

No Country Mouse

Thirty Years of Effective Marketing and Health Communications

Peggy Edwards

ParticipACTION was one of the longest-running communication campaigns to promote physical activity in the world. For over 30 years, the proverbial “mouse that roared” nudged Canadians of all ages, sizes and shapes to make physical activity a part of our everyday lives. With a small staff and a small budget, the organization and its message managed to become a uniquely Canadian source of influence, recognition and pride. The story of how this was accomplished is important for practitioners, marketers and planners in communications, public health and health promotion. This article provides an overview of the ParticipACTION story by focussing on the historical context and marketing highlights. The other articles in the supplement take a more in-depth look at some of the key people, community mobilization and educational activities, evaluation, communicating in two languages and lessons learned.

A model of social marketing or health communications or both?

What’s in a title? A lot! After much discussion and debate, the authors of this supplement have called it *ParticipACTION: The Mouse That Roared. A Marketing and Health Communications Success Story*. In doing so, we suggest that by nature of its inception and evolution, ParticipACTION was a hybrid of both, a kind of experimental mouse that adopted techniques from both camps along the way. Bauman, Madill, Craig and Salmon explore the theoretical side of this evolution as well as the results of the agency’s efforts in their article, “ParticipACTION: This Mouse Roared, But Did It Get the Cheese?”¹

In 1971, when ParticipACTION began, the discipline called “health communications” did not exist. While efforts to persuade people to act in a healthy way are as old or older than public health itself, “health education” was the primary strategy used in the 1950s and ’60s by most people in the health field. Health education was essentially a one-way form of communication designed to give people information, not to persuade them to take action. Today, the Health Communication Unit at the Centre for Health Promotion, University of Toronto defines comprehensive health communication campaigns as:

“goal-oriented attempts to inform, persuade or motivate personal and social change at the individual, network, organizational and societal levels. They are aimed at a well-defined, large audience and occur during a given time period, which may range from a few weeks to many years. They involve an organized set of communication activities and may draw on techniques from social marketing, media advocacy and community mobilization.”²

Similarly, in 1971, the theory and discipline of social marketing had just been introduced in the academic literature³ and was not in common practice. Thus, ParticipACTION became a leader in the developing fields of social marketing and health communications by both necessity and design.

Health communications and social marketing are important strategies for increasing awareness and knowledge, and for influencing attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. They are most effective when used in combination with a variety of other interventions at the community level.⁴ As the subsequent articles will show, ParticipACTION used a unique com-

ination of awareness, education and motivational techniques, including:

- public messaging through a wide variety and mix of media;
- marketing techniques, such as branding, promotion, positioning, point-of-purchase marketing and identity development;
- educational information and motivational programs delivered through intermediaries;
- partnerships and networking;
- community mobilization and events; and
- face-to-face influence and leadership.

To understand how all of these elements were employed, it is important to set the historical context and document the sequence of events, as well as the thinking behind some of the major decisions. (See Appendix for a listing of the milestones from 1971 to 2000.) It is hard, if not impossible, to do justice to this rich history in one article. I was overwhelmed when I reviewed the ParticipACTION archives in terms of the quantity and creativity of its products, messages and shenanigans! This article begins the story by focussing primarily on ParticipACTION’s public messaging and marketing experience. The other elements are discussed in more detail in subsequent articles.

The early years

In the late 1960s, Canadian leaders were concerned about declining standards of health and fitness, increasing rates of cardiovascular disease and rapidly rising health costs. On an earlier visit to Canada, Prince Philip had admonished Canadians about their sedentary lifestyles and suggested that in the event of an emergency, Canada was ill prepared to respond. This spurred the creation of Bill C-131 – An Act to Promote Fitness and Amateur Sport, and the creation of Sport Canada and Recreation Canada (which was renamed Fitness Canada in 1980). During the 1970s, national conferences on Fitness and Health and Employee Fitness were held, millions of school children earned the Canada Fitness Award, and the first Canada Fitness Survey was launched.

In 1974, *A New Perspective on the Health of Canadians*⁵ was published and a modern health promotion concept was introduced to Canada and the world. This landmark document called on sport programs,

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Governor General Roland Michener was an active supporter of ParticipACTION.

The Truth About the 60-Year-Old Swede

Early in the fall of 1972, Russ Kisby showed McKerracher a book by Dr. Roy Shephard that described how an active man at age 60 could have the same level of fitness as a sedentary man at age 30. On the same page was a chart comparing fitness levels in various countries, with Sweden at the top and Canada way down the list. McKerracher immediately seized on the opportunity to meld these two ideas. He created a 15-second television public service announcement (PSA) showing a 60-year-old Swede jogging effortlessly beside a puffing 30-year-old Canadian. The voice-over said: "These men are about evenly matched. That's because the average 30-year-old Canadian is in about the same shape as the average 60-year-old Swede. Run. Walk. Cycle. Let's get Canada moving again." The spot was shown only six times during Canadian Football League games in 1973. The outcry was immediate and even sparked a debate in parliament. Canadians were alarmed and embarrassed. The ad dramatized the poor fitness level of Canadians so effectively that it became the cornerstone of a new fitness movement. The 60-year-old Swede proved to be a powerful communications concept that influenced social norms – in the short term through public debate, and in the long term because it remained a memorable "hot spot" over decades.



employers, unions, municipalities and the women's movement to support physical activity opportunities for all Canadians. As the fitness movement gained strength across the country, ParticipACTION provided leadership through its media campaigns and special initiatives.

The Birth of an Idea

In 1969, a study commissioned by the National Advisory Council for Fitness and Amateur Sport concluded that Canadians were in terrible shape, that the future well-being of Canadians was in jeopardy and that, to all appearances, most Canadians couldn't care less. In response, Philippe de Gaspé Beaubien, who was Chair of the Council, asked then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and federal government officials to provide seed money for the creation of an independent fitness promotion agency, involving both public and private sector funding.

The new national, non-profit company – originally called "Sport Participation Canada" – held its first official meeting in September 1971. A head-hunting company approached Keith McKerracher, a successful marketing consultant, to lead the new agency. "I'll never forget that ad," says McKerracher. "It read: 'Wanted: a Chief Executive Officer to whip Canada into shape. The reward – a generous salary and the thanks of future generations.'" McKerracher readily admits that he knew nothing about physical education (some professionals protested that the government was hiring a 'huckster'), but he knew everything about successful marketing.

McKerracher established an office in Montreal. He hired Jacques Gravel, a Francophone who worked in marketing and advertising, and Russ Kisby who brought extensive experience in the fields of physical education and recreation. Philippe de Gaspé Beaubien served as the first president. A Board of Directors was established, made up of prominent Canadians, including the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson who served as Chairman from 1971 to 1972. (See the article on the Mouseketeers® for more details on the people behind the idea.)

The organization's stated purpose was two-fold: to motivate all Canadians to be more active, and to improve general levels of fitness over the long term. What set them apart from others with similar goals was their



intent to use commercial marketing techniques and tools to “sell” their mission. McKerracher was determined to create an advertising symbol as well-known in Canada as the Canadian wool mark. McKerracher says: “The wool symbol said warm, wear forever and look great; our brand would say activity, health, me, time to get moving.”

An early strategic plan described ParticipACTION’s purpose as:

“the development of a major, ongoing, national campaign to motivate all Canadians to become more physically active. We aim to do this through the use of modern communication and persuasion techniques designed to increase public awareness and concern about physical fitness. We also aim to make physical fitness and activity more socially acceptable.”

The last sentence is particularly significant. It speaks to the long-term goal of changing social norms, which is a primary objective of modern social marketing and health communications campaigns.

In the early stages, ParticipACTION often talked about a dual mandate – that of influencing individuals to get fit, but also to build a fit nation. The team decided that the best way to defuse people’s perceptions of fitness as hard, sweaty and inconvenient was to serve up the message with humour. Canadians awoke to find signs on their buses saying, “Jog to the rear of the bus. If you’re like most Canadians, it’s the only real exercise you’ll get today” and “Canada, the true North soft and free” (the “strong” in the national anthem was crossed out and replaced by “soft”). It was impossible not to laugh when ParticipACTION staff arrested mayors for being unfit, and celebrated St. Patrick’s Day with a radio announcement featuring a very Irish accent that described how St. Patrick “jogged the snakes out of Ireland . . . and that’s why they call running shoes ‘snakers.’”

Branding an Idea: How to Become as Famous as Mickey® and Minnie®

Most corporations and businesses spend millions, even billions of dollars to achieve brand recognition. With a small budget and very few staff, the mouse that roared managed to become almost as familiar to Canadians as Mickey® himself. As described in the article

ParticipACTION’s Marketing Mix

Product:	An active, healthy lifestyle; a fit nation.
Place:	Be active at home, school, work, while travelling to and from, while enjoying the outdoors, in your neighbourhood and community.
Price:	Being active is easy, fun, accessible and inexpensive. Benefits include health, appearance and well-being.
Promotion:	Public service advertising, public relations, personal selling, community events, educational resources. Channels of distribution included media (mass and targeted), sponsor messages, the Internet, workplaces, schools, universities, communities, events, point of purchase in supermarkets and pharmacies, recreation, fitness and sport venues, educational material (films, posters, etc.), health professionals, dietitians and community leaders.
Positioning:	The Canadian movement for personal fitness.



by Bauman et al., brand recognition of ParticipACTION and its message has been consistently over 80%, even after the agency stopped producing new ads in 1999.¹ This is no accident. As a marketing agency, ParticipACTION understood that creating an identity that appeals to your audience is as important as the message itself.

In his article, “The Challenge of Bilingualism”, Lagarde⁶ explains how the name ParticipACTION was conceived. The decision to go with a new word that no one had ever heard of was deliberate. “We had toyed with names like *Get Active*, *Sport Participation* and even *Fitness Canada*,” says Kisby, “but all our focus tests reported that Canadians associated the words ‘fitness’ and ‘exercise’ with hard work and inconvenience, ‘sport’ with high performance, and ‘Canada’ with a government agency. We decided to go with a name that had no baggage attached to it, even if it meant overcoming the initial reluctance people have to accepting a new word.”

McKerracher, who was a perfectionist about creative, had rejected many logo proposals when he finally asked a designer he knew to try something new. Wolfgang Letzin produced the famous red and blue pinwheel on his first try and gave it to the new agency gratis. This symbol, which effectively suggests motion and spins in

television ads, was just what McKerracher was looking for. A positioning statement, “The Canadian Movement for Personal Fitness”, which accurately defined the new agency’s mission, was added to the mix. Throughout the first decade, the symbol, name, message and movement rapidly gained momentum. By 1978, 79% of Canadians knew the ParticipACTION brand⁷ and the positioning statement was no longer required.

Using Marketing Techniques and Settings to Create a Movement

From the outset, ParticipACTION used the five Ps of marketing (product, place, price, promotion and positioning) in a creative mix that hit the mark. The agency also made use of two basic types of marketing strategies.⁸ The “push” strategy was aimed at intermediaries and influencers such as educators, employers and politicians who controlled the environment for physical activity. The “pull” strategy was aimed directly at the public through persuasive messages designed to convince individuals that they needed ParticipACTION’s product and that the price was right. A pamphlet published in the mid ’70s described the ParticipACTION philosophy this way:

- Fitness is for everyone, not just for athletes and not just for the young.

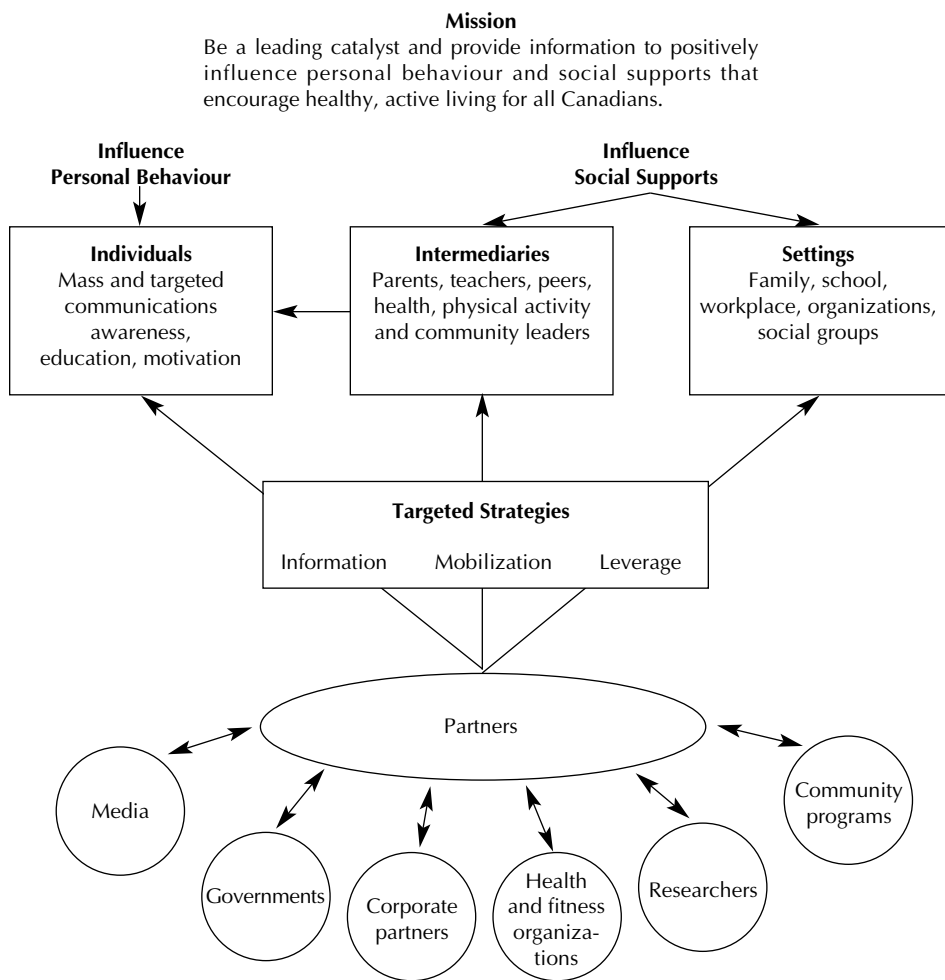



Figure 1. ParticipACTION's Strategic Framework



KIDS TODAY

Kids aren't what they used to be. Neither is the world they live in.

The old-fashioned kid who couldn't sit still has been replaced by the modern child who can. And does. Look at the elementary schools. Physical education is generally the subject with the lowest priority. On the average, only 60 minutes a week—just 6% of all curriculum time—is allotted to phys. ed. Compare that to Japan where kids get 135 minutes a week of phys. ed. Or to East Germany with 180 minutes a week. Better still, consider the recommendation of a major international UNESCO report which sets 150 minutes

Extract from the CAHPER booklet, "What's the Matter with Kids Today?"

- Fitness delivers tremendous benefits.
- Getting there is half the fun.
- Fitness can become a way of life for the individual, the family and the country as a whole.

While ParticipACTION made effective use of commercial marketing practices, its leaders never forgot that behaviour change starts with an idea, not a product. "Effective social marketing respects its audience," says Kisby. "Communication campaigns that condescend or tell people what they *should* do inevitably fail. An effective campaign *shows* rather than *claims* that an idea is good, and how and why it is worth acting on."

At the same time, leaders in the agency who had roots in the YMCA knew intuitively that a "settings approach" was a practical way to reach and motivate a variety of target audiences. Kisby's hometown of Saskatoon became ParticipACTION's first pilot community and an enthusiastic guinea

pig for testing a number of innovative ideas at the community level, such as an inter-city challenge. The article by Costas-Bradstreet in this issue explores this further.⁹

Partnerships with teachers, school administrators and organizations such as the Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (CAHPER – later CAHPERD) enabled ParticipACTION to bring their message to children, educators and parents through school settings. Ironically, many university educators who later became some of ParticipACTION's best supporters were at first skeptical about what the agency was about. The production of a booklet with CAHPER called *What's the Matter with Kids Today?* cemented the relationship by bringing the researchers' concerns about children's lack of fitness to a broad audience. The engaging booklet used art and the graphic style from the original "Dick and Jane" books that many of the baby boomers had used in school to learn to read.

Fitness in the workplace became a major focus for governments and ParticipACTION in the late 1970s and early '80s. Canadian National, Téléglobe Canada, MacMillan Bloedel, Wood Gundy, TD Bank, Sun Life and others participated in FITNESS: THE FACTS, ParticipACTION's information campaign on employee fitness, which eventually reached some 100,000 employees and their families. Supplements in *enRoute* and the *Financial Post* urged busy executives to "find time" for fitness for both themselves and their employees. In the early 1980s, ParticipACTION began distributing health communication booklets on a variety of topics to employees in more than 2,000 companies. This continued until 1999. (See the article by Costas-Bradstreet⁹ for other examples of workplace initiatives.)

By the end of the first decade, ParticipACTION had more than met the goals of awareness and attitude change. The agency had created an identity and made a major contribution to the growth of the fitness movement. ParticipACTION and its partners had brought us an engaging media campaign, a national television special, 100 ParticipParks, fitness posters created by some of Canada's most important artists, plus hundreds of other promotions. The agency had won the hearts and minds of many educators and employers.

With a staff of less than ten (who put in many miles delivering the message across Canada), the mouse was racing to make ParticipACTION's vision a reality.

The middle and later years: Sustaining a movement

In the 1980s and '90s, physical activity and health promotion gained important ground. During the '80s, the fitness movement continued to both grow and focus – on children, youth, seniors, Canadians with disabilities, women, and fitness leadership. In 1986, CPHA co-hosted the first international conference on health promotion, with Health Canada and the World Health Organization. Delegates developed the *Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion*.¹⁰ At the same conference, Health Canada released *Achieving Health for All: A Framework for Health Promotion*,¹¹ which led to the birth of the active living concept. In 1986, the Fitness Summit reinforced the movement toward the gentler concept of “active living”. Ten years later, the Surgeon General's report on physical activity and health summarized the evidence supporting this moderate approach to physical activity. During this period, Canada hosted two international conferences on Physical Activity, Fitness and Health (1988 and 1992). Health Canada released national guidelines on healthy weights and a series of *Physical Activity Guides to Healthy Active Living*.

ParticipACTION helped sustain the active living movement and their creative leadership by leveraging support and building partnerships, producing motivational messages and increasing community involvement. The agency had a clear mission and multi-level targeted strategies as shown in Figure 1 (see page S9). But ultimately the changing media landscape, competing priorities, and reduced levels of core government funding for public service announcements forced the agency to close its doors in January 2001.

Leveraging Support and Building Partnerships

From its earliest days, ParticipACTION worked hard to leverage support for its message. For most of the first twenty years, staff went across Canada from station to station and newspaper to newspaper to explain their cause. This personal approach combined with high-quality advertising ensured that

TABLE I

Traditional Mass Communication Supporters of ParticipACTION PSA Messages

350 television and cable stations
580 radio stations*
110 daily newspapers
950 weekly newspapers
1,100 commercial/professional magazines
1,100 corporate publications and newsletters

* no radio ads produced after 1995 due to reduced core funding

TABLE II

Main Sources of Funding (in constant 1971 dollars)*

Year	Fitness/Health Canada	Other Sponsors
1971-72	\$262,000	–
1980-81	\$302,772	\$272,495
1990-91	\$266,384	\$440,334
1999-2000	\$122,044	\$101,371

* Calculated with Bank of Canada's Inflation Calculator using Consumer Price Index data

TABLE III

Examples of Corporate (Cash \$) Support

Amount	Company	Type of Initiative
\$3,500,000	Crown Life Insurance (10 years)	500 communities in activity challenge
\$1,500,000	Astra Pharma (3 years)	Materials for community leaders
\$1,000,000	Air Canada, CN Rail, Royal Bank	Purchase employee education materials
\$1,000,000	Crown Life Insurance (5 years)	Newsletter to 1,000 worksites
\$750,000	Astra Pharma (3 years)	“Healthier future” media messages
\$350,000	Sun Life Assurance	Community fitness trails and education
\$300,000	Hoffmann-La Roche	Obesity education campaign
\$275,000	H.J. Heinz	Public education with family physicians
\$200,000	Merck Frosst	Community leader resources for seniors

TABLE IV

Government Contracts for Community Mobilization

\$6,500,000 (1992)	Canada 125 program Government of Canada	50 community animators, 1.1 million volunteers, 21,000 registered community events
\$5,000,000 (2000)	Trans Canada Trail Relay 2000 Millennium Bureau of Canada	30 community animators, over 800 participating communities, tens of thousands of volunteer leaders
\$1,500,000 (1988)	1988 Olympic Torch Relay Government of Canada	10 community animators mobilized 1,600 communities in support of the Petro-Canada Relay

the agency never needed to pay one cent for media coverage. The value of this coverage grew to some \$15 million per year in the early 1990s (not including in-kind support and other non-media exposures). The cumu-

lative value of media support over 29 years is estimated to be some \$280 million.

Over the years, ParticipACTION worked with and nurtured a host of mass communication supporters of their PSAs

Radio Rules

In the early years, Keith McKerracher and his staff talked with over 50 radio stations to determine what kind of ads would get the most play. They then devised a strategy to meet the stations' needs and hired "Listen Audio" who produced humorous ads year after year that station managers and Canadians loved. One of the earliest was titled "The Godfather". It went like this:

Interviewer: Hey, are you the Godfather?
 Tough voice: Yeh.
 Interviewer: Is it true you sit in charge of all the mob's dealings?
 Tough voice: No. I used to sit. Now I stand, even walk sometimes.
 I've been listening to those ParticipACTION ads.

(Table I). "The good will of a variety of media was essential to ParticipACTION's success," says François Lagarde, a social marketing consultant and former vice-president of the agency.

Successful media exposure helped to attract and involve corporate partners who matched or exceeded government support (see Tables II and III). It also helped in the creation of a network of committed community supporters in all walks of life, who provided millions of Canadians with access to physical activity avenues and programs.

The federal government provided core funding to ParticipACTION over its 29 years of operation, although levels of support were significantly reduced throughout the 1990s (see Table II). Several initiatives were funded by provincial governments. Not-for-profit and professional partners such as the Heart and Stroke Foundation and the Canadian Public Health Association contributed to many projects by providing expertise, access to key influencers and other in-kind support whose value is beyond estimation. The arti-

cle by Costas-Bradstreet describes some of the key health communication and community mobilization projects carried out in partnership with both the private and non-profit sectors.⁹ In addition, the agency was able to tap into a number of other federal programs for special community mobilization activities (see Table IV).

Creating Motivational Media Campaigns

ParticipACTION's ongoing media messages were based on a communication model that cycled through awareness (the 60-year-old Swede), to education (the 15-minute three-times-a-week campaign), to motivational suggestions (Do It! campaign), to solutions (the Walk a block a day campaign), to reinforcement (the Way to Go, Canada! campaign). Some campaigns used clever techniques to show Canadians how easy it is to overcome barriers to getting active, such as "not enough time". For example, one ad displayed a series of dots representing 15-minute segments in the week. Three of them were cir-



cled, showing just how little time it takes to be active each week.

In the later years, there was an increasing emphasis on demonstrating how various individuals and groups were getting and staying active. For example, the *Sharing a Healthier Future* campaign (made possible by support from Astra Pharma Inc. – now AstraZeneca) reinforced the idea that every Canadian can be empowered to improve her or his own health by being physically active. It showcased individual and community success stories that ranged from how a group of women used active living to cope with osteoporosis, to how a small company implemented an exercise program that helped employees reduce stress.

"No pain, no gain", was not the ParticipACTION way. Their recommendations, such as the "Walk a block a day" theme, were simple and practical, and could be incorporated easily into an individual's daily life. Other popular campaigns included:

- Fitness is fun. Try some.
- Great moments in Canadian sport.
- Fitness now. And how.

Don't Just Think About It. Do It!

This campaign aired long before Nike adopted its popular slogan, "Just do it." And while the stages of change theory was unknown at the time, the slogan speaks directly to "contemplators" on the verge of taking action.





- Look who's into (swimming, etc.)?
- Don't just think about it. Do it!
- Way to go, Canada!
- Make your move.
- Try it!
- Moving your way. Every day.

Throughout the 1980s and '90s, the ParticipACTION media campaigns kept pace with new scientific evidence relating to exercise prescription for health. The language moved from "fitness" to "physical activity" and then to "active living." When Health Canada released *Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living* in 1998, ParticipACTION launched a print and television campaign to promote the use of the guide.

Increasingly, the agency coupled the physical activity message with other health messages, related to heart health, weight management and healthy eating. Defenders of an integrated approach to healthy living point out the limits and duplication of addressing risk factors and diseases in isolation. They suggest that targeting multiple risk factors (such as unhealthy eating and sedentary living) for



Campaigns Linking Physical Activity and Healthy Eating

- Vitality
- ParticipACTION Makes Perfect
- Sharing a Healthier Future
- Healthy Active Living for Older Adults

single diseases or disease clusters, has met with greater success.¹² However, the literature is contradictory on the advisability of marketing combined messages.

Fridinger and Kirby¹³ suggest that: "Campaigns and programs attempting to combine physical activity and healthy eating into one message need to be cognizant that many experts in the field believe there are differences in the behavioral and target audience characteristics of each. Additionally, the marketing mix factors of perceived product, price, place, promotion, and positioning are believed by many experts to be sufficiently distinct for physical activity and healthy eating, and therefore it is questionable whether including both nutrition and physical activity together will have sufficient impact on consumers' behavior."¹³

Vitality: A Program and Campaign Ahead of Its Time

In 1988, Health Canada published *The Integrated Approach: A Blueprint for Action*, which provided a framework for promoting healthy weights. The objectives of the proposed program were to:

- enable Canadians to adopt an integrated approach to healthy eating, enjoyable physical activity (later called active living) and a positive self- and body image;
- create a positive environment for adoption of the integrated approach.

The initial target audience was adult Canadians 25 to 44 years old, with 9 to 13 years of education. From 1991 to 1995,

Health Canada and Fitness Canada spent an average of \$650,000 per year on the program: 74% was spent on social marketing and 26% on community action and professional education. Fitness and Health Canada produced a number of promotional materials and ParticipACTION was given the lead on the development of a marketing concept and a comprehensive media campaign.

Selecting a name and image for a campaign with three complex integrated messages was a challenge. ParticipACTION's recommended choice of "Vitality" with its stylized word logo was pure brilliance. People associated the name with "feeling good", and by stylizing the "Y" in Vitality into a French "é", the name and logo worked equally well in both English and French. The media campaign covered a creative mix of print products and radio and television PSAs that were complemented by tools and events related to professional education and community action.

The program ended in the late 1990s for a number of reasons, including the deaths of two of its strongest supporters within Health and Fitness Canada. Critics claimed that too much money was being spent on social marketing and that the evaluations did not show that Canadians were changing their behaviours related to eating, physical activity and body image/self-esteem.

In 2003, Health Canada conducted a thorough review of the Vitality program and the lessons learned in the project.¹⁴ Some of the reasons for the demise of Vitality and the lessons learned included:

- obtain long-term commitment from stakeholders at senior levels of government;
- provide enough resources to undertake activities that create supportive environments;
- establish an evaluation framework from the beginning that includes measurable, appropriate outcomes; and
- sustain marketing activities long enough to establish the identity of the program and its messages.

Ironically, in 2004, healthy weights is again a key issue, due to increasing concerns about obesity and the links to diabetes and other chronic diseases. Leaders in government and the non-profit community who are searching for a new marketing concept keep returning to the “integrated approach” of Vitality as the best way to promote healthy weights without exacerbating weight preoccupation or turning off the target audiences.

Hickory dickory dock

When ParticipACTION's clock struck 2001, the mouse fell down. With greatly diminished core support for the main media program, the agency stopped producing new ads in 1999; in late 2000, the Board decided to close the doors. Appeals to government to provide the necessary core funding from individuals, groups and media supporters fell on deaf ears.

The article by Bauman, Madill, Craig and Salmon¹ tracks how Canadians' awareness of ParticipACTION rose from 79% in 1979 to 90% in 1992. Ironically, despite ParticipACTION's closure in 2001, Ekos Research reported in 2002 that 85% of Canadians had heard of ParticipACTION. The final article in this supplement by Rootman and Edwards¹⁵ discusses the legacy the mouse leaves behind as well as some ideas for the future of health communications in general, and physical activity promotion in particular.

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Sun Life Financial is proud to have been a partner with ParticipACTION at its very beginning. We are gratified that our sponsorship during ParticipACTION's formative years encouraged many other corporate partners to support its initiatives.

Congratulations to ParticipACTION, for encouraging Canadians everywhere to get moving — and stay healthier.

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