How Much Do Park Agencies Market Physical Activity?

Deborah Cohen, MD, MPH, RAND
Vanessa Guzman, Johns Hopkins
Peter Harnik and Elissa Hoagland, Trust for Public Land
Outline

• What is marketing?
• What are park agencies doing to market their programs and parks?
• How do these efforts compare to for-profit fitness marketing?
• Implications
What is Marketing?

(Getting attention for products/services and motivating use/purchase)
Does Marketing Work in Parks?
The Gates, February, 2005; Est. 250,000 persons/day
The Park Saw a 400 Percent Increase Compared to an Average February
Marketing Physical Activity

• In our work in parks, we have observed most parks to be underutilized and minimal park marketing efforts

• In contrast, most for-profit businesses rely on marketing as a catalyst for consumer behavior

• Park agencies can do the same, even though many don’t recognize the opportunity

• The extensive marketing of and natural proclivity to sedentary behaviors needs to be countered.
Parks Provide Opportunities for Physical Activity

Yoga in the Park, San Diego (yogabuddies.com); Joggers in Central Park (nydailynews.com); Fitness equipment in a Los Angeles park (tpl.org);
Parks Are Public Resources

- Parks are widespread, affordable, public resources for physical activity
- 80% of Americans live within 2 miles of a public park

Boston Common (undercovertourist.com)
Trust for Public Land has park resource data for the 77 most populous US cities.
Methods

TPL Data includes:
1) Budget
2) Marketing Budget and Staff
3) Park usership and paid usership

We asked all parks with a marketing plan to send it to us
Qualitative Evaluation for Park & Recreation Marketing Plans

- ✓ Primary goal
- ✓ Consistent brand or logo
- ✓ Physical activity programs or campaigns
- ✓ Focus on a target market
City Park Systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Populations served</td>
<td>451,572</td>
<td>239K-8,300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of parks/city</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>41 - 4,157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1 park/2,611 people)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acreage</td>
<td>6,167</td>
<td>357-501,725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1 acre/62 people)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Ratio of Marketing Budgets to Total Park Expenditures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average Park System Budget</td>
<td>$74,412,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Marketing Budget</td>
<td>$211,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. % of Operating Budget</td>
<td>0.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg.% of Total Budget</td>
<td>0.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenditure per park</td>
<td>$655</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenditure per capita</td>
<td>25 cents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No associations with poverty, race, age distribution, or city growth rates.
Problems Assessing Parks’ Marketing Budgets

• Non-standard definition for marketing.
  • Some include outreach, programming and promotional discounts, while others don’t
  • Some include staff in their budgets while others did not
  • Some with supposedly 0 budgets still spent money on websites and other outreach efforts that might be considered marketing
• Usership data are also incomplete and assessed in different ways
Comparison: Marketing Fitness in the Private Sector

Promotional photo from Curves’ Tampa Bay website (curvestampabay.com)
Marketing Physical Activity in Private Facilities

- Gyms spend millions of dollars on marketing each year.
- Marketing efforts typically focused on 21-64 year olds in the middle-high income brackets.
- Between 1998 and 2007, private gym memberships increased 40%.
- During that time, fitness club industry revenues increased from $9.6 billion to $18.7 billion.
Marketing Expenditures as a Percent of Total Revenue

Bally in West LA: 1500-1700/day
Bally in Culver City: 1800-2700/day

$50 Million

*Source: 2006, 2007 or 2008 annual reports
Marketing Efforts by Park Systems

Bakersfield, CA outreach (bakersfieldcity.us); San Antonio “Step up to Recreation” Flyer (sanantonio.gov); Glendale Parks & Rec. Facebook profile photo (facebook.com/pages/Glendale-AZ/Glendale-Parks-Recreation/)
We requested marketing plans from 57 park systems, and have received 16 so far.
Three Models for City Parks’ Marketing

The 57 agencies surveyed fall into 3 categories:
1. No plan
2. Revenue-driven plan
3. Usership-driven plan
1. No Plan

Objective and methods unknown or nonexistent
2. Revenue-Driven

- Objective: Earn as much revenue as possible through multiple sources
  - Favors lucrative park activities (e.g. golf, with high fees) over typical, everyday use
- Fitness goals: undeveloped
- Outreach: limited to campaigns that bring in revenue
  - Reliance on free media, targeted to potential spenders and donors
- Strategy: Marketing plan shows business-like sophistication
  - Corporate and retail partnerships
  - Merchandising
Revenue-Maximizing: Miami-Dade County Parks and Recreation

- Objective: “OVERRIDING PRIMARY GOAL: INCREASE REVENUE” (Marketing Plan Overview: 2008-2010, p.2)
- Fitness Objective: None

From the “EcoAdventures” portion on the Miami-Dade Parks & Rec website (miamidade.gov)
Targeted Demographics

- Demographics with the greatest potential for bringing in revenue
- Active local users:
  - Park use survey to target individuals based on park activities
- Millennials (the under-30 demographic):
  - Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Craig’s List
- Community Donors:
  - Parklife magazine
  - Adopt-A-Park & Park Foundation
- Tourists:
  - Partnerships with hotels, cruise lines, destination management companies
  - Advertising in visitor publications, tourist maps, and travel-related websites
  - Tourist-specific link on park website
3. Usership-Driven

- Objective: Encourage as many people as possible to use the park system
- Fitness: provides a range of programs to meet demand
- Outreach: Information on park programs and facilities is available to all through a few, well-known sources
  - Website, newsletters, email updates
  - Some agencies use educational campaigns to reach the least interested or informed constituents
- Targeting: ranges from no targeting to business-like precision
  - Targeting is frequently aimed at demographics overlooked by private fitness marketing
Usership-driven: Lexington-Fayette Parks and Recreation

• Objective: “To provide Quality Park Land, Recreation facilities, Programs, and Open Space For All.” (2007 Marketing Plan p.3)
• Fitness Objective: promote fitness and wellness as benefits of recreation
  • Slogan: “Varied recreation, when you want it” (p.6) emphasizes diversity of recreational activities, from running and hiking to kite flying

Activities at the William Wells Brown Community Center (lexingtonky.gov)
Targeted Demographics:

1. New Residents
   - “New Resident Package: information on Parks & Rec. facilities and programs
   - distributed through the Lexington Board of Realtors

2. Community Youth
   - Information distributed through county schools, YMCA

3. Limited English Proficiency Residents:
   - Hispanic population of Fayette county has grown significantly in last two decades. Parks department is working to tailor services to these residents.
   - Spanish language fitness campaign: “benefits of youth participation”
Lexington-Fayette (cont’d)

Strategy:

• Updated, appealing graphics and branding in all county park publications and products
• Annual surveys ensure that services are well-suited to residents.
• “Seize the Day Off” Campaign: $25,000 TV and internet campaign promotes the range of activities possible in parks

Other Distribution Channels:

• Website & monthly email updates
• Quarterly direct mail & semiannual activity catalog

Partnerships with Dicks Sporting Goods & Marriot
Summary

• Park systems often lack a specific goal for which to market

• Most public park marketing budgets are anemic

• Many park system marketing plans are not taking advantage of state-of-the-art marketing strategies
Barriers to Maximizing Park Use: Why is Marketing Neglected in the Public Sector?

• Lack of expertise in marketing, customer service principles (e.g. branding, etc.)
• Recession—programming, marketing cut first
• General perception that parks are a luxury, rather than a necessity
• Limited partnering with other agencies/private sector
Future Research Questions

Do city park agencies want people to use their parks and recreation facilities?
What is the “reward structure” for the park department (financial or other)?
What methods, structures are most effective in promoting community level physical activity?
What Could the Future Hold?

- National strategic marketing of local parks
- Local marketing plans with improved communication, signage, programming, events
- More public-private partnerships for park activities
- More park use = more physical activity
- Parks perceived as the heart of a community, rather than the appendix