comparison, many political campaigns will buy 1,200 rating points per week.

To focus maximum attention on the ads, the campaign was launched with a press event in early March, at which local chefs convened and signed a petition asking DC area residents to wait until fall to fertilize or to hire a Chesapeake Club lawn care partner, so that they can more reliably serve delicious local Chesapeake seafood. Two local network affiliates covered the story.

In addition, lawn care partners were recruited to co-develop and offer customers a Bay-friendly service option. Early discussions with local university researchers and extension agents, and lawn companies themselves, indicated that by limiting the timing and quantity of fertilizer applied, lawn services with the proper technology and training can apply fertilizer throughout the growing season in a Bay-friendly way that the general public cannot. In return for offering such a service option, the campaign would promote these participating businesses to the target audience.

Finally, print collateral was developed to support several campaign components. A color brochure promoting the Chesapeake Club lawn care option was developed and provided to all participating lawn care partners, for distribution to existing and potential customers. Lawn care partners were also given free promotional items like Chesapeake Club window stickers, "No appetizers were harmed in the making of this lawn" cards to hang on customers doors after receiving a Chesapeake Club service, and Chesapeake Club lawn signs to publicly reward their decision to hire a Bay-friendly lawn service.

Branded "Save the crabs, then eat 'em" drink coasters were printed and distributed without charge to local seafood restaurants, to use and hand out to patrons. The coasters sported the fertilize in the fall message on the back, and restaurant wait staff were informed regarding the purpose of the campaign and why fall fertilizing is more environmentally sound. In this way, restaurants also became partners in disseminating the campaign message, and as an extra incentive, were also promoted on the campaign website.

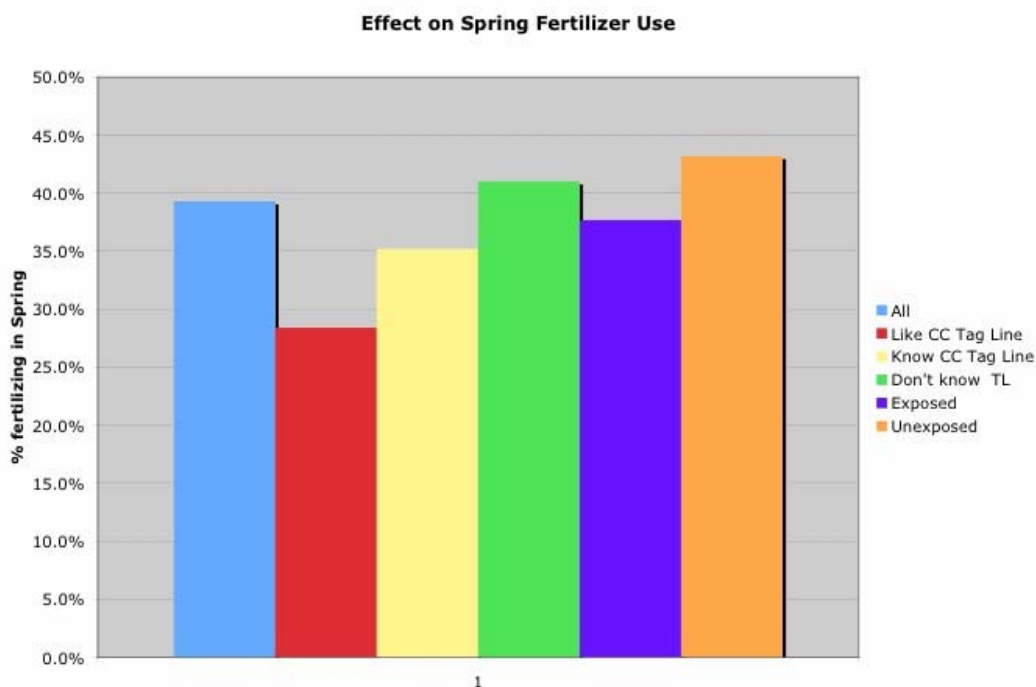
Media opportunities were pitched to local news outlets and national newswires throughout the seven-week ad run, and a number of stories ran as a result. Several media outlets were interested in the angle of a non-environmental theme for an environmental campaign, and others focused on the partnership with lawn care companies, which they deemed an unlikely but beneficial partnership. A number of news outlets outside of the target area, including the *Los Angeles Times* and an English-language radio program in Germany, picked up on the story of this unusual approach to environmental advocacy.

The Results

The Chesapeake Club campaign was noticed, remembered, liked and correlated with the use of fertilizer in the spring.

A post-intervention random-digit dial telephone survey was administered over two and-a-half weeks, beginning the last week of the television buy, to 599 area residents who reported they

cared for their lawn or hired someone to do it. Respondents were asked questions regarding environmental concern and practices as in the pre-intervention survey, with the addition of a few others. Homeowners were also asked whether and how often they plan to fertilize this year, and if so, when they did so or plan to do so.



The results were impressive given the campaign's limited budget:

- ❑ The campaign had very high awareness. Seven out of 10 respondents (72%) reported exposure to a Chesapeake Bay campaign about lawn care and could correctly identify one of the themes of the campaign.
- ❑ A large portion of the audience also recalled the tag line and brand name, the pieces of the campaign more closely related to the brand the program hopes to continue using over time. Nearly half the respondents -- 44% -- were able to recall the Chesapeake Club brand, and/or the "Save the crabs, then eat 'em" tagline in an aided awareness question.
- ❑ A third of the respondents (32%) said they knew the tagline, half of which said they liked it. (Most of the other half were neutral; only a small percentage did not like the tagline).

- ❑ The campaign appears to have an effect on fertilizer use. Respondents exposed¹ to the campaign were less likely to use fertilizer in the Spring (38% compared to 43% for those not exposed to the campaign). While the campaign asked residents to shift the timing of residential fertilizer application, respondents exposed to the campaign were more likely not to fertilize at all (37% versus 27% for those not exposed to the campaign). Consistency issues administering the post-test survey prevent a fair pre- and post-comparison for spring fertilizer use, though the level recorded in 2005 was lower than that recorded for 2004.
- ❑ Respondents who recalled the tagline were even less likely to fertilize in the Spring (35%) and even more likely not to fertilize at all (39%). Those who liked the tagline were the least likely to fertilize in the Spring (only 28% did).
- ❑ Overall, people seemed more interested in refraining from fertilizer use in 2005 than before the campaign. The portion of respondents who said they planned not to fertilize at all doubled from 15% in the pre-campaign survey, conducted in 2004, to 34% in the post-survey, conducted in 2005.
- ❑ A surprising number of people (approximately 100) took time to email via the website to express their appreciation of the campaign messages and use of humor – the most frequently made comment was that the campaign should print and sell “Save the crabs, then eat ‘em” T-shirts. Surprisingly few people (four) wrote to express displeasure with our suggestion that we should save the crabs solely so they can be eaten.

Like any campaign, however, the Chesapeake Bay Social Marketing Initiative also ran into unanticipated obstacles and fell short of its own goals in several areas. The problems are listed below because each also represents an opportunity for the future

- ❑ “Hits” to the campaign website were much lower than expected, in part because the call-to-action in the advertising centered on the behavior (not fertilizing in the spring) and not visiting the web site. The open question is whether more emphasis on visiting the web site in the modestly-budgeted campaign would have detracted from the fertilizer message and prevented the campaign’s success in influencing behavior.
- ❑ Some lawn care partners were unhappy that most of the ads featured the message of fall fertilization, without pairing it with the option to hire a Chesapeake Club partner lawn service. Again, this downside was the result of a conscious decision to emphasize a core message focused on behavior – one that appears to have been successful.
- ❑ Insufficient time was allotted for development and distribution of print collateral to support the lawn care partners, who each year begin customer outreach as early as January, and as a result they were unable to promote the Chesapeake Club service option along with their first customer contacts of the year.
- ❑ An effort to partner with Scotts, a major manufacturer of lawn chemicals, to develop a product for use in the springtime in place of lawn fertilization did not result in a plan to come up with a replacement product. Scotts, who sells most of its lawn care products in the spring, did indicate that the company would consider changing fertilizer packaging in the future to promote more responsible fertilizing. Continuing post-campaign discussions may be able to develop new partnership opportunities prior to future campaigns.

¹ Respondents were considered “exposed” to the campaign if they 1) indicated that they had heard something this year about using fertilizer and the Chesapeake Bay, and 2) were able to describe one of the specific campaign themes without any prompts, i.e. without being given any hints or choices. Campaign themes included: not fertilizing in spring, putting off fertilizing until fall, Chesapeake Club, “Save the crabs then eat ‘em,” “No appetizers were harmed in the making of this lawn” and “Protect the crabcakes.” Respondents who answered “how to care for your yard” or something similar that was not specific to the campaign were not considered “exposed.”

Overall, the campaign succeeded in its primary objectives: it created a new brand that appealed to residents the program had not successfully reached in the past, it appears to have discouraged spring fertilizer use, and it established new relationships with a new set of partners, lawn services and restaurants.

Next Steps

The challenge ahead is to leverage the success of the first year. The Chesapeake Bay Program is emerging from year one with more than a temporary dip in fertilizer use. The program now owns the Chesapeake Club brand and with it, the ability to reach residents responsible for a significant portion of the nutrient runoff. The program may want to expand the effort, using the same advertising, to markets previously unexposed to the message (such as Baltimore and Richmond). In addition, the program should consider leveraging the partnerships and website created in year one to expand and improve the Chesapeake Club lawn service option, expose more people to the message next year and make better use of the Club's online potential.

Specifically, the Academy for Educational Development recommends the following:

- ❑ Expanding the Chesapeake Club brand in Washington, D.C., to continue discouraging improper fertilizer use with the creation of a year two media campaign;
- ❑ Using the Chesapeake Club advertising elsewhere in the watershed, especially in areas that strongly identify with Chesapeake Bay icons such as the Blue Crab.
- ❑ Creating a more robust and popular lawn care service option for the entire watershed using the parameters negotiated in year one and launching a cooperative advertising effort with participating lawn services that is more targeted at potential lawn service clients.
- ❑ Beginning now to design an extensive outreach and publicity effort in the spring using local chefs and other unexpected partners.
- ❑ Striking partnerships with restaurants throughout the watershed to use the coasters, adding a variety of stewardship messages to the back.
- ❑ Consider the establishment of a Chesapeake Club effort owned jointly by a larger share of stakeholders in the Bay including the fishing industry, developers and environmental groups.
- ❑ Build on the "Club" concept by recruiting real people to be club member spokespeople – e.g. homeowners, fishermen, chefs, lawn care professionals.
- ❑ Finally, we believe a more detailed next steps discussion should be held with AED staff, Marketing for Change staff and the Chesapeake Bay Program's Communications Workgroup.