

The Promotion of Drug Abuse — PO*

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SUMMARY

The problem of drug abuse is both international and multifactorial. Traditional approaches toward finding a solution have so far achieved little. Lateral thinking, a recent concept providing freedom from the constraints of logic, offers the basis for a different kind of evaluation of the problem. The normal concepts are reversed and one starts with the proposition of *promoting* drug abuse. In defining a promotional programme one becomes increasingly aware of those elements which are important contributory factors. The solution to some parts of the problem becomes self-evident and new insights into other facets are suggested.

S. Afr. Med. J., 48, 407 (1974).

The concept of lateral thinking was first described by De Bono.¹ Lateral thinking is different from the traditional vertical type of thinking in that in the latter one moves forward by sequential steps, each of which must be valid and justified. Lateral thinking steps outside these constraints, to the point where one may have to be wrong at some stage in order to arrive at a correct solution.

Vertical thinking uses information for its inherent value and meaning. Lateral thinking uses information for its potential effect of precipitating new ideas. In problem-solving situations, where the traditional vertical approach

has failed, a lateral thinking process can be initiated by the use of an intermediate impossible solution or idea. This can be done by simply reversing the normal concepts, by denying the obvious, or by being purposely ridiculous. De Bono cites one example where the problem posed was to reduce traffic congestion in cities. The intermediate impossible proposal was that all cars should be made with square wheels. This led to a series of ideas related to the fact that cars would not be able to move, that the roads would have to move, a moving roadway would lead to higher density because there would be no danger of collisions and it would also allow controlled circulation and speeds.

The point is that in lateral thinking one is not concerned with the validity of an idea but rather with its ability to stimulate other ideas. Thus, the more provocative the intermediate impossible, the greater the value it is likely to have in the creation of new insights.

The international problem of drug abuse is of an unquestionably multifactorial nature. Much time and money has been spent in just trying to progress to the fundamental point of *defining* the nature of the problem. There has even been some argument as to whether, indeed, a problem exists! Thus for any one person, or group, or even nation to search for an easy answer is patently ridiculous.

On the other hand, any business executive who has experience in modern marketing techniques could develop a promotional campaign to *increase* drug abuse. In doing so he would necessarily become aware of potential difficulties and pitfalls which could limit his success, of possible competitive activity, and of those seemingly nebulous, but important, anti-sales factors which should be avoided. It is therefore worth examining such a hypothetical campaign as an exercise in lateral thinking, since it is possible that, as in any other selling situation, an

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*The symbol PO is used to formally denote that a lateral thinking approach has been used.

understanding of the strategy of the opposition will provide the basis for the tactics of reversal.

Thus, for the purposes of this exercise, one starts by acknowledging that there is an international increase in drug abuse. The problem is how to reverse the trend. The intermediate impossible idea is that one *promotes* drug abuse.

THE MARKET

The potential total market is of course enormous. It must be expected that some part of a population group will always reject using the products and some will not be able to afford them.

Some, too, will always simply resist change.

Thus the most vulnerable and most easily converted market sector would be that which is reasonably affluent, without rigid ideas, easily influenced, and which is lacking in either the ability or experience of discrimination. These criteria are met by many of the Western world's young people. There is likely to be a fringe market in those older people who exhibit the Peter Pan syndrome, and who, in their life style, wish to identify strongly with youth.

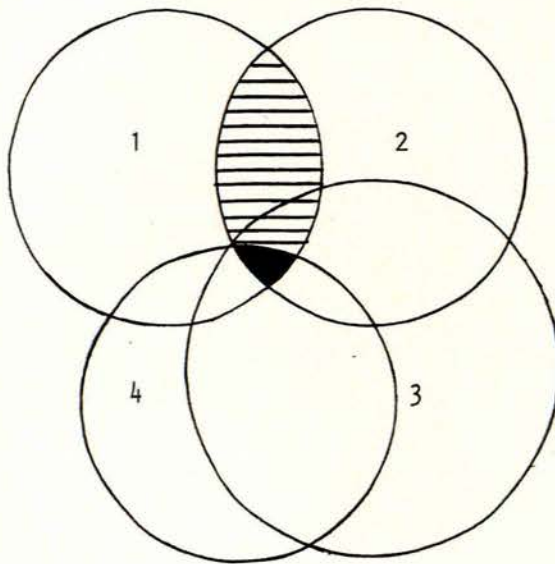
MARKET RESEARCH

It would never occur to an experienced market researcher to confine his questions to product users. Thus, in attempt-

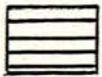
ing to define market needs and trends, it would be more important to investigate the attitudes and requirements of those who do not use the product. Although accurate statistics are not available it would seem that at least 90% of potential users still do not do so. It would be necessary to discover the reasons for this resistance before it could be overcome, preferably before a competitor used it as a basis for his counter-campaign. The problem is, however, that this market sector is not particularly articulate or conscious of many of its own motivations. This is even more true of the user of the product, and this is where the traditional research of competitors may come to grief.

In preparing the study, particular attention should be paid to the differences between the motivation of the young and that of the mature. The market sector under examination has quite distinct and different conformity, social, and hierarchical patterns. If a major penetration is to be achieved, this will have to be recognised and explored by a research group who are prepared to abandon their preconceived (adult) ideas.

Stratification within a school population does not often follow a pattern recognisable in adult societies. It rarely conforms to the same social, intellectual and cultural divisions as in the mature, and the interfaces tend to be better defined at any given moment. A reasonably intelligent, modern adolescent would probably describe it in terms of new maths where perhaps 4 elements could be differentiated in the school universal set.



COMPETITIVE GAMES



DRUG ABUSE

Fig. 1. The school as an universal set.

Group 1

Extrovert
Very gregarious
Anarchistic
Aggressive
Poor academic performance
Some body contact sport
Drug abuse—identity
within group

Group 2

Extrovert
Less gregarious
Not aggressive
Rebellious of authority
Much body contact sport
Academically mixed
Drug abuse—for 'kicks'

Group 3

More introvert than group 2
Less gregarious than group 2
Not aggressive
Not rebellious
Some body contact sport
Academically mixed
Emotional problems in some
Little drug abuse

Group 4

Introvert
 Not gregarious
 Pacific—even cowardly
 Conformist
 No body contact sport
 Good academic performance
 No drug abuse

The intersection providing a commonality of all 4 elements is, strangely enough, competitive games. The intersection of elements numbers 1, 2 and 3, is an incidence of drug abuse. The characteristics of each group are easily defined, but as demonstrated in the set as intersections, there is a degree of overlap.

It is in group 2 that the greatest potential for a further increase in drug abuse might reside, and in group 1 it is already probably maximal.

SUPPLIES OF THE PRODUCT

Since the very term 'drug' is incapable of a universally acceptable definition, it would be pointless to attempt to limit the scope of supply sources. From naturally occurring plant alkaloids to the most sophisticated pharmaceutical compounds, from the alcohols to industrial solvents, all are potentially capable of abuse. Recently, attention has been drawn to the possibility of habituation to occlusive dressings!² Thus, regardless of any shortage or restrictions of supply of any one group, there can never be a total failure of supply.

On the other hand, the market will demand a range from which to choose, and thus it will be necessary to ensure that those concerned with primary availability do not fail. Cupidity and carelessness can be relied upon to contribute to this. There will always be farmers, somewhere, to grow *Cannabis indica* for a profit; there will always be hardware merchants who will not question the schoolchild's purchase of a hundred tubes of glue; there will always be a careless pharmacist or manufacturer, while there is no penalty for carelessness. Whether the motivating force is profit or politics, anarchy or stupidity, there will be no decrease in supplies.

THE PRODUCT IMAGE

In increasing the depth of penetration into this market, it will be of major importance to establish and maintain the correct product image. Identification of the product with negative connotations should be avoided. This should become modern, free, with-it, alive, swinging, way-out, and not weak, dulling, unhealthy, cowardly, deadening or old-fashioned.

The brand names should also be chosen carefully. They should be easy to say, be evocative, catchy, have a high alliteration potential, and be capable of easy idiomatic development. This latter point is important since one of the features of this particular market sector is that it has unique verbal communication characteristics. Even now

accepted names and jargon are easily recognised from those invented outside the group. Even the best of products, given a 'square' name, will not realise its full potential. In adapting these characteristics to marketing needs, the potential for image escalation should also be borne in mind. The elevation of status implied by the name 'Big-H' is an example of this.

ADVERTISING AND PROMOTION

In this market the mass media offer the greatest coverage and impact. Word-of-mouth advertising is necessarily slower and more selective, even with the trend toward increased international and intranational travel by young people. Thus newspapers, magazines, television, cinema and even radio could be used to get the promotional message across. Such a message could be based on any one of a number of equally viable platforms, and these will be defined by market research. However, the restrictions imposed by legislation will necessitate the creation of more subtle approaches than usual. The fundamentals, however, remain the same.

It will be invaluable to have a number of prestige users. These will be internationally or nationally recognised personalities of high news value with whom the potential consumer can identify. For this market, pop musicians, actors and actresses and pseudo-intellectuals offer the best prospects. Prime examples, who can be quoted as authorities supporting the product, even though they may not use it themselves, will also be useful. A fruitful source is likely to be found among liberal politicians, the professions and the arts, particularly in those areas where the Peter Pan syndrome appears to be endemic.

It must be remembered that so-called reminder advertising is essentially reinforcement. It confirms the wisdom of a previous buying decision to the purchaser. It is well recognised that most advertisements extolling the virtues and qualities of motor cars are read by people who have recently bought that particular model. There is always some lingering doubt and the purchaser requires reassurance. So then will it be to the new drug abuser. His doubts as to the wisdom of his action will be quickly dispelled by either the quality or the quantity of the reassurance. The phenomenon of instant expertise is also to be encouraged. Politics, the clergy, and medicine have always provided good candidates in the past. The vocal minority should be helped to maintain their individual beliefs that legislation, religion, or medicine is each the only answer. It is so with most social-based or group behavioural problems and there would seem to be no reason to change now.

These instant experts will generate the right kind of publicity for the product in many ways. Some, perhaps by visiting centres where there is resistance, and by talking about and demonstrating the product, draw attention to it. Natural rejection, at the personality level, coupled with inherent curiosity and adventurousness will do the rest. Some, of course, will always make good copy for news media. The magnitude of their exaggerations, their self-seeking motives, perhaps even their pious holier-

than-thou attitudes will nullify whatever substance might be present in their case.

While it is not normally good marketing practice to make excessive claims for a product, it is both expedient and safe in this instance. Social drugs have a higher news value than antisocial drugs. A suggestion of hallucinatory or aphrodisiac effects rates high on the journalistic scale. The imagery of a gang of drug-crazed youths driven wild by erotic hallucinations indulging in an orgy in Main Street, is superior to that of the somnolent opium smoker passing his lonely hours in a dingy room. It is becoming recognised that quite artificial individual effects result from the interplay of suggestion within and between components of an adolescent group.³ Thus placebo reactions can be capitalised upon, and these highly subjective reports exploited. The nature of the market is such that the most bizarre effects are accepted as being experienced. The phenomenon of group identity frequently leads to extrapolated experience being a prerequisite for acceptance into the group. Thus a condition recognisable in medicine as alcoholic intoxication becomes a mind-blowing trip, given the correct environment and circumstances. Ataxia is even more sinister. Hallucinations are common, and for the most part it is fortunate that few investigators ask the obvious questions that would deny their existence. It would add one further adjective to the list: auditory, visual, tactile—illusory.

The lay Press should be encouraged to comment fully upon each episode that is drawn to their attention, preferably with attendant distortion and exaggeration and naming the product. Notes on availability and administration would also be valuable.

Quite apart from relatively objective reporting in Press and radio, the use of audio-advertising offers scope for promotion. The language of the young, apart from the few hackneyed phrases known to the more mature, is a secretive, yet dynamic one, ever-changing. The lyrics of recorded pop music can be as persuasive, or more so, than the most clever commercial advertising jingle. The exposure is also more sectional since it is directed at just that part of the market which is to be exploited. Thus 'landing from a jet with a few keys for my bread, fighting off the chicks, finding me a pad,' is not easily recognisable as a song in praise of the life of a drug pusher unless it is known that in current jargon a 'key' is a kilogram of heroin.

Strangely, the police also offer an unique advertising potential. In schools, colleges and universities, at public exhibitions and fairs, they can be persuaded to demonstrate the identification and use of drugs. In the accompanying lecture these less-than-experienced communicators, portraying as they do restrictive authority, can often be relied upon to create both an awareness of the product and a sense of rebellion in the audience.

COMPETITION

Concepts and images change with time and distance. That product which was the anodyne of the underprivileged black man for centuries is no longer associated with a dull-eyed negro. It is now White and with-it. It had to have a new name of course and so, in the Americas, marijuana became successively 'Mary Jane', 'weed' and 'grass' and our own 'dagga' became 'pot'. It even developed an export potential because well-meaning journalists reported the chemist's findings that the content of active alkaloid in our cannabis plant was higher than that available in the USA and Europe.

The right of the poor man to mentally escape from his depressing environment by using drugs was always questioned. He was exhorted to work harder, to become affluent, to improve his environment. His survival depended on his ability to meet this challenge.

Paradoxically, among the more advanced societies where there is now virtually no personal challenge to meet, where survival itself is no longer individual, but related to nations and peoples, there is a resurgence of the inclination to alter the state of consciousness. Authority, in its every guise, is naturally puzzled. There exists a deep division of opinion as to whether this is another manifestation of 'escape', or whether it is the creation of a new and artificial challenge. Opinion is equally divided as to how, and even whether, this trend could or should be changed.

Virtually no useful data are being obtained and the old reflex protective instincts are blindly followed. The aetiology is unknown, the treatment symptomatic.

There is no real competition. The market is wide open.

CONCLUSION

It cannot, naturally, be seriously suggested that the international increase in drug abuse has been stimulated by such a campaign. The end result is, however, already such that it could have been. Thus much of this review is based on the observation of recent historical fact. It is merely examined from a different viewpoint. If, in doing this, I have stimulated a fresh appraisal of the problem or suggested new directions of approach, then my objectives have been met. In being purposefully provocative I recognise that I may have caused offence to a particular profession, or perhaps to an individual who is able to identify himself in my text. This was not intended and I do not wish to infer that any particular person or institution is more, or less, responsible than any other.

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