



CANADIAN JOURNAL OF

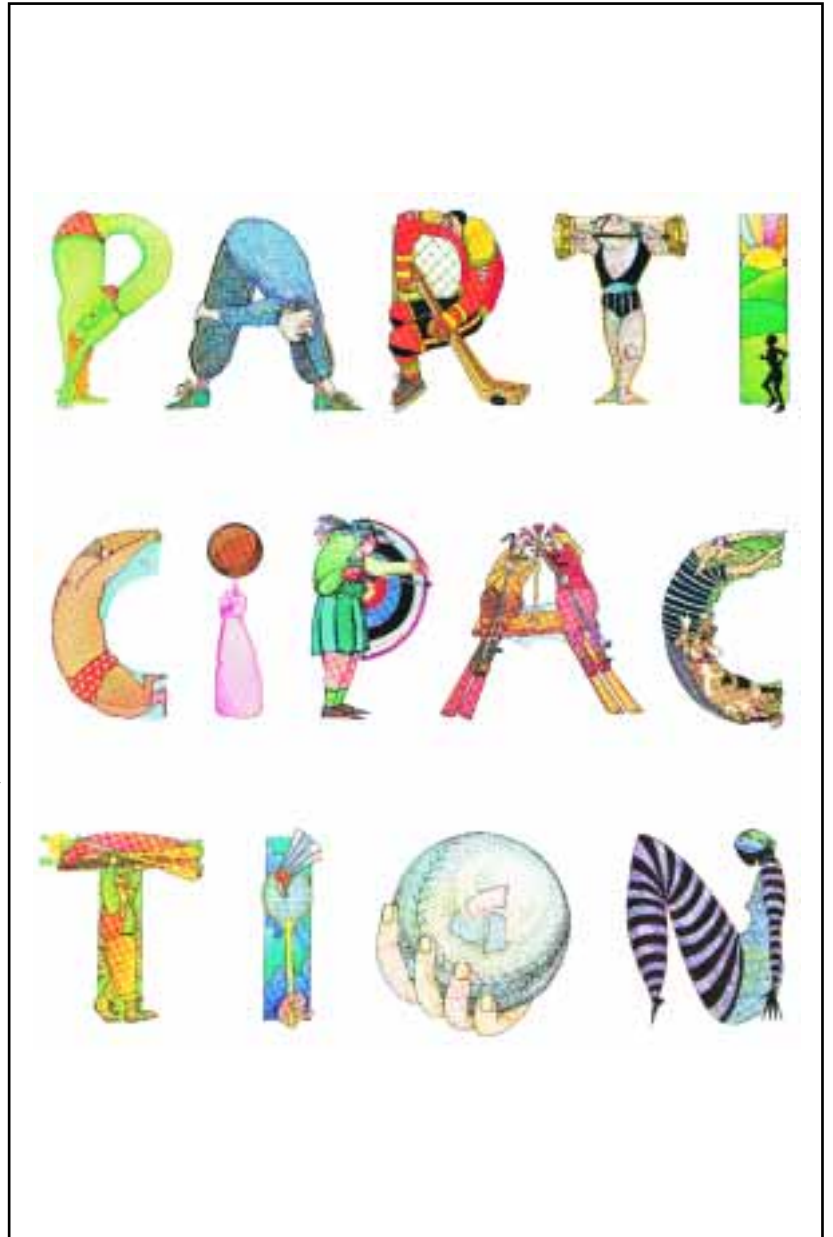
PUBLIC HEALTH

VOLUME 95, SUPPLEMENT 2 ■ MAY/JUNE 2004



PARTICIPACTION®

The Mouse That Roared
A Marketing and Health
Communications Success Story



REVUE CANADIENNE DE

SANTÉ PUBLIQUE

VOLUME 95, SUPPLÉMENT 2 ■ MAI/JUIN 2004

Acknowledgements

The original articles in this supplement were written by a voluntary group that included researchers, educators, marketing and health promotion consultants, and leaders in the field of active living. Their objective was to share the strategies and learnings from ParticipACTION's experiences in the hope that they will prove useful to future health promotion initiatives in Canada and around the world. A sincere thank you to:

- Adrian Bauman, Sesquicentenary Professor of Health Promotion and Behavioral Epidemiology, School of Public Health, University of Sydney, Australia
- Cora Lynn Craig, CEO, Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, Ottawa, ON
- Peggy Edwards, Principal, The Alder Group, Ottawa, ON
- Christa Costas-Bradstreet, Physical Activity Specialist, City of Hamilton Public Health and Community Services Department, Hamilton, ON
- François Lagarde, Social Marketing and Communications Consultant, Montreal, QC
- Judith Madill, Associate Professor, Marketing, Carleton University, Ottawa, ON
- Irving Rootman, Professor and Distinguished Scholar Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research, University of Victoria, BC
- Art Salmon, Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Recreation, Toronto, ON

Special thanks is also accorded to:

- Russ Kisby (former President of ParticipACTION) for his wisdom and wit as an advisor to the project
- Ebbe Marquardsen (early staff member) for his help with fundraising and his willingness to root through some really old boxes of stuff
- Monique Joly for her excellent translation/adaptation from English into French
- François Lagarde for his rigour and sensitivity in French editing
- The numerous people who described their experiences and insights in interviews and e-mails (see specific articles for their names)
- The Canadian Public Health Association for its support and commitment to this partnership project.

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CPHA's mission is to constitute a special national resource in Canada that advocates for the improvement and maintenance of personal and community health according to the public health principles of disease prevention, health promotion and protection and healthy public policy.

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All material intended for publication should be addressed to the Scientific Editor.

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ISSN 0008-4263

All articles published in this journal, including editorials, represent the opinions of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Canadian Public Health Association or the institution with which the author is affiliated, unless this is clearly specified.

The *Canadian Journal of Public Health* is published every two months by the Canadian Public Health Association. A subscription to the *CJPH* is included in the Association's membership fee.

Publications Mail Agreement #40062779. Registration #09853. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: Circulation Department, Canadian Public Health Association, 1565 Carling Avenue, Suite 400, Ottawa, Ontario, K1Z 8R1, E-mail: info@cpha.ca.

Subscription rate: Canada \$97.61 per year, including 7% GST (\$104.90 per year, including 15% HST), payable in advance; United States \$117.42 per year and other countries \$151.41 per year payable in advance in Canadian funds. Single copies \$19.09 Canadian, including 7% GST (\$20.52 Canadian, including 15% HST), \$23.69 U.S.A. and \$28.84 International. Reprints: Reprints of articles, minimum 50, are available from the business office of the Journal (price on request). Contents may be reproduced only with the prior permission of the Editorial Board. A maximum of 30 photocopies of articles are permitted with acknowledgement of *CJPH*.

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CJPH is available in microform from University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan and is abstracted by ProQuest.

Forewords

In early 1970, Mr. Pierre Elliott Trudeau, then Prime Minister of Canada, asked me to chair the Canadian Council for Physical Fitness and Amateur Sports. After conducting some research, the Council was shocked to discover that Canada was ranked one of the lowest countries in the world in terms of the degree of physical fitness of its citizens. I suggested to the Prime Minister that we should create an organization that would be mandated to try to change this unfortunate fact. As I remember it, 85% of our free time as Canadians (after work and sleep) was spent watching TV and riding in automobiles.

Mr. Trudeau naturally asked me how much it would cost to create this organization. I replied that it costs automobile companies a minimum of five million dollars to launch a new model, and that we would need at least the same amount to change Canadians' fitness awareness. He thought the amount high but offered to contribute half, over a period of time, if we could raise the other half.

We started "ParticipACTION" (coining a new word in the process) with a seed grant from government and enlisted the contribution of the major media players across Canada. Thanks to this new partnership between the federal government and the media in our country, we managed to raise the necessary funds and set out to change the physical fitness awareness and involvement of Canadians from coast to coast.

Thanks to ParticipACTION, Canadians became more involved in taking the good of their own health in hand. The program provided a model for other countries in terms of what could be done to motivate citizens to become more active. We succeeded in positioning ourselves in the top 10 leading nations with respect to our physical fitness level.

In so doing, ParticipACTION helped Canadians become fitter and more active in their communities, and contributed over the course of 30 years towards saving our government millions of dollars in remedial medical expenditures. To this day, I still find it hard to understand why the federal government reduced to such an extent and then terminated its financial support for ParticipACTION, a program with such obvious health benefits for our nation.

Nevertheless, I am forever proud to have been associated with the dedicated individuals who launched and ran ParticipACTION all those years. You helped us become better because of your "being there."

*Philippe de Gaspé Beaubien
President, La Fondation de Gaspé Beaubien
Former President of Télémedia
ParticipACTION Founder and Board Chair, 1973-77*





In December 2000, the Board of ParticipACTION decided to close its doors because of insufficient resources to continue a national campaign in the highly competitive communications and media environment of the 21st century. It was not an easy decision to make. A subsequent survey showed that even with minimal coverage and no new campaigns in the previous year, 85% of Canadians still recognized the ParticipACTION brand and message. This is an accomplishment that many private companies who spend millions of dollars on advertising would love to achieve.

It is important that we document the ParticipACTION story, and the support of CPHA in helping to share this information is most appreciated. The future is also important. As the prevalence of obesity and chronic diseases increases in Canada, the physical activity message is even more relevant.

Although ParticipACTION was a small company, its voice and message rang loud and clear. It was the proverbial “mouse that roared.” What will fill the void? A mouse’s shoes may be small, but when you are as popular as Mickey®, they are pretty hard to fill.

*Marilyn Knox
President Nutrition, Nestlé Canada
ParticipACTION Board Member since 1992, Chair, 2000-2001*



In 1991, the Canadian Public Health Association presented ParticipACTION with one of its highest awards – the Ortho Award for “outstanding contribution to health in Canada.” CPHA and ParticipACTION have been longstanding partners and friends, having worked together on issues such as physical activity and aging, prenatal fitness, physical activity in schools and workplaces, the CrownLife ParticipACTION Challenge and other initiatives.

Social marketing and health communications have now become a standard part of public health practice in Canada. We owe much of what we have learned to ParticipACTION’s leadership. The year that ParticipACTION began its ground-breaking campaign was the same year that Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman published the first article suggesting that the marketing techniques used to sell Coca-Cola® could also be used to sell health and social ideas such as physical activity.

This is an important story for public health in Canada and around the world. CPHA, through the *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, is pleased to help tell it.

*Gerald Dafoe
Former Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Public Health Association*

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,

Peggy Edwards is a health promotion consultant with the Alder Group. She is a former head writer for ParticipACTION, and served as a Communications Executive at Health Canada and Manager of the Fitness Secretariat at the Canadian Public Health Association.



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.

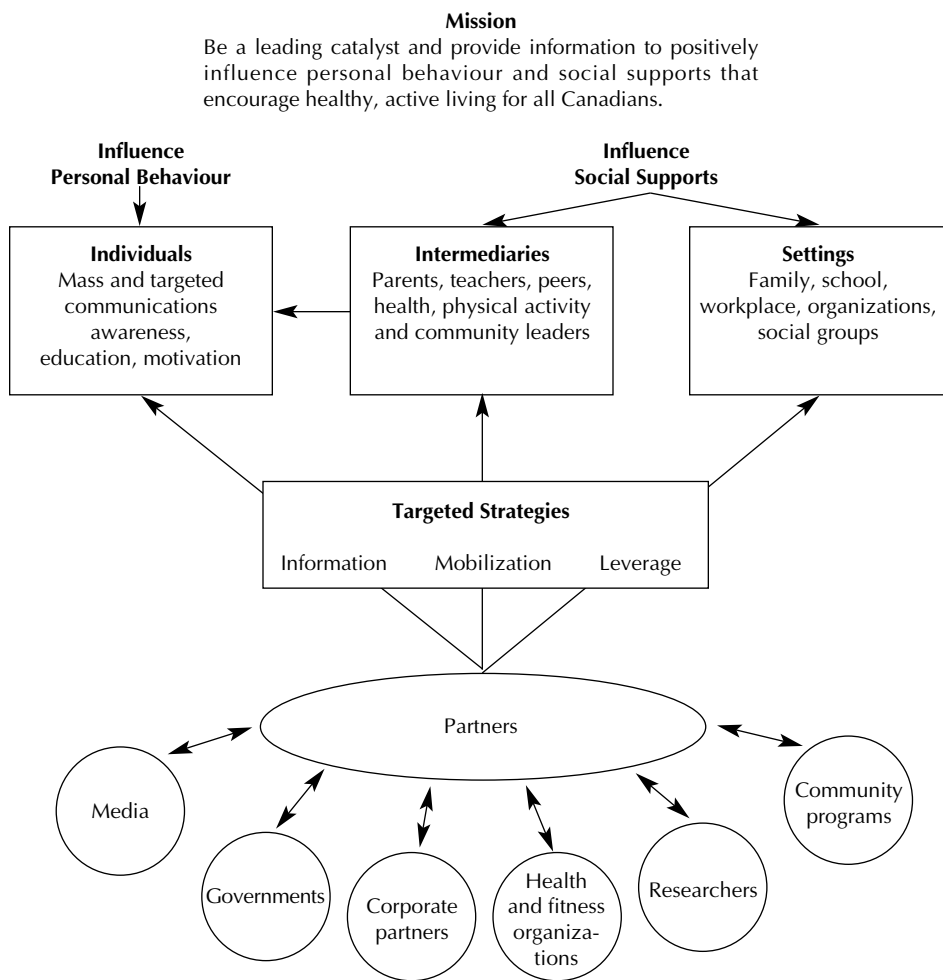


Figure 1. ParticipACTION's Strategic Framework

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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Getting Canadians off the couch for over 30 years.

Since 1971, ParticipACTION has encouraged active lifestyles for Canadians. Its techniques have become so successful that the Canadian model is now emulated in some 25 countries around the world.

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.

Sun
Life Financial

ParticipACTION

This Mouse Roared, But Did It Get the Cheese?

Adrian Bauman^{1,2}

Judith Madill³

Cora L. Craig⁴

Art Salmon^{5,6}

ParticipACTION is a health message still recognized by most adult Canadians and is associated with being physically active, even though the organization has not specifically supported the brand since the fall of 2000.^{1,2} The purpose of this article is to describe what ParticipACTION was from a theoretical perspective, and examine evidence for its effects upon adult Canadians, given the limited data available. In the analogy used in this supplement, did the roaring ParticipACTION mouse get the cheese?

This paper focusses on the theoretical underpinnings of ParticipACTION, and appraises evidence from evaluations that have assessed community awareness of ParticipACTION in Canada. Specifically, this article:

- explores whether ParticipACTION was a social marketing campaign or a health-related mass media and communications initiative;
- examines the diverse evaluation data that have been collected to assess awareness or understanding of ParticipACTION across two decades; and
- attempts to describe whether or not ParticipACTION was a success in Canadian public health terms, and from an international campaign perspective.

ParticipACTION – Social marketing or a health communication approach?

The first step is to assess what ParticipACTION was trying to achieve, and whether it used social marketing or health communications in achieving its ends. The paper by Edwards² showed that the overall goal of ParticipACTION was to improve the health of Canadians through increasing participation in physical activity (called ‘fitness’ in its early years). ParticipACTION had the broad objectives of trying to influence individuals to become more aware of the benefits of active living and recreation, as well as influencing decision-makers and organizations to develop friendly infrastructures and supportive environments for physical activity.

To determine whether ParticipACTION was more a social marketing initiative or a health communication program requires a brief examination of definitions. Social marketing is “the application of generic marketing to a specific class of problems where the object of the marketer is to change social behaviour primarily to benefit the target audience and the general society.”³ Fundamental to social marketing is the application of marketing tools (formative and developmental marketing research, audience segmentation). Strategies utilizing the four Ps are critical to the social marketing approach. These are the ‘product’ (the benefits consumers might gain from being more active), ‘pricing’ (the costs of engaging in sport, active living or recreation), ‘promotion’ (the communications strategies) and ‘place’ (the places where the recipients of the messages can undertake physically active behaviours), which is analogous to “making physically active choices easier for people.”³ In the ParticipACTION context, this is the linkage of messages and campaigns to on-the-ground facilities in communities, schools and neighbourhoods, which people could easily locate and use. Finally, social marketing has an underlying concept of a voluntary exchange

occurring between consumer and marketer, for the benefit of both.^{4,5} On the other hand, public health communications are ‘purposive efforts using mass media to create awareness and inform populations about an issue, to stimulate discussion, and to create social norms around health issues.’⁶ The current thinking around social marketing⁴ places it more in alignment with traditional comprehensive health promotion, with initial efforts to inform an identified population; detailed and sustained efforts at persuasion supported by on-the-ground community events, programs and professionals; and finally incorporating environmental change, and possibly legislative and regulatory enforcements of the behaviour. Examples from tobacco control to mandatory seatbelts have shown the link between communications through to regulation, and their combined positive impact on health risk. There is clear evidence that the communications piece alone – such as stand-alone, short-term mass-media placements – will produce little long-term effect, other than an initial impact on awareness, but may start the process of influencing social norms.⁷

ParticipACTION was a dynamic set of programs and actions, with a range of ‘physical activity and health’ products that *evolved* over 30 years (from its inception in 1971 to its ‘hibernation’ in 2001). Many of these products worked in concert with community mobilization programs and in partnership with community leaders, in keeping with the model of comprehensive health communications campaigns. ParticipACTION exhibited features of a mass-media-led health communications campaign over its entirety, with some initiatives focussing on awareness raising, information transfer and setting a social agenda for increased physical activity. However, some elements used a clear social marketing approach: the ‘ParticipACTION’ brand was omnipresent across programs targeting diverse population groups and over three decades; many initiatives involved private/public sector partnerships, and some had defined formative research as part of message development. In addition, there were a diverse range of audience segments that were the focus in different years; some ParticipACTION efforts targeted special groups, workers, older adults or youth, and some targeted

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5. ParticipACTION, Toronto, ON
6. Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Recreation, Toronto

TABLE II

Surveys Assessing Community Awareness and Opinion about ParticipACTION*

<p>Contemporary Research Centre Survey, September 1978 Sample size not known (Data weighted to adult Canadians 15+ years) (approximate N=2,120)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Unprompted top of mind awareness) ParticipACTION 23% (YMCA 22%, health clubs 12%, others 13%) • Ever seen ParticipACTION logo 79% (lower with increasing age) • “Meanings” of logo: exercise, fitness, movement, involvement, getting Canadians active • Think ParticipACTION is working well (% of all Canadians): 61% (contributing to getting Canadians to be more active).
<p>Canadian Fitness Survey 1981 Random population survey of adult Canadians 18+ years, N=21,738 [unweighted data]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ever heard of ParticipACTION 76.1% • Seen specific ParticipACTION logo 85.2%.
<p>National Survey, March 1982, Contemporary Research Centre Sampling frame not clear; N=2,000, home interview, aged 15+ years, national sample</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases in “regularly physically active” from 1971, 1979 to 1982 (5%, 25%, 37% respectively); exact wording of physical activity questions not known (but comparable across surveys) • Recognition of ParticipACTION increased 1978, 1980, 1982 (77%, 85%, 85%).
<p>Gallup Omnibus, National Participation Awareness Survey, 1989 N=1,025 adults, 18+ years, home interview, June 1989</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think of PA/fitness, organizations recalled (unprompted) – ParticipACTION mentioned by 29.8%, (YMCA 23.5%, health clubs 21.6%, others <10%) • Recall PA/fitness events – ParticipACTION challenge/CrownLife challenge (20%), Fitweek (9%), other events <5% • Ever seen ParticipACTION logo 83.8% (decreases 65+ years) • Believe ParticipACTION’s efforts very/somewhat useful (94.7%) • Think ParticipACTION is working (encouraged people to become more active) 82.3%.
<p>Gallup Omnibus, National Participation Awareness Survey, 1992 N=1,018 adults, 18+ years, home interview, June 1992</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think of PA/fitness, organizations recalled (unprompted) – ParticipACTION mentioned by 31.8%, (YMCA 24.1%, health clubs 21.6%, others <10%) • Ever seen ParticipACTION logo 89.7% (decreases 65+ years) • Believe ParticipACTION’s efforts very/somewhat useful (91.4%).
<p>Tandemar Survey, May 1994 N=614 national representative sample, 16+ years, random telephone survey, weighted to national estimates</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When you think of PA/fitness, organizations recalled (unprompted) – ParticipACTION mentioned by 17% • 89% prompted in response to any awareness of ‘fitness and health’ organizations (similar to YMCA/YWCA; greater than Fitness Canada, Health Canada) (lower with older adults) • What influenced you to be more active – 7% unprompted, 64% prompted responded ‘ParticipACTION’ (similar to health clubs, YMCA; greater than sports clubs, government, institutions, others) • Overall, ParticipACTION’s efforts useful/somewhat useful (83% of Canadians) • Image profile excellent ~ 2/3 reported ParticipACTION motivated people, was credible, important source of information (similar to Heart and Stroke Foundation; greater than health clubs, Fitness Canada, videos) • Seen any ParticipACTION advertising 83% • Seen any TV (68%), billboards (44%), radio (46%), print media (51%) about ParticipACTION (for TV – higher than videos, health clubs, government agencies; for print media – ParticipACTION second to health clubs) • Main messages – be active (65%), lifestyle/health (32%), walk (12%), food/nutrition/reduce stress (10%) • “Active Living” campaign – recalled TV ad (33%), recalled radio (15%), non-TV message (34%) – prompted recall • Other source of ParticipACTION (apart from mainstream mass media) – any contact 42% (schools, workplaces, events/local communities) • Low level of agreement that ParticipACTION should be involved with other issues (tobacco, drugs, HIV, drinking and driving, domestic violence).
<p>Nielsen Media 1994 ParticipACTION Report Nielsen review of media density; provides estimates of advertising expenditure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Method – review was based on monitored TV time, newspapers (N=96) and magazines (N=256) estimated “expenditure” (exposure); as well as other media reviewed (radio, transit/billboards) • Monthly media “value” (imputed expenditure at commercial rates) between February 1993 and January 1994 ranged between \$167,000 and \$538,000 (median \$230,000) • Campaign February 1994 – 313 ParticipACTION ads (times shown) in February.
<p>Ekos Research, Health Canada, May 2002 N=1,014 adults (sampling details not known)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ever heard of ParticipACTION (85%).

* Survey reports accessed from ParticipACTION archives [to be lodged at the University of Saskatchewan]; information of the polling or survey organization and date provided where possible.

TABLE III

Physical Activity Monitor Data – Recent Recall of ParticipACTION as the ‘Physical Activity Guidelines for Canada’ 1998, 2000 and 2002 ($\pm 95\%$ CI)

	PAM Survey 1998 [n=2240] Percent ($\pm 95\%$ CI)	PAM Survey 2000 [n=4938] Percent ($\pm 95\%$ CI)	PAM Survey 2002 [n=5045] Percent ($\pm 95\%$ CI)
Total recall (generic)			
Overall recall of any guidelines for physical activity	39.4 [36.1-42.7]	41.8 [39.2-44.2]	46.2 [43.6-48.8]
Specific recall			
Prevalence of recalling these guidelines specifically as ‘ParticipACTION’	8.0 [6.8-9.2]	8.8 [7.9-9.7]	7.8 [7.0-8.6]
All other responses [as sources of PA guidelines] combined	8.8 [7.5-10.1]	8.3 [7.5-9.1]	9.2 [8.3-10.1]
Other specific mentioned, non-physical activity (e.g., Food Guide)	22.6 [20.4-24.8]	24.7 [23.1-26.3]	29.2 [27.4-31.1]

PAM – Population Activity Monitor, Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, www.cflri.ca

interventions and the involvement of many agencies, groups and professional bodies in a climate of social change, and sufficient resource allocation to the issue. For example, the role that media campaigns played in tobacco control were largely around creating a social normative non-smoking climate, and creating the advocacy that led to the policy and environmental interventions which restricted tobacco advertising, and smoking in public places and near children. Sustained anti-tobacco campaigns exist in Canada to this day, focussing on developing and maintaining an anti-smoking ‘social climate’.

Today, optimal evaluation of health communication and social marketing interventions might comprise quasi-experimental designs, with serial cross-sectional representative population surveys or population-based cohort studies tracking phenomena over time, in media intervention and comparison communities.¹³ Short-term evaluations of national physical activity campaigns can now achieve this, using reliable and valid measures of proximal and distal variables of interest.^{13,14} Evaluation comprises clear planning and investment, a consideration of formative, process and impact levels of evaluation of a clearly planned and sequenced campaign with specific objectives over several years. Such careful campaign development, and investment in its evaluation is warranted today when assessing public sector investments in media campaigns, and where governments want to know whether money is being wasted and whether campaign objectives are being met.^{3,15}

In 1971, when ParticipACTION began, evaluation designs to appraise public health

programs were more limited, seldom planned, and not highly regarded, as it was generally thought that the expense of such ‘research activities’ could be better spent on programs. Hence, no logic models were developed and implemented to specifically evaluate ParticipACTION over the years, and data are confined to ad hoc assessments of the community at various time points.

In order to assess the impact of ParticipACTION, the authors examined all evaluation survey data collected at different stages of ParticipACTION. Former ParticipACTION staff and managers collected survey reports, and much of these data had been archived. The total number of all ParticipACTION-relevant surveys ever collected is not known, but cross validation using several different people to locate survey reports was used. Any community-wide or population surveys that assessed awareness, recall, or any other variables related to ParticipACTION were identified and scrutinized by the authors.

RESULTS

A total of eight surveys were located, of which seven measured proximal impact variables related to ParticipACTION. Some were true representative population samples, others used the less methodologically rigorous ‘quota sampling’ methods to represent Canadian adults. All those chosen were meant to represent the views of adult Canadians. These reports were appraised by the authors, and as much information as possible about the methods, and all relevant data were abstracted and summarized in Table II.

This process identified six surveys with useful information about recall of ParticipACTION. In addition, national physical activity and fitness monitoring surveys, conducted by the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, provided data in 1981 and more recently from 1998-2002 (see Table III). The sample sizes and any available details of the samples used are shown in the left-hand column of Table II. The median sample size was 1,025 adult Canadian responders, but response rates for these surveys are not known.

Results indicate high levels of unprompted (unaided) and prompted (aided) recall of ParticipACTION among adult Canadians across two decades. In response to unprompted recall questions about fitness and physical activity organizations, ParticipACTION was consistently mentioned by between one sixth and one third of Canadians between 1978 and 1994. This was the most frequently mentioned organization involved in these activities, more prevalent than health clubs, the YMCA or actions through government agencies. Prompted recognition rates of ParticipACTION and its logo or messages were very high throughout, ranging from 77% of Canadians in 1977 to over 80% in all other surveys from 1980 through 2002.

In the 1981 Canada Fitness Survey, unprompted recall of ParticipACTION was reported by three quarters of adult Canadians, but the logo (prompted recall) was substantially higher. Recall of ParticipACTION messages was well balanced across media channels – 79% recalled the campaign through TV messages, 33% recalled magazine stories, 42%

radio messages, and 33% recalled that newspaper articles had mentioned ParticipACTION.

Across the next decade, between 83 and 95% of those who were aware of ParticipACTION thought it useful, and 61 to 82% reported it was working well. Generally, ParticipACTION was conceptualized as an activity and lifestyle message, or as a set of fitness, activity or recreation programs for the community. Specific messages were recalled from mainstream media (television, radio, print), as well as specific community settings where events occurred. These are all proximal variables, reflecting awareness, understanding and perceptions of the initiative.

More distal variables were infrequently asked in these surveys. The 1994 Tandemar survey suggested that 7% reported without prompting that ParticipACTION helped them to become more active, although 64% said so if prompted. Rates of influence varied across Canada, with highest rates for Quebecers, 13% of whom reported that ParticipACTION helped them to be more active. However, given the small sample size of the Tandemar survey, the 95% confidence intervals around this Quebec estimate would be large (8.1%-17.9%), which would not be different to the overall population rate of 7%.

Two independent sources suggest evidence of distal variables (physical activity participation) changed, namely that during the ParticipACTION period, adult Canadians became more physically active. The first is the 1982 national survey (Contemporary Research Centre, cited in Table II), which alludes to increases in physical activity participation rates between 1971 and 1982. Second, the large and representative Canada Fitness Surveys did show increases in national levels of physical activity between 1981 and 1988, and again between 1988 and 1995.¹⁶ However, these changes cannot be uniquely and causally linked to ParticipACTION, as many other policy, environmental and public health factors may also have contributed.

The most recent data are from the Physical Activity Monitor, a population-based national survey conducted by the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute; data from 1998 (n=2240), 2000

(n=4938) and 2002 (n=5045) are analyzed and presented in Table III. Here, respondents were asked to recall any guidelines for physical activity, and nearly half recalled some generic physical activity guideline message. Unprompted responses included national guidelines and fitness or nutrition guides from Health Canada, provincial agencies or NGOs such as the Heart and Stroke Foundation. More specific responses were active living or exercise guides, fitness tests and ParticipACTION, and non-specific responses (such as food guides) were excluded. As shown in Table III, ParticipACTION was recalled as representing 'physical activity guidelines' as often as all other plausible responses of 'physical activity guidelines' combined in the three surveys 1998-2002. Overall, around 8% of Canadian adults reported that ParticipACTION was the national physical activity guideline, and this did not differ from 1998 to 2002.

Finally, some data exist on the in-kind media supports and media provided through ParticipACTION (Nielsen 1994, Table II). For example, between 1993-1994, approximately \$230,000 of in-kind media value was earned each month, which sums to several million dollars earned each

year. While exact data are difficult to obtain here, it appears that the return on paid investment for media placements alone was of the order of around 10:1, and possibly greater than this. There were also some informal process evaluation data collected on specific ParticipACTION initiatives. For example, one large single event in 1991, the Crown Life-sponsored 'ParticipACTION Challenge', attracted more than 22,000 volunteers from across Canada, and registered around 4 million people as participants in these events. Other large-scale events were similar, including the Canada 125 events in 1992, and the Trans Canada Trail Relay 2000 organized with the Millennium Bureau of Canada in 2000. These informal data suggest that the participation by many Canadians, across many such initiatives, may explain the high levels of ParticipACTION recall and awareness.

The legacy of ParticipACTION – Was it a success?

It is reasonable to judge that ParticipACTION was a public health and/or social marketing success story, lasting three decades, but limitations to the evaluation designs used prevent an understanding of



its full contribution. At the very least, it delivered clear messages, enhanced community awareness of physical activity and recreation, and fostered community-based partnerships. These led to the delivery of many programs and events that reached many thousands of Canadians. An important proximal outcome is that this initiative reached both French- and English-speaking Canadians, making it effective in a national context (see Lagarde, this issue).¹⁷ The consistency and stability of high awareness rates are testament to the national impact of this initiative, compared to most other public health campaigns.

A review of physical activity campaigns conducted around the world has suggested that post-campaign prompted recall rates of campaigns, logos or themes average around 70% of adults from population surveys.⁷ Thus the prompted recall rates of 80% and higher shown across the extant ParticipACTION surveys in Table II suggest a pervasive and sustained impact on the Canadian consciousness.

The maintained high recall rates, irrespective of varying survey methodologies, further corroborate the persistence of the concept of ParticipACTION, and its linkage to community participation. The high rate of attributing physical activity guidelines to ParticipACTION in recent years (Table III) was interesting, given that ParticipACTION initiatives had declined by 2000, and that it was always only a framework and had never actually promulgated specific guidelines.

The high level of background and sustained community awareness was advantageous for others in developing population health approaches and programs to target inactivity in Canada through the 1980s and 90s. This was distinctly different from initiatives in other countries, where mass media campaigns about physical activity were short term,^{13,18} or localized to small communities or regions.¹⁹ Thus although the increases in physical activity among adult Canadians cannot be causally linked to ParticipACTION, the latter is likely a contributory factor, especially since most other developed countries experienced unchanging or even declining rates of physical activity participation during the same period.^{14,20,21}

ParticipACTION preceded much of the theoretical work underpinning approaches

to changing population health behaviour,⁵ or even the use of mass media and marketing to address public health problems.⁶ As such, it was remarkable how close many initiatives were to subsequent more theoretical efforts. For example, targeting of workers or women or youth reflected the principles of audience segmentation.⁴ Efforts to change social norms reflected (later developments in) the theory of planned behaviour, and encouraged 'trailing' of activities reflecting social cognitive theory.⁷ Furthermore, media emphasizing community supports and involvement, modelling 'fun', and linked to a sense of the initiative being 'national and Canadian' were media and social marketing tools ahead of their time.²²

Finally, there are no other public health-related marketing or media efforts at the national level, that have been sustained as long as ParticipACTION, anywhere in the world. Tobacco control, under the 'Quit Campaign' and similar logos, have persisted in some countries since the 1980s,²³ but the longevity of ParticipACTION is unrivalled in public health. Physical activity campaigns have come and gone in many countries, but remain as an ongoing phenomenon in New Zealand.²⁴ The duration of ParticipACTION gives it rare status as an evidence-based sustained campaign.⁸ It demonstrated flexibility of operation and multi-sectoral capacity, working across agencies and with public or private sector partners, which probably contributed to its longer-term survival. Current awareness of the initiative remains high (Table II), even though it is no longer directly funded. One could ask no more of any "mouse's attempts to get the cheese", or of any effort designed to influence the culture change required to induce a more physically active Canada.

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The Mouse Under the Microscope

Keys to ParticipACTION's Success

François Lagarde

ParticipACTION's groundbreaking health communications campaign put fitness on the map in Canada. The campaign also became the model for other organizations in the fields of social and behavioural change. Many leaders of national organizations have been heard to say, "We need a ParticipACTION-like campaign for our cause." This article examines some of the ingredients in ParticipACTION's unique formula for success.

The Canadian movement for personal fitness

Most physical activity interventions using mass media and information technology have led to a high recall of messages, but little documented direct impact on physical activity behaviour.¹ Then again, it may be too much to expect such a direct relationship from a national public health communication campaign.

Yet ParticipACTION – in concert with activities by numerous other organizations and leaders in the community – managed to do just that. By nature of both design and good timing, this small agency managed to spearhead a movement. Indeed, until the end of the 1980s, ParticipACTION's tag line on its letterhead read: *The Canadian Movement for Personal Fitness*. Building on Hornik's explanation of the complementary models of behaviour change implicit in many public health communication campaigns, ParticipACTION was able to successfully create a movement by increasing knowledge and attitudes through its mass media campaigns that worked in conjunction with changing public norms.² Events like the inter-city ParticipACTION Challenge highlighted the growing involvement of individuals in physical activity, while providing an opportunity to participate in a concrete way. The movement also contributed to institutional change (e.g., municipal policies regarding recreation programming), which in turn had an impact on individual behaviour.

Keys to success and lessons learned

In this article, the 12 key elements of successful behaviour and social change initiatives listed in Kotler, Roberto and Lee's book on social marketing are used to identify ParticipACTION's unique strengths and weaknesses.³ The analysis below describes ParticipACTION's performance in relation to each element. It also includes lessons learned and other suggestions on the partnerships needed to achieve behavioural and social change.

Element #1: Take advantage of what is known and has been done before.

ParticipACTION started when little was known about social marketing. In the same year ParticipACTION was founded, the expression 'social marketing' was used for the first time ever in a landmark article.⁴ A public/private/media/non-profit partnership approach to the delivery of a public health campaign was a first. A sophisticated, professional approach to public service announcements was unheard of at the time. In a sense, ParticipACTION was a fortunate coincidence that emerged from enterprising minds. They were nothing short of innovative and proactive risk-takers in the way they set up their organization and health communications approach.

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Over time, however, the fields of health promotion, health communications, physical activity and advertising became more sophisticated. The media landscape became more complex. Competition for the audience's interest became more intense with the appearance of television remotes and multiple channels. At the same time as commercial advertisers became more appealing and other agencies began copying their approach, ParticipACTION seemed to lose ground. While limited funding was a major factor, ParticipACTION did not move quickly enough with the times. By maintaining its traditional strategies, the organization lost its leading edge.

Lessons learned:

- Be the first, be the best, take risks, think big and think outside the box.
- Establish non-traditional partnerships.
- Stay alert and adapt on an ongoing basis. When confronted with inadequate funding, take the opportunity to re-define the organization's communication and partnership strategies.

Element #2: Start with target markets that are (most) ready for action.

For years, ParticipACTION spoke to 'Joe public' using a motivational approach. Based on the *Diffusion of Innovations* model, the 'early adopters' (those most ready to take action) were individuals facing few or no barriers to adopting physical activity as part of their lifestyle. However, as an organization tries to reach late adopters, it must "focus on barriers preventing the use of the innovation."⁵



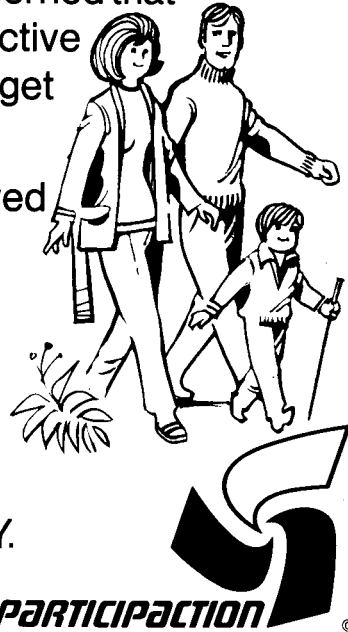
THE FIRST STEP...

to improved health and fitness.

PARTICIPAction is concerned that most Canadians are inactive and unfit. Our task is to get Canadians moving.

As a first step to improved fitness, we encourage walking. Young or old, in any season. It's the all round conditioner.

Set your goal to
**WALK A BLOCK A DAY.
EVERYDAY.**



Because ParticipACTION conducted very little formative research, its audience segmentation related primarily to demographic factors such as age, gender and language. Segmentations related to personal and group readiness for change were not part of the mix. This may have limited ParticipACTION's ability to address the perceptions and barriers of those segments of the public who were less ready to take action.

Lesson learned:

- By aiming to reach the general public, you may be successful in the short term with those most ready to take action, but it may limit your ability to address issues other segments may face in trying to adopt the behaviour.

Element #3: Promote a single, doable behaviour, explained in simple, clear terms.

ParticipACTION excelled in its ability to focus on doable physical activities. The concept was made simple and explained in clear terms. ParticipACTION described its

approach in the FITNESS: THE FACTS promotional brochure in the early 1980s as follows: "In keeping with ParticipACTION's successful communications philosophy, this FITNESS: THE FACTS program has not been designed to coerce anyone or dangle imaginary carrots in front of people. Instead, it gives the individual the facts in an attractive, easily understood and comprehensive manner." One of ParticipACTION's most successful campaigns – "Walk a block a day" – is a great example of a campaign that provides a clear and simple solution to getting active.

Lesson learned:

- Promote a single, doable behaviour, explained in simple and clear terms!

Element #4: Consider incorporating and promoting a tangible object or service to support the target behaviour.

Most of ParticipACTION's tangible objects or services used in campaigns were either educational (e.g., the Goal Setter booklet of the ParticipACTION Network

– see Element #8) or promotional (e.g., pins, shoelaces, caps and T-shirts). Merchandising was also included as part of some projects, such as the ParticipACTION Challenge and the Network. Thousands of enthusiastic supporters and partners of ParticipACTION wore these items proudly.

Many of these educational and promotional products were funded by private-sector sponsors and delivered through partnerships with governmental and non-governmental organizations at the national, provincial/territorial and local levels.

Lessons learned:

- Educational products and merchandising initiatives complementing mass media campaigns help to move people toward action by providing needed information and reinforcement.
- Sales of promotional products can be an effective revenue-generating or break-even approach to leveraging the influence and visibility of supporters in their own milieus.

Element #5: Understand and address perceived benefits and costs.

ParticipACTION stayed away from scientifically-based health benefits as motivators. It simply positioned physical activity as fun and easy, with a wide range of positive outcomes. The activities featured did not suggest that individuals had to join a club or buy expensive equipment. Some messages also tackled the 'no pain, no gain' myth in highly entertaining radio spots.

Lessons learned:

- Address a wide range of relevant motivations depending on the audiences.
- Address perceptions about monetary and non-monetary costs (e.g., time, pain, etc.).

Element #6: Make access easy.

With its practical, non-elitist approach, ParticipACTION made access to physical activity appear easy for individual Canadians and their families. However, by design or by omission, it did not fully explore its advocacy potential through partnerships to more effectively bring about the institutional changes and supportive environments that would make access to physical activity easier. This was

probably for good reason, since ParticipACTION did not want to generate controversy to the point that media supporters would reduce their contribution in public service announcement (PSA) time and space.

Lesson learned:

- Given that most lifestyle behaviours do not depend solely on personal willpower and that individuals who want to adopt the behaviour may face real social, physical and other barriers, health communications campaigns need to fully address the range of issues related to the behaviour they are promoting. Health communications agencies need to consider advocacy-related activities in their communications mix and actively participate in coalitions seeking public support. This approach demonstrates their appreciation of the factors involved, creates opportunities for partnerships and strengthens their image and credibility both with the public and in their field.

Element #7: Develop attention-getting and motivational messages.

Many people can still recall ParticipACTION messages of 20 or 30 years ago. While frequency is a key success factor in any health communications campaign,² the public was exposed to some of the messages only a few times. Long-lasting message recall is no doubt because of ParticipACTION's highly creative, talented and professional teams and suppliers who produced some of the best campaigns in Canadian public health history. Their wit and humour is what made so many campaigns attention-getting and memorable.

The Health Communications Unit of the University of Toronto provides a Health Communication Message Review Tool along with various criteria.⁶ ParticipACTION excelled at most of them:

- The message will get and maintain the attention of the audience.
- The strongest points are given at the beginning of the message.
- The message is clear.
- The action you are asking the audience to take is reasonably easy.
- The message uses incentives effectively.
- Good evidence for threats and benefits is provided.



How Come Nobody Ever Says They're 'Healthy As A Dog?'

One of the many misconceptions about exercise is that everyday activities like walking your best friend does little to improve your health. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. The daily bond with 'Spot' is great for both of you. And, considering how eager he is to go wherever you are, says a lot about how little it takes to be active and feel good. Just 30 minutes a day, most days of the week, for a whole new leash on life. Of course, if you don't have a dog, there's nothing stopping you from taking yourself for a daily walk. (Leash optional)

Sharing a Healthier Future™
PARTICIPACTION

- The messenger is seen as a credible source of information.
- Messages are believable.
- The messages use an appropriate tone for the audience.
- The message uses an appeal that is appropriate for the audience (i.e., rational or emotional).
- The message will not harm or be offensive to people who see it (including avoiding 'victim blaming').
- Identity is displayed throughout.

ParticipACTION had another good reason to produce excellent ads. Given that the organization relied solely on PSA time and space for placement, the first audience for these ads was media outlet managers who decided whether or not to air and place them. The goal was to have the media outlet managers 'want' rather than 'have to' place the ads. ParticipACTION truly mastered the technique, leading the media to donate over \$15 million worth of placement in some years.

Lessons learned:

- Hire the best creative minds, brief them well and make them want to apply their full potential toward your cause.
- Follow best practices in health communications message development.

Element #8: Use appropriate media and watch for and exploit opportunities for audience participation.

For many years, the use of donated time was ParticipACTION's biggest asset. A

media relations team personally visited most if not all radio and TV stations, meeting the person responsible for PSAs. These visits were invaluable in giving a human touch to ParticipACTION, providing answers to questions and ensuring that spots were sent in the easiest format for their use. Many of these visits led to on-air interviews, which added to the exposure.

Eventually, as the media landscape became more sophisticated and fragmented, a sole reliance on PSAs became a liability. In the 1970s, many Canadians watched the same TV programs, listened to fewer radio stations and the Internet did not exist. At the time, PSAs from a few major networks meant reaching the majority of Canadians. However, the media underwent dramatic changes in the late 1980s and the 1990s. The catchword used was the 'demassification' of the media. New generations' expectations in terms of advertising meant that ParticipACTION was now competing with New York and Hollywood for creative and placement strategies, while maintaining its objective of reaching all Canadians. As people turned to the Internet, ParticipACTION no longer occupied a leading position or attempted to use it in any significant way. Budget cutbacks during this period pointed to PSAs becoming a thing of the past.

ParticipACTION did very well in terms of 'audience participation', which is generally very difficult for a national campaign in a country as large and diverse as Canada. Millions of Canadians participated in the



Ebbe Marquardsen welcomes Peter Elson (former Executive Director of the Ontario Public Health Association) as the first member of the ParticipACTION Network (1984).

ParticipACTION Challenge throughout its 11-year history. In the mid-1980s, some 40,000 Canadians, approximately 10,000 of whom were fitness leaders, were members of the ParticipACTION Network. This concept was 10 years ahead of its time as a print version of what would later have been a dynamic website, chat room and electronic resource centre.

ParticipACTION used other channels, such as the workplace, to distribute the FITNESS: THE FACTS program and other booklets on employee health and fitness. Employers purchased and distributed the booklets to thousands of employees across the country. InformACTION – ParticipACTION's first entry into electronic communications – was also designed to supply material in a format that was easy to incorporate into workplace communications channels, such as company newsletters.

Lessons learned:

- PSAs may not be dead, but you can't rely solely on them to create a national movement anymore.
- Media relations activities help confirm donated time and generate added exposure.
- Segmentation is now a must.
- Interacting with audiences on an individual basis is now easier and can take many forms.

Element #9: Provide response mechanisms that make it easy and convenient for inspired audiences to act on recommended behaviours.

Providing response mechanisms (e.g., 1-800 number, response form, contact at the local level) in a national campaign run by a dozen people trying to reach 25 to 30 million citizens is never easy. Until the late 1980s, ParticipACTION's approach to partnerships with provincial and local authorities and service providers was largely centred on campaign delivery, rather than acting as a potential promotional partner for them. Of course, becoming a national promotional partner for local programs is not always feasible. Yet as Canadians became increasingly fitness-oriented, they started asking 'what and where' questions that had to be answered at the neighbourhood level. Aside from several pilot projects and the programs mentioned in the next paragraph, continuity between the national message and local opportunities was not systematically part of the campaign strategies.

Several programs in the later years did make effective use of local response mechanisms. For example, ParticipACTION produced PSAs that Parks and Recreation Departments could personalize with a phone number to call. The TransCanada

Trail and the Ontario Community Active Living Project were examples of community mobilization activities that provided contact at the local level. The Healthy Active Living initiative in New Brunswick provided ready-to-use materials for leaders of seniors programs. The print material was supported by media awareness activities to attract seniors to local program opportunities.

Lesson learned:

- Appreciating the challenges involved in forming partnerships between governments and organizations at the national, provincial/territorial and local levels, national health communications campaigns may lose their relevance if they merely continue to deliver a general awareness message about the recommended behaviour. Ideally, campaigns would include an immediate call to action that connects people to readily available opportunities and resources.

Element #10: Allocate appropriate resources for media and outreach.

The fact that ParticipACTION produced PSA miracles early on with just a small amount of seed money from the government no doubt created long-term assumptions and unrealistic expectations in terms of continued support from the media, and ultimately its ability to reach Canadians. Reaching late adopters requires more integrated and focussed efforts. This was hard to do in the more complex and fragmented media landscape of the 1990s, and with fiercer competition in the sponsorship and philanthropic fields. At the same time, many governments actually reduced their investments in physical activity and health promotion initiatives.

Lesson learned:

- Organizations and funding agencies aspiring to generate social or behavioural change need to stand behind campaigns with the appropriate long-term financial support, expertise and partnerships to have a lasting impact and make the most of the 'equity of the brand.'

Element #11: Allocate adequate resources for (formative) research.

For the past 20 years, the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (CFLRI)

has excelled at collecting, interpreting and disseminating data on the health and fitness patterns of Canadians. ParticipACTION was one of the many beneficiaries of CFLRI's work. Yet aside from the detailed formative research conducted for the Vitality campaign in the late 1980s and isolated reviews of literature, ParticipACTION did not systematically perform formative marketing research or pre-testing. The obvious barrier to this type of research was the lack of funds. However, between relying too much on research at the expense of opportunistic and effective use of money, and doing little or no research, there is room for marketing research that won't break the bank.⁷

Lesson learned:

- Formative research and tracking studies are useful and often essential tools for building on best practices, developing relevant messages, selecting audiences and channels, monitoring and showing progress, identifying challenges and making adjustments, and for being recognized as a valuable partner.

Element #12: Track results and make adjustments.

The comments on formative research also apply to tracking studies. ParticipACTION conducted some tracking studies in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as well as an extensive study in 1994.⁸ The studies enabled ParticipACTION to quantify its tremendous reach and brand equity for public and private partners, while providing feedback to media supporters. Efforts were also made to track media support, but this was not systematically carried out throughout the years.

Lesson learned:

- Funding agencies need to provide the necessary financial resources for formative research and tracking studies to be carried out.

CONCLUSION

ParticipACTION contributed to the advancement of fitness in Canada primarily by creating a 'movement' through awareness raising, as well as by changing attitudes and influencing social norms. The positive attitudes and norms about fitness in turn created a more receptive climate for the institutional changes needed to help Canadians adopt physical activity.

ParticipACTION's primary strengths were:

- The innovative and entrepreneurial way it was set up as a focussed, small non-governmental organization, including its unique relationship with the media around its public service announcement campaigns;
- Its appealing, humorous, relevant, simple and clear approach to persuasive communications produced by highly dedicated and talented creative teams;
- Its ability to forge partnerships for the delivery of educational projects and events; and
- Its prevailing and persuasive presence over time.

However, ParticipACTION faced a number of challenges:

- In the 1990s, ParticipACTION switched to survival mode due to tighter government funding combined with the fragmentation and dramatic changes in marketing practices, health communications, media and advertising, as well as increased competition and reduced support for PSAs.
- Given its dependency on public service announcement support from the media, ParticipACTION was not very open to the idea of engaging in advocacy activities that could have generated controversy. This eventually reduced its ability to be seen as a leading organization that addressed the factors that prevented some segments of the population from adopting physical activity.

- Appropriate funding and cooperation between ParticipACTION and governmental and non-governmental agencies at the national, provincial/territorial and local level would have provided better leverage for the ParticipACTION brand, as well as the necessary formative and tracking studies to plan, deliver and evaluate its campaigns, while reinforcing its partnerships.

ParticipACTION unquestionably made a unique, innovative and effective contribution by helping to enhance the lives of millions of Canadians. For today's social marketers, the ParticipACTION experience provides valuable lessons to ensure that the campaigns of tomorrow are equally or more successful.

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Spreading the Message Through Community Mobilization, Education and Leadership

A *Magnanimouse* Task

Christa Costas-Bradstreet

Ask Canadians what the name ParticipACTION conjures up, and the majority of adults will easily recall the “60-year-old Swede”. Public service advertising was the big cheese for ParticipACTION in its early days, as the company established its name and mission. But as Canadians became aware of fitness, and the “unfitness” of the nation in the late 1970s, ParticipACTION began to explore additional opportunities to reach people with its message. In fact, while ParticipACTION was best known for its extensive media campaigns and promotions, its greatest contribution was quite possibly made through its innovative mobilization strategies at the community level.

Community mobilization

Long before the *Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion*¹ identified “strengthening community action” as one of the major strategies in health promotion, ParticipACTION used community mobilization as a way to empower communities and motivate individuals to get more active. While ParticipACTION’s mandate was national, leaders in the organization believed there could be considerable merit in initially concentrating on one or two communities, as a way of testing out various strategies. This community-driven approach, if successful, would demonstrate the potential of the overall ParticipACTION strategy, which in turn would be critical to securing long-term government and sponsor support.

In 1972, ParticipACTION launched its first community-based project in Saskatoon, with the purpose of generating the volunteer cooperation and support of as many different community groups, organizations, institutions and individuals as possible, in a planned and coordinated campaign. Given his local contacts, Russ Kisby, then National Coordinator, was assigned to make Saskatoon the first model community. He met individually with a cross-section of community leaders to discuss the need and the proposed ParticipACTION solution. A number of influential and non-traditional fitness leaders – including a newspaper publisher, a physician and college president, business leaders and university academics – eventually agreed to become the first volunteer Board of Directors of “ParticipACTION Saskatoon”. This cross-section of individuals, with their influence and contacts, brought credibility and public support to the initiative. The project received no outside funding. If it were deemed important, the community would need to generate its own resources, which is what in fact happened. This was important because if the Saskatoon model worked, ParticipACTION hoped it could be duplicated across the country, and this would be unrealistic if outside funding was required.

Saskatoon *did* work! The Saskatoon team generated an exceptional level of donated local media support as well as the support of many leaders in physical activity and recreation, business, the faith community, media, education, and politics. They became pioneers in community mobilization around special days that encouraged mass participation in “try it” opportunities, such as the “Walk a block a day” event.

In 1974, the City of Peterborough, Ontario, implemented the same community-based approach, which also proved to be highly successful. The program ran for more than 25 years and re-confirmed the merits of a comprehensive community-driven strategy. In Peterborough, ParticipACTION learned the importance of having an initial catalyst (local or outside leader) to get things started. This learning directly influenced the strategies employed for the successful CrownLife ParticipACTION Challenge, Canada 125, and Trans Canada Trail programs, as well as the development of Community Animators in Ontario (discussed later in this article).

Meanwhile, Saskatoon decided to challenge Umea, a similar community in Sweden (because of the ParticipACTION ad comparing Swedes and Canadians), to three “challenge days” over three years. Later, Saskatoon challenged other Canadian cities and the highly successful CrownLife ParticipACTION Challenge was born.

From 1981 to 1993, with private sector funding, ParticipACTION annually involved over 500 cities and towns, more than 22,000 volunteer leaders, and 4 million registered participants in the CrownLife ParticipACTION Challenge. It became the biggest one-day participatory event in Canada, second only to federal elections.

In 1994, after consultation with local, provincial and national leaders, ParticipACTION developed and coordinated SummerActive, a six-week national campaign helping leaders promote physical activity within their communities. The program still exists through funding from Health Canada; provincial and territorial governments are responsible for its coordination.

Well into the 1990s, ParticipACTION developed and managed a number of additional high-profile, community-based, mass-participation initiatives on both provincial/territorial and national scales, by working in cooperation with thousands of community leaders and local organizations.

- In 1988, through the Olympic Torch Relay and Celebration '88, ParticipACTION mobilized 1,730 communities in partnership with Petro-Canada and the Canadian government

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to plan events and celebrations around the running of the torch through each community.

- Four years later, with combined federal government and private sector funding, ParticipACTION recruited, trained and managed a team of 50 community animators (from the French word “animateur”, meaning “someone who creates dynamic relationships between people in a community”). The animators generated over 21,000 registered community-based events involving over 1 million volunteer leaders and extensive, free media exposure for the 1992 “Canada 125” program.
- From 1992 to 1994, ParticipACTION developed and managed the Ontario Community Active Living Programme (OCALP) in which 4 community animators worked with traditional and non-traditional physical activity leaders in over 300 communities across Ontario to establish and support active living initiatives. They provided leadership, support and guidance to individual groups, organizations and active living coalitions. The Programme continued for another seven years, led and managed by the Ontario Physical and Health Education Association (OPHEA). In 2003, it became the Physical Activity Resource Centre, an official resource centre of the Ontario Health Promotion Resource System.
- With federal government Millennium Bureau financial support, ParticipACTION mobilized numerous groups, volunteer leaders and media support in over 800 communities to support the 8-month, 16,500-kilometre Trans Canada Trail Relay 2000 project.

It seems that history has a way of repeating itself. In its last two years of operation, ParticipACTION again partnered with the Saskatoon Health Region, the City of Saskatoon, and the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. The vision of “Saskatoon *in motion*” is to make the Saskatoon Health Region the healthiest community in Canada through physical activity. The partners, along with a large number of community groups, are striving to get all the citizens of Saskatoon and region to include regular physical activity in their daily lives. The development and



implementation of Saskatoon *in motion* is the key initiative involved in addressing the goals of a healthy community and will serve as a model for future provincial, national and international initiatives.²

From the beginning, ParticipACTION understood that governments cannot successfully increase physical activity levels alone, and that voluntary leadership in a variety of forms from all segments of the community or region is required. Canadians have always generously given their time to voluntary activities of their choice.³ What was different about ParticipACTION-headed projects was their unique ability to build community capacity by engaging volunteers from all walks of life, including the business and media communities, professionals and leaders in the community, ordinary people and elected officials. “It was not unusual to see mayors and provincial ministers personally involved in ParticipACTION activities,” says Marilyn Knox, who sat on the ParticipACTION Board for over 10 years. “This raised the profile and fun of events without politicizing them.”

As evidenced in the Saskatoon experience, ParticipACTION viewed communities as more than an aggregate of individu-

als or a “roll up” of individual behaviour change. Hawe suggests that if we conceive of community as “a social system with capacity to work towards solutions to self-identified problems”, our intervention will aim to achieve more than this. It will seek to “harness and enhance the natural problem-solving and helping processes in the community.”⁴ This means that changes in community processes, networks and confidence are additional outcomes that can be expected.

Educational products and merchandising initiatives

In his article, “The Mouse Under the Microscope: Keys to ParticipACTION’s Success”, Lagarde refers to a key element of success identified by Kotler, Roberto and Lee⁵ when he says: “educational products and merchandising initiatives complementing mass media campaigns help to move people toward action by providing needed information and reinforcement.”

ParticipACTION successfully used merchandising to reinforce its message. Whether in support of an event, or to signify their affiliation with the organization and its message, Canadians from coast to coast were proud to wear a ParticipACTION T-shirt, baseball cap or sweatshirt. They wrote



The ParticipACTION Challenge Goes International

The ParticipACTION Challenge Day event was adopted by the TRIM and Fitness International Sport for All organization and spread to many countries around the world. It continues to this day. From an estimated 25 million participants in the first year, the program grew to a reported 50 million by year five. Canada is credited as the founder.

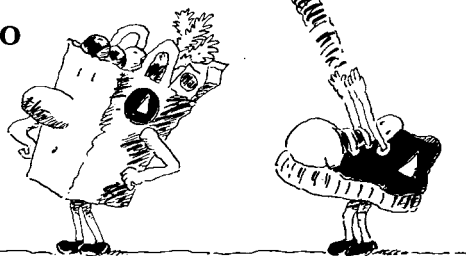
Family
newsletter
№ 1

PROJECT APEX

Action program on eating and exercise.



Project Apex wants to take your child to the top.



with ParticipACTION pens, threw ParticipACTION frisbees, and carried water bottles with the pinwheel logo. They tied up their running shoes with ParticipACTION laces, wrote in ParticipACTION notebooks, and even lit their campfires with matches bearing the pinwheel logo and a physical activity message.

ParticipACTION believed that educational resources helped move people to action by providing information on the benefits of physical activity, what to do and how to just “do it, do it, do it” (to quote a popular ParticipACTION campaign). The agency aimed to *be a leading catalyst and provider of information to positively influence personal behaviour and social*

supports, which encourage healthy, active living for all Canadians. Whether targeting individual Canadians or supporting the work of leaders and intermediaries, ParticipACTION was committed to providing resources that were leading edge, relevant, and credible. Their materials attempted to educate and motivate Canadians by using clear language and a light-hearted, often humorous style that made reading interesting, fun and easy.

Some examples of educational resources over the years include:

- **Health Savers** – In partnership with H.J. Heinz Company and the College of Family Physicians, ParticipACTION created 2.5 million activity and nutrition

guides, targeted to older adults and modestly overweight adults. Fifteen thousand family physicians and dietitians personally distributed these materials to appropriate individuals.

- **Live It Up** – With support from Merck-Frosst Canada Inc. and six major health organizations, including CPHA, ParticipACTION produced an innovative health information resource kit for leaders working with older adults. Some 20,000 kits were distributed with over 1 million information pieces hand-delivered to the target audience.
- **Project APEX** – With financial support from the Ontario Milk Marketing Board and the Ontario Government, ParticipACTION developed nutrition and activity information and motivational tools for use by elementary school teachers in Ontario. According to former staff member, Bob Duck, “Projects like APEX and other collaborative activities with CAHPERD (Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance) and CIRA (Canadian Intramural Recreation Association), allowed ParticipACTION to bring educational systems from different provinces together to work toward some common goals, without competing or stepping on each other’s toes.”
- **Jump To It** – This program encouraged girls 8 to 10 years of age to establish an active lifestyle. It was a cooperative initiative, produced by ParticipACTION in cooperation with the four Atlantic Canada provincial governments, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, and with funding from the Health Alliance division of Astra Pharma. Interactive booklets were distributed through the school boards to all girls in the target group. These were supported with classroom posters, a video, television PSAs and materials for parents.

Physical activities take place in specific physical environments that influence the type and amount of activity. These behavioural settings provide the physical and social contexts in which behaviour occurs.⁶ In the 1970s, ParticipACTION concluded that the workplace was an ideal setting for reaching a large number of adults with its fitness and health message. Over the years, a key learning for ParticipACTION that

shaped the way it “did business ... for business” was the importance of having an inside champion who would make use of the resources as part of an ongoing employee wellness campaign.

Resources targeting employees included the following:

- **FITNESS: THE FACTS** was a series of six booklets supported by workplace posters that reached over 100,000 employees. According to Jeannette Hanna, Vice-President of Brand Strategy at Spencer Francey Peters, **FITNESS: THE FACTS** was a good example of how ParticipACTION went beyond ‘motherhood’ statements. “ParticipACTION resources helped people understand and overcome the psychological and practical issues that hold us back. There was always a bias for action. And what better place to leverage and support action than in the workplace, where most Canadians spend at least eight hours a day.”
- **The Krames booklets** were a series of US-developed, clear language health education booklets, dealing with stress, weight control, back care, fitness, etc. ParticipACTION “Canadianized” and sold them to more than 2,000 companies over the years.
- Work with the federal **Department of National Defence (DND)** began in 1985 when ParticipACTION conducted a feasibility study on how best to develop and support individual fitness programs. Following this study, ParticipACTION worked with DND to create materials for individuals (exercise prescription charts, fitness and activity booklets delivered by the physical education and recreation instructors), training manuals, and promotional materials (newspaper articles, posters). ParticipACTION coordinated the development and production of the materials, building on its fitness and communications expertise, as well as on its well-known brand. The organization continued to develop additional resources for DND throughout the 1990s.
- **InformACTION** was an electronic information package with ready-to-use articles and filler ads for convenient and cost-effective use in workplace newsletters and other communication vehicles. Hanna says, “InformACTION was an unrealized gem. It was a model of credibility, readability and design. Unfortunately, it was

ahead of its time in terms of the technologies available in the workplace.”

- The **Quality of Life Newsletter**, which was developed in partnership with Crown Life Insurance, contained healthy living information presented in a colourful, easy-to-read format, as well as interactive features such as contests and personal stories. It went to over 80,000 employees in small and medium-sized workplaces.
- **ParticipACTION’s Workplace Wellness** program was based on extensive consultation with frontline wellness coordinators and public health officials. The year-long program consisted of bi-monthly themed posters, plus weekly information sheets for employees. It also featured additional information on an exclusive website, regular newsletters for program coordinators that contained program suggestions and suggestions for best practices shared by their colleagues across the country. Its strength was that it supported the efforts of corporate wellness coordinators who lacked the time and resources needed to produce quality materials of this nature on their own.

As evidenced in the examples in this article, ParticipACTION built upon the federal government’s core financial support and its resulting mass media exposure to establish partnerships with private sector supporters that allowed them to get more targeted and detailed information to key audiences. The use of easy-to-read, reliable, attractive print materials, which were later expanded to include electronic communications, allowed for effective durability and replicative power. For example, follow-up surveys on the Quality of Life newsletter showed that many employees brought it home for family members to read as well.

Another important learning was how to create a “win-win” situation. By using a pragmatic business approach and finding out what the company’s needs and challenges were, ParticipACTION could tailor their projects and resources to also help corporate partners meet their goals. For example, the Quality of Life newsletter gave Crown Life an opportunity to communicate with a particular segment of their customer base, while providing ParticipACTION with a cost-effective way to deliver health and active living informa-

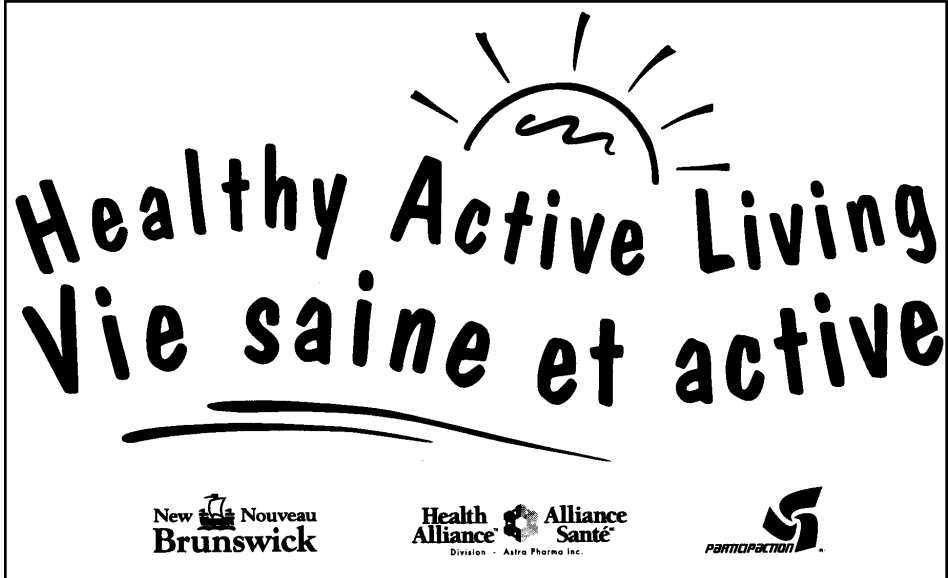


tion to over 1,000 small businesses, which typically do not have employee wellness programs like large companies do.

Enhancing leadership

Whether through community mobilization efforts or the dissemination of educational materials, empowering and supporting leaders was key to ParticipACTION’s success.

In the mid-1980s, the agency developed the ParticipACTION Network as a unique opportunity to serve Canadian leaders, both formal and informal. It was described as an “organization for Canadians who have made a personal commitment to fitness whether they’ve been physically active for years or are just starting on fitness



activity, or even if they've just recognized the importance of the fitness idea and are planning to soon make fitness part of their lives."⁷ Forty-five thousand people (including 10,000 fitness leaders) enrolled as members "almost overnight". Members received a full-colour, highly illustrated, quarterly newsletter and *The Official Network Goal Setter* with information and goal-setting activities to help individuals get active. In addition, members of the "leaders section" received their own newsletter with practical program advice and information about best practices from peers.

Although the network proved to be wildly successful during its time, it also proved to be costly. Mark Sarner, President of Manifest Communications Inc., believes the agency was just not ready for its immediate success. Lagarde agrees, noting that this concept was 10 years ahead of its time as a print version of what would later have been a dynamic website, chat room and electronic resource centre.

ParticipACTION sought partnerships with many programming organizations – nationally, provincially and locally. This strategy was based on the conviction that there already existed a wealth of local programs and leaders. ParticipACTION's aim was to avoid duplication or competition with them, cooperating instead to support and maximize their local potential. From the perspective of the YMCA, which is a grassroots service provider in 250 commu-

nities across Canada, this type of collaboration was ideal. "We know our communities and how to deliver high-quality programs," says Medhat Mahdy, Senior Vice-President of YMCA Program Development and Research, "and ParticipACTION knew how to promote events and attract private sector financial support and media exposure. Working with ParticipACTION on high-profile community initiatives like the Challenge and the launch of Vitality supported our leaders and our work at the community level."

The Healthy Active Living Program in New Brunswick is an example of a unique opportunity to support peer leaders working with older adults. In a provincial partnership with Aîné(s) en marche—Go Ahead Seniors!, Health Alliance (Astra Pharmaceuticals), and the government of New Brunswick, ParticipACTION worked to further develop and promote a bilingual peer-led health information program for older adults throughout the province. Together, the groups developed a train-the-trainer manual, educational resources, public service announcements focussing on the program, and promotional materials. The program is still in existence.

IN CONCLUSION

Still thinking about the 60-year-old Swede? Perhaps you are, given the impact of that PSA and other memorable ads over

ParticipACTION's 30 years. But ParticipACTION also based its work on what is now known about the relationship between community mobilization activities and health communication – that community organization efforts "strengthen the impact of the messages people receive from media-based communication campaigns, and the impact of health communication by defining and framing health issues in ways the community can understand."⁸

There were numerous learnings on how best to support community mobilization, educational and leadership initiatives. These include the adoption of a community-driven approach (whether the community is a school, city, workplace or group of peer leaders) that features full community participation, shared power and decision-making, building on community strengths (empowerment), building networks and partnerships, and believing in the value of collective action.⁹ By listening well, valuing voluntarism, respecting grassroots leaders, and providing high-quality support materials and access to media coverage, ParticipACTION earned a reputation of "doing with" rather than "doing for".

By all accounts, when the mouse roared in all the different ways that it did, the community understood – and roared back.

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The Challenge of Bilingualism

ParticipACTION Campaigns Succeeded in Two Languages

François Lagarde

ParticipACTION's history (1971-2001) paralleled the recognition and promotion of English and French as Canada's two official languages. "In establishing the legal infrastructure for the official languages – first by the initial act of 1969, then by sections 16 to 23 of the Constitution Act, 1982 and, lastly, by the new Act in 1988 – the federal government made linguistic duality a fundamental part of the Canadian identity."¹

During that same period, Canada became more linguistically diverse and underwent challenging debates on national unity. The French Canadian identity slowly gave way to the Francophone regional identities of the Quebecers, Acadians, Franco-Saskatchewanians, Franco-Ontarians, Franco-Manitobans, etc.² National advertisers increasingly recognized Quebec as a unique market that required distinctive strategies developed by Quebec-based agencies. Ultimately, these trends meant that contrived efforts through the mere translation of advertisements created in English would be ignored or resented by many French-speaking Canadians.

Like all federally funded programs and organizations, ParticipACTION was expected to perform well by reaching all Canadians in both official languages "from coast to coast". And perform it did. In a 1994 survey, French-speaking respondents were most aware of ParticipACTION.³ Given that the mother tongue of more than 80% of Quebecers is French and that approximately 85% of Canadians whose first language is French live in Quebec, Quebec respondents' unaided awareness of ParticipACTION was the highest in the country: 31% in Quebec, followed by 23% in the Atlantic provinces. The national average for unaided awareness was 17%. Aided awareness was very high in all parts of the country, including Quebec: 89% nationally, 97% in the Atlantic provinces, 95% in the West, 89% in Quebec, and 82% in Ontario. Some 70% of Quebec respondents rated ParticipACTION's efforts as very useful, the highest rating in the country. The national average was 60%.

This ability of a national program to reach both English and French Canadians is outstanding. In addition, the campaign was carried out with limited funds because ParticipACTION's budgets did not allow for the production of totally different English and French campaigns.

This article examines the three factors that explain such a high level of achievement: the genesis of the organization, people's attitude and skills, and the involvement of skilled staff and suppliers at every step of the creative development and production process. Yet, these factors taken on their own do not constitute a magic formula. This retrospective analysis should serve as a case study for other organizations that have a mission and the motivation to reach national objectives in bi/multilingual or bi/multicultural settings.

Genesis – Bilingual right from the start

One of the founders of ParticipACTION, Philippe de Gaspé Beaubien, was committed to achieving ParticipACTION's mission in both official languages. His initial core group of leaders had an influential network that gave the organization access to media elites and top creative professionals in both linguistic communities.

Initially, ParticipACTION's head office was located in Montreal. Although the national office moved to Toronto in the late 1970s, the organization retained a permanent office in Montreal during almost all its years of existence.

Two other factors in the genesis of ParticipACTION contributed to its acceptance in two cultures and languages – its bilingual name and its status as a non-governmental organization. Although some perceived ParticipACTION as a federal government agency, key partners and major media donors were aware of the organization's non-governmental and non-profit status. This helped establish an initial image that was built around the organization's apolitical health and fitness message.

Leaders, staff and suppliers – Bilingual at heart

People with the right attitudes and skills are an important ingredient of successful bilingual campaigns. First and foremost, the board of directors and senior management at ParticipACTION were committed to producing and delivering outstanding communications that were relevant, powerful and effective in both languages. This does not mean that all board members, staff and suppliers needed to be bilingual themselves. Nor did every campaign need to be totally different. It does mean, however, that the people involved shared the same goals, and recognized that bilingual campaigns require open-mindedness, time and money.

In an article on marketing in multicultural environments, Bertagnoli suggests that marketing skills are the deciding factor for hiring, rather than gender, ethnicity or multicultural knowledge. "However, being able to recruit and retain a diverse employee base in the marketing department, or foster strong relationships with multicultural consultants and agencies, may sharpen a company's message to various target markets. At least, it may help avoid potentially embarrassing gaffes due to ignorance about culture or language."⁴ Building on the suggestions by Barrette et al. regarding the assets required for effective intercultural communication, the best people to work on multicultural campaigns are probably individuals who have the interpersonal skills to grasp and convey the nuances within their own culture.⁵

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were clearly upheld when recruiting board members, staff and suppliers who had the right attitudes, skills and networks.

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What's in a Name?

When ParticipACTION was created in 1971, it was called "Sport Participation Canada". This name proved to be problematic. The word "Sport" made the public think about gold medals rather than fitness and health-enhancing physical activity for all ages. "Canada" implied that the agency was government-based. While ParticipACTION's leaders did not want to deny their government link and funding, they believed that it was critical to emphasize the independence and non-profit status of the agency in order to attract public service support from the mass media, as well as voluntary support from the community. After many attempts to find a "perfect" new name (including the hiring of a professional search agency), the name ParticipACTION emerged. It was the creative brainchild of Jacques Gravel, ParticipACTION's Francophone Vice-President at the time. While sitting at his kitchen table, Gravel experimented with the words "action" and "participation" – both bilingual words that spoke to the mandate and mission of the agency. His "ah ha" moment came when he combined the two – creating a bilingual brand name that was destined to become a household word in Canada.



Official Insurer to Canada's Olympic Teams
SPRING 1995

QUALITY OF Life!

SAFETY FIRST

Intense may appear to be a matter of chance. In fact, the risks we take while driving a car, cycling or cooking on gas stoves and barbecues can be substantially reduced by practicing some basic rules of safety.

Dr. Robert Coran, a pediatric surgeon who led the operating team to spearhead the Canadian Injury Foundation, says we need to eliminate the word "accident". Dr. Coran has a good point. When we drive, after drinking or cycling

without a helmet, the tragedy that may follow is predictable and preventable.

The Canadian Injury Prevention Foundation believes that life is about taking risks. In fact, there is a continuum of risk. At one end of the continuum are the risks that none (or few) of us is willing to take because the chance of injury or death is too high. At the other end of the continuum, are risks like driving a car that all of us take for granted. In the middle are situations involving risk in which we consciously or subconsciously make a choice.

(Continued on page 2)

SPRING into Safety

When spring arrives, most of us are anxious to get outside and get going. Because cycling is one of Canada's favorite springtime activities, this issue offers some practical advice on getting in shape through cycling.

Typically, many Canadians miss out on spring activities because of injuries. In fact, injuries are the leading cause of deaths for Canadians between the ages of 1 and 44. That's why this issue of the newsletter is also dedicated to safety and some of the leading programs to prevent needless deaths and injuries. Fill in your emergency number on our back-two-oh sheet and keep it posted in a handy place.

Congratulations to our readers who sent in their heart healthy recipes. One of them was chosen as random and featured in this issue. Let's keep the dialogue going. Send us a short description of your community efforts to create or greet environments and live actively at the same time. The article on Green, Active Living may give you some ideas. Crown Life is pleased to offer free bike helmets and 30 water bottles to readers who write to tell us about their experiences. Have a safe, green and enjoyable spring!

Blair
Blair
Senior Vice President
Group and Resource
Development
Crown Life Insurance
Company

DID YOU KNOW?

- If five million Canadians used a bicycle instead of a car to short trips (averaging about five kilometers each week), there would be a reduction of as much as 30 metric tonnes of polluting car emissions over a six month period.
- Despite cycling gives the active individual higher energy levels, a lowered risk for heart disease and an opportunity to enjoy the natural environment's outdoors.
- Injuries kill more Canadians under age 19 than all other causes of death combined.
- Nearly 90% of all victims look out to be saved by the first person on the scene of an emergency if that person is trained in first aid and CPR.

The Mouseketeers®

People Make the Difference

Peggy Edwards

The ParticipACTION story is about strategies, partners, creativity, teamwork and style. Behind these factors are the people who made them work. To try to understand this dynamic, we talked with representatives from three key groups: board members, suppliers and staff. They represent just a small number of the dedicated people who served ParticipACTION over 30 years. “Each and every person made a special contribution,” says Russ Kisby. “It is impossible to name everyone in this article, but we acknowledge, salute and thank each and every one.”

Building a family

Rob Petch expresses the view of virtually all the people we interviewed: “The people associated with ParticipACTION were exceptionally committed and knowledgeable, in both a technical and experiential way. Their energy was contagious. Nobody ever lost sight of the real purpose – enabling Canadians to live healthier, happier lives. They had the guts to try new things, even if they fell on their noses sometimes.”

What attracted and kept these people? To answer this question, we asked our participants: *What was special or different about ParticipACTION? Why did you stay involved with the agency over a number of years?*

The following is a summary of their responses.

Diverse Skills and a Collegial Spirit

The fact that staff, suppliers and board members came from varied backgrounds was important to the organization’s success. “We had an incredibly good mix of people on the Board,” says Charlie Caty, “representing physical education, the media, service providers in physical activity, and the business community.” Despite this diversity in both the board and staff, many spoke about the collegial spirit of the organization. Dave Rae says: “In forty years in the graphics field I’ve been in and out of a lot of offices, and none could compare with the sense of shared purpose at ParticipACTION. Everyone could and did make a contribution.”

This sense of shared commitment extended outside of the office. “Our successes were shared successes,” says Nanci Colbeck. The organization was able to draw on the expertise of suppliers and researchers, physical activity experts, educators and community organizers who were like-minded people. One of the most enduring of these experts was Don Bailey, an award-winning scholar and physical education professor at the University of Saskatchewan. He taught Russ Kisby and served as ParticipACTION’s longest-running board member. “He called so often to give advice and support, that we used to refer to his phone calls as the ‘Daily Bailey,’” says Tom MacMillan.

A Personal Passion for the Cause

All of the contributors spoke about the importance of personal passion and commitment to the cause. “ParticipACTION people were more than involved,” says Ebbe Marquardsen, “they were committed. When people ask me the difference, I tell them to think about the standard bacon and eggs breakfast. The pig was committed; the chicken was only involved.” Ebbe, who left the YMCA to become a social marketer extraordinaire,

Peggy Edwards is a health promotion consultant with The Alder Group Inc., who worked as the Manager of the Fitness Secretariat at the Canadian Public Health Association and as a Communications Executive with Health Canada. She wrote many of ParticipACTION’s best known health information materials, including resource kits, booklets, magazine supplements, newspaper articles, and website copy.

believes that his ‘avocation’ became his ‘occupation’.

Jeannette Hanna is personally and professionally committed to the cause. “I was struck by the potential of personal fitness, and how ParticipACTION could make a difference. When people are in control of their fitness, they are more in control of their lives. This can help them become more vital people and better citizens.” When Nanci Colbeck, who came from the world of elite sport, began her 13-year employment with ParticipACTION, she was not convinced that ‘walking a block’ was worth getting passionate about. “That changed quickly,” says Nanci. “Russ Kisby’s passion and vision were irresistible. It didn’t take long before I felt the same way.”

Energy, Respect and Fun

“Energy”, “excitement” and “respect” were three words that respondents often used to describe their time with ParticipACTION. “We were never treated as employees, but as partners in the cause,” says Nanci. Humour was ever-present and one of the ways that staff coped with long hours. Early staff members remember how hard they worked to sell the fitness idea to skeptics across Canada. Brunhild Ramaut says: “We were all deeply involved in our work, really as a team, and we were very tolerant of each other. Friendly teasing and humour helped us get the work done, no matter what.”

For suppliers, ParticipACTION was refreshingly different from the commercial sector. “It wasn’t a packaged account, imprisoned in conventional advertising standards and handicapped by heavy corporate structures,” says Michel Lopez. “It was good to get away from commercial work and to be involved in a campaign with a social mission.”

Intellectual and Creative Challenges

Breaking new ground, striving for high quality, and advancing the enterprise while keeping it financially viable provided constant challenges for all involved. Board member Jim Struthers says that struggling with the ‘product line’ and audience was always a strategic issue. “The question of focus and where to direct our energy kept coming up. In the end, we opted to create an appetite for fitness by aiming the message at the ordinary Canadian. We knew they would pressure the usual suspects, such as school boards and recreation departments.”

As physical activity, health promotion and the communications environment evolved, so did the challenges ParticipACTION faced. The satisfaction of meeting an obvious need in the early years was less clear in the later years, when some people in the field had different ideas about what ParticipACTION should be doing.

Inspirational Leadership

Throughout its existence, the ParticipACTION Board was chaired by charismatic and influential leaders. “I felt proud of the fact that someone of Philippe de Gaspé Beaubien’s stature was leading the ship,” says Tom MacMillan. But it was the agency’s two heads who most inspired the ParticipACTION movement. Keith McKerracher, ParticipACTION’s first Director General, was the marketing genius behind its inception. He was, in the words of Ebbe Marquardsen, “a man with a demanding and huge presence, a consummate hit and run leader, and the perfect person to start up the company.” Russ Kisby became President in 1978. “Russ was a visionary with a wealth of practical experience,” says Rob Petch. “He was relentless in his pursuit of the agency’s objectives. He never took himself seriously, but he sure took his mission seriously. It was impossible to not be inspired by his commitment.”

National Pride

ParticipACTION’s stature as a national and international leader was important to the people who represented it. Brunhild Ramaut says: “Because ParticipACTION had such an excellent reputation and was so well known, doors opened as soon as you mentioned where you worked.” The Mouseketeers® were very conscious of the pan-Canadian nature of their vision. “I became very aware of regional differences in concerns, particularly about economic barriers to being active,” says Bob Duck. Brunhild says: “Francophone mentalities and expressions are not uniform across the country. We had to be careful to use a common French, and to request feedback from various communities to make sure we were communicating well.”

Creative Freedom and Spontaneity

When ParticipACTION became one of the first clients of FOUG, a small advertising agency in Montreal, Michel Lopez was a

Contributors to This Article

- Charles (Charlie) Caty spent 30 years in the Canadian securities industry, retiring as a senior officer and director of RBC Dominion Securities. During this period, he served eight years on the Board of Governors of the Toronto Stock Exchange, the last two as chairman. After his retirement, Charlie has remained active on several boards. He chaired the ParticipACTION Board from 1993 to 2000.
- Robert (Bob) Duck is currently with the Ontario HIV Treatment Network. He worked with the YMCA and as National Director of the Boys and Girls Club of Canada. Bob served as Director of Special Projects with ParticipACTION between 1980 and 1989.
- Nanci Colbeck worked with ParticipACTION from 1989, when she began as the part-time coordinator for the Toronto CrownLife ParticipACTION Challenge, to the year 2000 when the company ceased operations. In the latter years, she served as the (more than) full-time Director of Communications and Community Programs.
- Michael Fog is an illustrator and designer based in Montreal. He is best known for his creative ParticipACTION filler ads, which appeared in thousands of newspapers, newsletters, magazines, etc. over the years. Michael also did the illustrations for some special projects, including The CrownLife ParticipACTION Challenge, the Express Programme and the DND programme. In 1991, he created an animated film for Vitality.
- Jeannette Hanna is Vice-President of Brand Strategy with Spencer Francey Peters (SFP), a Toronto-based branding and design agency. SFP worked with ParticipACTION from 1975 to 1999 on a number of innovative campaigns, including Fitness Now and How and the CrownLife ParticipACTION Challenge event organizers kit, and special projects such as the workplace kits FITNESS: THE FACTS and InformACTION.
- Marilyn Knox is President of Nutrition with Nestlé Canada. She is the former Executive Director of the Ontario Premier’s Council on Health and Deputy Minister of Tourism and Recreation. Marilyn served as a ParticipACTION Board member for 10 years and as Chair from 2000-2001.
- Michel Lopez is a partner and senior copywriter at Joly, Lopez, a creative team based in Montreal. Michel worked with ParticipACTION from 1990 to 1992 when he was a copywriter/partner at FOUG, primarily on Vitality and the Make Your Move campaign.
- Tom MacMillan is Senior Vice-President, Advance Planning/MS&L, a public relations firm based in Toronto. Tom worked with the Toronto Sun for many years and served as Director of Communications and Media Relations with ParticipACTION between 1973 and 1975.
- Ebbe Marquardsen is Vice-President, Development and Community Relations, Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital in Burlington, Ontario. Ebbe was Director of National Projects for ParticipACTION for three years in the mid-1970s and Director of Marketing for six years in the early to mid-1980s.

...continues next page

young copywriter and partner in the business. “We were full of ideas about what good advertising should be. ParticipACTION gave us the opportunity to put our ideas into action. François Lagarde, who was managing the media campaigns at the time, encouraged us to experiment. I will never forget the fun we had during radio recording sessions.” Michael Fog, who created ParticipACTION’s famous print filler ads, says: “I have never had so much fun on the job. The people at ParticipACTION understood that creativity flows from spontaneity.”

During our conversations, many people referred to being part of the ParticipACTION family. It was a large, extended

family that went beyond board members, staff and suppliers to friends in the community, professional allies and corporate and media partners. It also included the families of staff. Husbands, wives and children came in to help with mailings and were always included in parties and get-togethers. If times were tough at home, colleagues and their families reached out to help. There was a sense that families mattered and were an integral part of both the work and the creative message. Michel Lopez was the father of two youngsters when he was developing ParticipACTION spots. “My family life was an unlimited source of inspiration. As my wife always

Contributors to This Article continued...

- Richard H. (Dick) Oland is CEO of Far End Corporation, Saint John, New Brunswick. He served as President of the 1985 Jeux Canada Summer Games, as a Board Member of ParticipACTION since March 1983, and as Board Chair from 1986 to 1993.
- Rob Petch is Executive Producer with the Cormana Group, a diversified communications company. The Cormana Group first developed a relationship with ParticipACTION in the early 1990s. Rob has provided production services and communications strategies to public and private sector organizations for over 20 years, after a 10-year stint at CBC.
- Dave Rae is President of Rae Graphics Limited, a printing and project management company located in Stratford and Toronto. Beginning with his father, Dave Sr., early in the ParticipACTION story, Rae Graphics was involved in the production of virtually all its print materials, from posters to brochures and shoelace cards.
- Brunhild Ramaut is a private communications consultant who specializes in adaptation from English to French. She has worked for a number of different newspapers and radio outlets, and as a communications director for Le Centre des dirigeants d'entreprises and Les Promotions MT et Ass. Inc. (a project management consulting office for special events). Brunhild worked with ParticipACTION on the Canada 125 campaign (1991-92), and headed up French communications for the agency from 1995 until 2001.
- Art Salmon has returned to the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Recreation as a senior policy analyst in the Sport and Recreation Branch. He was with ParticipACTION from 1991 to 2001 as National Technical Director.
- Mark Sarner is President of Manifest Communications Inc., one of Canada's leading social marketing agencies. Mark worked with ParticipACTION more or less continuously from 1974 through 1986 on strategy and the creation of a wide range of programs, including ad campaigns (Walk a Block a Day, Great Moments in Canadian Sport, Fitness Now and How), multi-media special projects (Fitness: Head On; Measure of Fitness; FITNESS: THE FACTS) and membership (ParticipACTION Network).
- James (Jim) Struthers retired as CEO of Armadale Media Group in 1994 after managing radio and television operations and publishing daily newspapers for over 40 years. He served in leadership roles with the Canadian Press, The Canadian Association of Broadcasters, The Canadian Newspaper Association, and The Newspaper Marketing Bureau. Jim served on the Board of ParticipACTION for 18 years and as Chair from 1982 to 1986.

said, it was not advertising, it was a documentary on our family life.”

The last word on this question goes to Mark Sarner, a key supplier and advisor to ParticipACTION for over 10 years: “Why did I stick around? Plain love I guess. You sure didn't work for the money; you worked with ParticipACTION in spite of the money.”

The men behind the mouse

While thousands of people worked on ParticipACTION initiatives, there are two people whose leadership set the vision and day-to-day path.

Keith McKerracher was a successful marketing consultant when he agreed to take on the new agency as one of his clients. He became the Director General, opened an office in Montreal and hired some key staff,

including Jacques Gravel to handle the French side of the operation and Russ Kisby as National Coordinator. Keith was a pioneer in social marketing. He set the direction with an obsession for high-quality creative, the use of marketing tactics to sell the idea of fitness, and a non-elitist approach. His fondest memory is being given an award from a group of Canadian cardiologists. Five years earlier, they had berated him for putting Canadians' health in danger because he was encouraging people to be active without seeing their doctor first. Keith led ParticipACTION from 1971 to 1978. He left to become the President and CEO of the Canadian Institute of Communications and Advertising.

Russ Kisby was there from the beginning and led ParticipACTION for 24 years. When Russ is applauded for his leadership



Keith McKerracher



Russ Kisby and his wife Merle, a public health professional

and contribution as the President of ParticipACTION, he always stands back and points to the remarkable people around him. This happened when he was given the 2000 World Sport for All Award in Vienna, Austria for “international contribution to population health, fitness and quality of life through physical activity and sport,” and in 1991 when the Canadian Public Health Association awarded ParticipACTION with the Ortho award for “outstanding contribution to health”.

Russ was born in Saskatchewan. He has an undergraduate degree in physical education, a master's degree in community development, and an honorary doctor of laws degree. His early professional career was

with the YMCA of Canada, at both the local and national level. He and Merle, who worked in public health and health promotion, have been married for 39 years.

Russ led by example. His leadership skills and his speaking ability – whether it is a three-minute pitch to a Minister or a keynote address to an international audience – are legendary. In fact, Russ has presented over 150 keynote addresses throughout North America and in 15 European, Asian and African countries. Gord Stewart, a fitness and health writer who has known Russ throughout his career, says: “In New Zealand, if someone is held in high esteem – they’re capable, reliable and trustworthy – you say they are ‘good value’. It doesn’t matter which side of the world you live in, Russ Kisby and the organization he led for almost 30 years are good value!”¹

Advice from the experts

We also asked our experts: *If a group came to you today and said, “I want to be the ParticipACTION of... (sexual health, diabetes prevention, etc... you fill in the blank)”, what would you say to them?*

Almost everyone prefaced his or her reply by saying that an organization would need to adapt to the communications world of the 2000s, which is vastly different than it was in the 1970s when ParticipACTION began. Having said this, the following suggestions remain salient:

1. Be prepared to be in it for the long haul (decades, not years).
2. Engage and meet the needs of communities across Canada. “The legions of ParticipACTION allies who worked at the community level were the heart and soul of the movement,” says Art Salmon. “Unless you can reach out and touch the people who share your vision, you can have a cause but you cannot create a movement.”
3. Have a clear, concise mission and be passionate about it. Surround yourself with people who are committed to a vision; be persistent and practical about making that vision a reality.
4. Maintain a high-profile advertising focus. Be prepared to work hard and spend time and effort establishing relationships with the media and private sponsors. Be persistent. If the cause is right, partnerships and sponsorships will come.

Chairs of the Board of Directors

Rt. Hon. Lester B. Pearson (Ottawa, ON) 1971-1972
 Mr. Philippe de Gaspé Beaubien (Montréal, PQ) 1973-1977
 Ms. Barbara D. Hughes (Windsor, NS) 1977-1982
 Mr. James K. Struthers (Saskatoon, SK) 1982-1986
 Mr. Richard H. Oland (Saint John, NB) 1986-1993
 Mr. J. Charles Caty (Oakville, ON) 1993-2000
 Ms. Marilyn Knox (Toronto, ON) 2000-2001

5. Make sure your message and tone are right. “You can’t create advertising that beats you over the head and expect the entertainment media to play it for you for nothing,” says Keith McKerracher. Michael Fog says: “ParticipACTION never pointed the big finger at you. In Atlantic Canada, people would phone in and ask stations to play the ParticipACTION ads because they were funny and clever. Imagine! People asking to hear ads.”
6. Build and maintain political will and a sustainable funding base. “The magic of ParticipACTION was the balance of funding between the public and private sector,” says Marilyn Knox. “To create a movement you need people, courage and the right level of resourcing. If you don’t have the money, you need to recreate yourself.”
7. Stay small, lean and flexible. Dick Oland says: “ParticipACTION’s greatest strength was its people; its greatest weakness was its dependence on the political system for core financing. On the other hand, financial weakness was also a strength – lean dogs are brave and resourceful.” Jim Struthers adds: “One of ParticipACTION’s important legacies is demonstrating how much can be done outside of government, by creating partnerships with the corporate sector, non-governmental agencies, communities and individual volunteers across the country.”

The last word on this question goes to Michael Fog: “I’d ask a group who wanted to be like ParticipACTION, ‘who is going to be involved?’ In the end, it is the people who make the difference. Being part of the ParticipACTION ‘family’ and working on their campaigns was the highlight of my career. I miss it!”

Some concluding thoughts

As one reflects on what we have learned from some of the key Mouseketeers®, it is

tempting to try to clone its leaders and the ParticipACTION model they created. But this is not likely to work. Philippe de Gaspé Beaubien, Keith McKerracher, Russ Kisby, Don Bailey and other ParticipACTION leaders are each unique personalities who crafted an idea and a movement in a certain time and place. While we can learn from how ParticipACTION worked, “it may be best for the change agent to select a model compatible with his or her own personality and to execute that model with the greatest level of professional efficiency.”² What is replicable is the commitment to a social cause and the ability to transmit that passion to others. A recent survey by the Canadian Policy Research Network suggests that the passion and commitment of staff in the non-profit sector may now be threatened by extrinsic factors such as low wages, poor benefits and lack of opportunities for advancement, due to increased expectations combined with cutbacks in funding. The author of that survey urges the public, private and charitable funders of the non-profit sector to head off this concern by ensuring funding for the sustainability of core functions and capacity development.³ This point of view is supported by another recent study of non-profit organizations in Canada. The move away from core funding to project-specific funding in the 1990s has forced many NGOs to devote more and more resources and staff to the money chase, and less to work that benefits the public.⁴

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The Best Laid Schemes of Mice and Men...

ParticipACTION's Legacy and the Future of Physical Activity Promotion in Canada

Irving Rootman
Peggy Edwards

*The best laid schemes of mice and men,
Go oft astray,
And leave us naught but grief and pain,
To rend our day. ...*

Robert Burns in "To a Mouse"¹

Robert Burns wrote "To a Mouse" after he had inadvertently destroyed the mouse's home while plowing in his field. But unlike the experience of the field mouse, ParticipACTION's closing leaves us far more than grief and pain. The agency leaves a rich legacy to build on in the future promotion of physical activity in Canada.

It is clear from the other articles in this supplement that ParticipACTION was indeed a "mouse that roared". But now the mouse is silent. Should we try to revive the mouse, find another mouse that roars, or teach others to roar? What do we take from the legacy of ParticipACTION and what future do we create for the promotion of physical activity in Canada, and for health communications and social marketing in general? To help us address these questions, the authors of this paper canvassed several experts in physical activity promotion and health communications. (See Acknowledgements in this article.) Specifically, we asked them: 1) What legacy does ParticipACTION leave the field? 2) What is the future of promoting active living in Canada? and 3) What is the future of health communications and social marketing as health promotion strategies? This paper will reflect their views as well as our own.

ParticipACTION's legacy

What legacy does ParticipACTION leave? First, it leaves us with a compelling model and story – a uniquely Canadian adventure of which we can be proud. Gerry Glassford, a distinguished scholar in the field of active living, says: "ParticipACTION left Canada with a very positive reputation among other countries that are seeking ways to countervail the high costs of an inactive population."

Second, ParticipACTION remains in the minds of several generations as a force encouraging us to be active. Cora Lynn Craig, President and CEO of the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, says: "ParticipACTION developed a brand that permeated Canadians' consciousness, making 'participating' synonymous with 'participATING'. It had a major impact that regrettably is difficult to measure. In 1981, virtually every Canadian knew of ParticipACTION and by 1995, Canadians were aware of and held positive beliefs about the health benefits of physical activity. Much of this can be attributed to the work of ParticipACTION during the 1970s and '80s."

Irving Rootman is a Professor at the University of Victoria and Distinguished Scholar, Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research.

Peggy Edwards is a health promotion consultant with The Alder Group Inc. and a former writer for ParticipACTION.

Third, while the growth of the fitness movement was mainly due to the hard work of organizations, service providers, educators and leaders across Canada, there is little doubt that ParticipACTION's high profile helped set the stage. "Thirty years ago it was rare to see bicycle paths, fitness trails, fitness clubs in shopping centres and exercise facilities in office buildings and workplaces," says Glassford. "The awareness programs generated by ParticipACTION helped to make these commonplace. And while ParticipACTION cannot be given full credit for gaining the support of key opinion leaders, it certainly was a major player in enhancing the readiness to support the field. ParticipACTION's President was so highly regarded and the ParticipACTION messages so frequently heard that he could 'gain the ear' of senior officials across the nation. This made it easier for others to follow in his path."

Jim Struthers, a former media executive from Saskatoon who chaired the ParticipACTION Board in the early 1980s, believes that ParticipACTION's greatest legacy is community mobilization. "Saskatoon was the ParticipACTION pilot site for all kinds of community activities. In the process, the community learned how to mobilize and use its power. We are a living legacy of the empowered community that was forged in partnership with ParticipACTION." Other board members and staff concur. "Nobody else could mobilize the community from the ground up like ParticipACTION did," says Dick Oland, a marketing expert from Saint John who chaired ParticipACTION from 1986 to 1993. "Events like the CrownLife ParticipACTION Challenge and the 1988 Olympic Torch Relay galvanized communities all across Canada. It was fitness for all, not elitism. The number of volunteers who helped with these events was extraordinary. In fact, part of the organization's legacy is its role modeling of the power of voluntarism and not-for-profit organizations to engage ordinary people."

Last, ParticipACTION leaves us with some specific lessons, which are captured throughout this supplement. A brief summary and some discussion of the main observations follow.

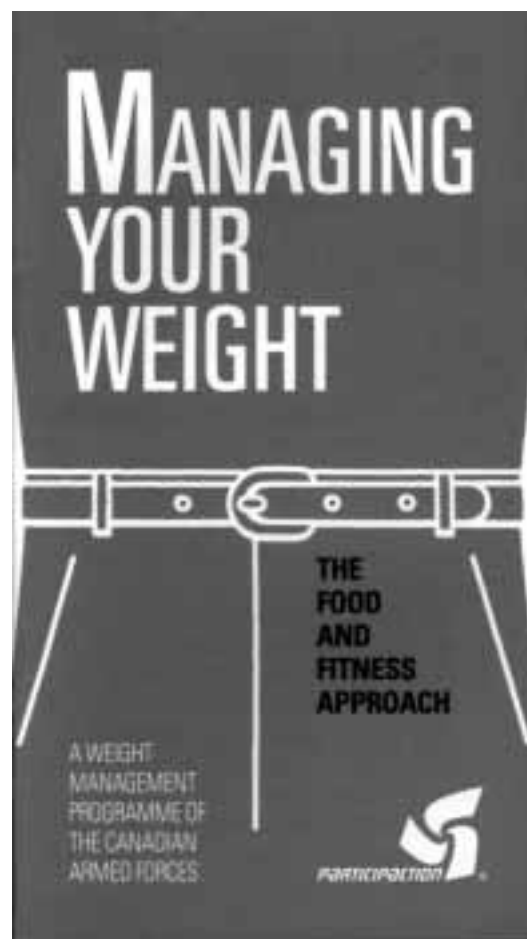
Bauman, Madill, Craig and Salmon² point to the importance of investing in evaluation with an emphasis on proximal measures for media campaigns in the short

term, and influence on social climate in the long term. Their exploration of the use of “social marketing” versus “health communications” suggests that how we do it is more important than what we call it. It is well known that health promotion efforts need a comprehensive and balanced approach that addresses the environments around people as well as personal behaviour change. What is less clear is the role of social marketing or health communications agencies in this effort. Some critics claim that ParticipACTION crossed boundaries and the mandates of other agencies by becoming involved in direct program delivery (e.g., workplace programs or the Ambassadors program) in their efforts to create positive environments for physical activity. Others say the opposite: that ParticipACTION did not get involved enough in advocacy efforts designed to influence policies and environments. Defenders of this stance suggest that an agency that relies on the good will of the media must remain neutral and be associated with a broad positive message.

It is likely that confusion about roles and perceived boundaries contributed to the organization’s demise. Therefore, it is essential in the future to be clear about the various partners’ mandates in a comprehensive strategy to promote physical activity, and to ensure ongoing communication about who does what. Whether or not a communications agency engages in active advocacy, there is a need to consciously frame the physical activity message as more than an individual decision, and to use deliberate strategies for social change that create supportive environments for Canadians who are inactive.

Rob Petch, Creative Director of Cormana Group, believes that the enthusiastic acceptance of ParticipACTION in Quebec was a key factor in their success. François Lagarde suggests that agencies working in bi- or multilingual and bi- or multicultural settings need to make a clear commitment to working in this capacity from start to finish, and retain staff and creative agencies that have the interpersonal skills to convey nuances within diverse cultures.

In his article, “The Mouse Under the Microscope: Keys to ParticipACTION’s Success”,³ Lagarde describes success factors related to ways of working and the princi-



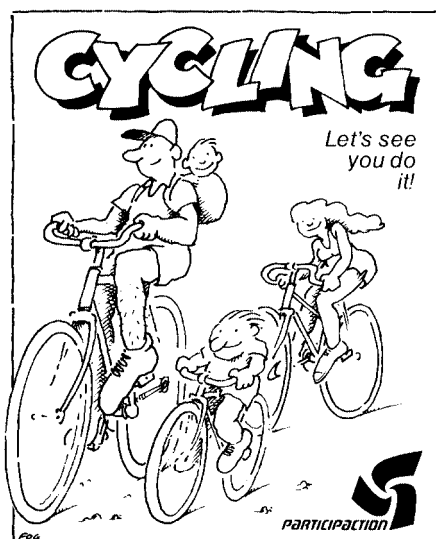
ples of good messaging. He also suggests some of ParticipACTION’s weaknesses. One relates to the agency’s limitations in addressing segments of the population who were not ready to take action. Glassford supports this view: “We still do not know what it will take to shift the inactive group to a health-enhancing lifestyle. Clearly, there is no single social marketing strategy that will positively influence every Canadian.” This dilemma suggests that understanding the barriers faced by inactive Canadians (who are most likely to have low incomes) is key to messaging for these audiences and the institutions that can help reduce disparities.

The other weakness raised by Lagarde relates to the agency’s slowness in later years to adapt to a new media landscape, especially at a time when they were experiencing inadequate funding. Mark Sarner, President of Manifest Communications Inc., believes that ParticipACTION had two major strengths in terms of leveraging public service advertising: innovative marketing combined with an obsession for creativity, and a proven approach to building

personal relationships with the media. “ParticipACTION had engaging people on the road all the time, visiting individual media outlets and giving them top quality creative. They recognized that the media, not the public, was their primary audience. At a certain point, they lost this focus. The quality of creative productions dropped and staff were not constantly visiting the media. They lost their edge just at the time that competition for public service advertising was dramatically increasing.”

In “Spreading the Message Through Community Mobilization, Education and Leadership: A Magnanimouse Task”,⁴ Christa Costas-Bradstreet suggests a number of key learnings related to community mobilization and educational information as complementary strategies to mass media campaigns. They include listening well, valuing volunteerism, respecting grassroots leaders, using a community-driven approach, and providing high quality support materials and access to media coverage.

In “The Mouseketeers®: People Make the Difference”,⁵ Peggy Edwards draws several conclusions from the



ParticipACTION experience. To be successful, non-profit agencies need to: pick a leader who is committed, tenacious, visionary and likeable; choose board members who are personally committed and professionally connected in a variety of influential areas; surround themselves with bilingual staff who are passionate about the cause; hire committed and creative suppliers who work for more than money; and find ways to involve and build loyalty among private sector sponsors, media representatives, senior officials in governments, and leaders in the community. This article also contains suggestions from the experts for organizations wanting to replicate the ParticipACTION experience.

Sustainability, branding and leverage

Three key concepts – sustainability, branding and leverage – ran through the analyses and opinions expressed by all of the authors, as well as the experts we interviewed. Mark Sarnier says: “Capturing the kind of impact that ParticipACTION achieved in today’s environment will require substantial resources in the short term and serious commitment over the long term.” Thus, the crucial task for those working in the field of physical activity promotion – including governments at all levels, non-governmental organizations, researchers, educators, service providers, local groups and citizens – is to find creative ways to work together in support of a sustained physical activity promotion effort for three to five decades to come.

In the first article in this issue, “No Country Mouse: Thirty Years of Effective

Marketing and Health Communications”,⁶ Edwards describes how identity building and branding were key elements of ParticipACTION’s success. This can only be achieved over the long term. Insiders suggest that while ParticipACTION’s branding was a success from an awareness point of view, the agency could have been stronger in articulating what the brand meant. Unless an organization maintains a consistent and insistent brand stewardship, it is vulnerable to misinterpretation by multiple suppliers and piece-meal projects. This might have been part of the problem in later years when some people observed a decline in focus and creativity.

“No Country Mouse” gives practical examples of the effective leveraging that was key to ParticipACTION’s strength. Larry Hershfield, Manager of the Health Communication Unit (THCU) at the University of Toronto, suggests that ParticipACTION provides a model of how to nurture, leverage and appreciate in-kind contributions from both the corporate and non-profit sectors. Nancy Dubois, a consultant with THCU, reminds us that building these kinds of partnerships takes a lot more time and energy than one would suspect.

Promoting active living: The future

At present, there is considerable activity in Canada bearing on the promotion of physical activity, spurred on in many cases by concerns about increasing rates of overweight and obesity. Key coalitions at the national level include the Coalition for Active Living, the Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance of Canada and the Integrated Pan-Canadian Healthy Living Strategy (which includes the federal, provincial and territorial governments). Several provinces already have full-scale promotion campaigns for physical activity on its own or as part of a broader healthy living campaign. Traditional service providers such as municipal recreation departments, sport associations and the YMCA and YWCA continue to promote and support physical activity among Canadians. Finally, organizations at the provincial level such as the Ontario Physical and Health Education Association, as well as at local levels such as the Saskatoon Health District, have increased their efforts to promote physical

activity recently, as part of a focus on improved health.

In contrast to previous campaigns, many of these efforts are tied to the prevention of chronic diseases. Cora Craig says: “If the current trend persists, physical activity promotion will be transformed into the promotion of non-communicable disease risk factors. This appears to be the direction of the federal government with its focus on a healthy living strategy (an umbrella for physical activity, nutrition, tobacco and other risk factors), and its support for the creation of the Chronic Disease Alliance. Although warranted, this was matched by a decrease in focus on physical activity promotion, and a decrease in funding for its physical activity unit (roughly 25% of what it was a decade ago).”

There are limitations to absorbing physical activity promotion within chronic disease promotion. Craig says: “The risk-factor specific approach is still necessary because the messaging across risk factors may not lead to clear messaging for any one risk factor, the target groups for specific risk factors (e.g., nutrition and physical activity) are not identical, and the sectors that need to be engaged in developing solutions are not the same.” This view is supported by the analysis presented in this supplement and from literature⁷ suggesting that it is more effective to “promote a single, doable behaviour, explained in simple and clear terms.”³ Adding negative risk factors, such as smoking in particular, may muddy the waters. Moreover, focussing on other risk factors at the same time may undermine the positive motivational potential of physical activity to build self-esteem, socialize and have fun.

Ebbe Marquardsen, who worked with ParticipACTION in the early years, believes that a clear focussed mission was key to their success. “Early on, it was a tough sell. People looked at us with blank expressions on their faces when we described who we were. But I had a clear mission – to promote personal fitness. I knew what that meant and I knew how to sell that idea. People responded.”

On the other hand, combining forces is not necessarily incompatible. There is a particularly strong synergy between physical activity and healthy eating, and Canada and other countries can build upon the current World Health Organization work

on a Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health.⁸ While physical activity and healthy eating still require separate campaign efforts, combining the efforts of these two networks makes a lot of sense. In this regard, it is encouraging to note that physical activity is being taken seriously in at least some of the current chronic disease work in Canada. Nancy Dubois, who represents the Coalition for Active Living in the Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance meetings, says: "Physical activity is really coming into its own – as a true partner at the table."

Having said this, the authors of this article are concerned that the current emphasis on risk factors and disease medicalizes physical activity and represents a throwback to the days before the birth of the *Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion*.⁹ In so doing, it loses the focus on personal and community empowerment that is the essence of health promotion. It also threatens to push away important partners in the recreation and sport communities. Millions of children play basketball, soccer and hockey, not because it prevents diabetes but because it is fun, challenging and rewarding. Most Canadians who camp, hike and swim do so for the enjoyment of recreating in nature, not because it helps control their blood pressure. Municipal recreation departments provide programs for seniors and Canadians with disabilities, not in the interest of improving health (although this is recognized as an important by-product), but because they believe that all citizens have the right to enjoy the holistic benefits of active recreation in their community.

Currently, there are many organizations and several coalitions that are well placed to improve access and provide leadership in the field of physical activity. The Coalition for Active Living is ideally suited to provide the leadership we need to achieve the six-point plan the Coalition promotes.¹⁰ The recent focus on developing physical activity guidelines and supporting national organizations that are trying to influence the environment for physical activity is laudable and essential. But there is a gaping hole in the strategy. There is no long-term commitment to support a program dedicated to the use of social marketing/health communications to increase awareness, knowledge, motivation and networks among the broad population and



subgroups, and to reinforce a social climate that makes active living the norm in Canada.

Art Salmon, an ex-staff member who currently works with the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Recreation, says: "While there is a lot going on in physical activity at the professional level, the average Canadian is missing a viable icon for physical activity. Canadians saw ParticipACTION as the national consciousness for fitness. There is a sense that we have lost a beacon at the street level."


Many Canadians are incredulous that support for ParticipACTION or a replacement program is not in place at the very time that levels of obesity and chronic disease are rising. There is particular concern that Canadian children, who live increasingly sedentary lives, are growing up without the ParticipACTION message. Charlie Caty, a financial expert and former chair of the ParticipACTION Board, is also concerned about the cost to our health care system. "Research has increasingly shown that keeping Canadians active will save money, as well as increasing personal well-being."

Social marketing can make an important contribution to the effectiveness of community-based interventions when combined with multiple strategies, such as those that are recommended by the CDC Task Force on Community Preventive Services.¹¹ The ParticipACTION experience suggests that social marketing programs are best sustained outside of government through an organization that can draw on the good will of the media and private sponsors without political encumbrances. "An association with government is important for credibility and an enhanced image with corporate supporters," says Rob Petch, "but it is not possible for governments to get the kind of leverage ParticipACTION garnered. Media expect governments to pay for their advertising."

Marilyn Knox, who served on the ParticipACTION Board for 10 years, says: "Without political will and the support of government managers, you lose the balance between public and private funding and are forced to work in survival mode, as we were at the end of ParticipACTION's time. The funding for this cannot come from the already under-funded Physical Activity Unit in Health Canada, or from the monies that flow to other groups working in physical

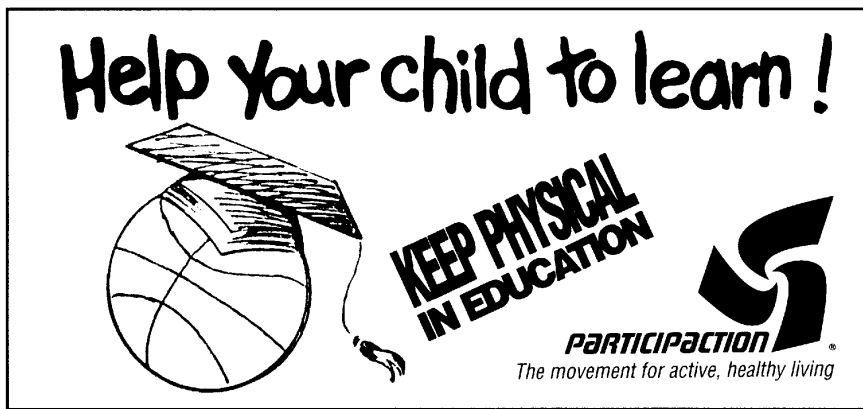



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to Healthy Active Living



activity. It must come from a commitment at the political level to support a comprehensive national social marketing effort that promotes and enables physical activity.”

A wise sage once said that “an elephant is a mouse built to government specifications”, and it makes sense to have an arms-length, small organization that is able to move quickly and even make fun of political correctness, as ParticipACTION did in their early days. In the face of competing and shifting priorities, it is difficult for governments to sustain a specific social marketing program over many years (the exception in Canada is tobacco). It is also challenging for governments to fund an outside agency over the long term unless they have support, cooperation and pressure from six essential groups: elected officials at the highest levels, key opinion leaders in the media and corporate sectors, government bureaucrats, and leaders in provincial/territorial and local governments, the non-governmental sector and grassroots organizations. Elected officials and senior bureaucrats in a variety of departments want clear evidence of the benefits of investing in the promotion of physical activity from economic, environmental and social perspectives as well as health. They need to know that the lessons learned from ParticipACTION and others will be well applied. Managers within government need assurance that their own mandates and programs are valued, and to become comfortable with being a hands-off partner that does not feel in competition with a dynamic organization such as ParticipACTION. They also need to be touched personally by the cause. Sometimes, stories are far more effective than statistics.

Bob Duck, who worked with ParticipACTION and the Y for many years, sug-

gests that future efforts to promote physical activity in Canada will need to pay more attention to the diversity of Canada’s population. “Different cultures look at physical activity in different ways and promotional efforts will need to explicitly address cultural values, beliefs and practices.”

Medhat Mahdy, Senior Vice-President, YMCA Canada, suggests that future efforts to promote physical activity will need to pay more attention to the family unit. “The field tends to promote active living for children and adults separately and to forget the importance of the family unit being active together. At the Y, we see how children take their cues from their parents.” Mahdy also believes that we need to put more emphasis on ‘staying’ with physical activity, as well as on starting. “Recidivism rates are always high. You need different strategies and messages to keep people active.”

Michael Weil, President and CEO, YMCA Canada, says: “We are spending a lot of time talking theory and organizing coalitions. Meanwhile, our young people are not developing the habit of physical activity. Grassroots organizations like the YMCA are working hard to increase access for everyone. Community action is key, but we need policy incentives and organizations like ParticipACTION to support the grassroots.”

Finally, it is important to note the growing interest in health promotion in an ecological approach building on concepts from social ecology and urban studies.^{12,13} This approach, which attempts to integrate theoretical perspectives that allow an analysis of the relationships between personal-level and broader-level environmental factors has in fact recently been applied to the promotion of physical activity.¹⁴ It is likely

that as it gains strength through further research, it will strongly influence the future of physical activity promotion.

The future of health communications and social marketing

It is increasingly apparent that health communications and social marketing efforts need to be viewed as a component of comprehensive strategies to promote personal and social change rather than the only, or even the primary approach. It is also important to recognize that the field is changing rapidly, largely as a result of technological and commercial developments. “It is a different world today and ParticipACTION set the bar high,” says Jeannette Hanna, Vice-President of Brand Strategy at Spencer Francey Peters. “It is more difficult to get noticed, there is more skepticism and more competition for donor dollars.”

Rob Petch, who worked as a producer at CBC television, says: “In the ’70s, you had a chance of reaching almost 50% of Canadians if you got on one of only two television networks. An audience of 2.5 million was considered big. Now with multiple networks and hundreds of channels, it’s considered a success if you reach 700,000 to 800,000 viewers. We also do TV differently. Every three months, there is a new technology to plug into. We’ve moved from broadcasting to narrow-casting to micro-casting.”

Tom MacMillan, Senior Vice-President of a public relations firm, agrees that the communications environment of 2004 is far more complex than it was during the time he worked with ParticipACTION. “On the other hand, there has never been more media available. Convergence also means that it is now possible to be really efficient, for example to engage many newspapers across the country through one corporate owner. Organizations who are willing to learn and adapt have a good chance of being successful.”

Some social marketers are starting to question the effectiveness of public service advertising (PSAs). A new study by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that in the US, broadcast and cable stations provide an average of 15 seconds every hour to PSAs (just under one half of 1% of all television airtime). The study also found that Partners for a Drug-Free America was buy-

ing about 9 seconds an hour for their “public service messages” because most networks were showing their messages at 3:00 a.m. or could only give the agency 10-second spots. On the positive side, new style PSAs that feature a network’s own stars – and therefore promote the network at the same time as the social cause – were getting prime-time exposure.¹⁵

Petch believes that non-governmental agencies need not abandon PSAs nor television. “It does mean that they need to be realistic about what a PSA can do, and make television one of several delivery mechanisms. For example, reduce your costs per unit and make your creative suitable for delivery on the web as well as on TV.”

It may also be time to revisit the rules about how much time broadcasters in Canada are required and encouraged to donate to public service advertising, and whether or not there should be stipulations on how much of that space should be in prime time.

Larry Hershfield suggests that “more participatory, personal approaches such as ‘blogging’ and ‘chats’ now dominate the information environment, particularly among the young.” In addition, “there are more commercial intrusions into the overall health information environment, including nutraceuticals, advertising, medicalization and the invention of syndromes.” These developments provide both challenges and opportunities for health communications and social marketing efforts to promote personal and social change.

On the challenges side, serious health communications and social marketing efforts will have to compete with well-funded commercial efforts and each other in an increasingly chaotic information environment. This will require ongoing research with an increased emphasis on the use of psychographics to segment audiences, focussed strategic and operational planning, the creative use of resources, effective partnerships, and the use of event marketing and new media approaches in addition to (or instead of) advertising. The goal must be to create and sustain support for social movements such as the one that ParticipACTION spearheaded.

On the opportunities side, the specificity of the increased number of media channels allows for more targeted messages to spe-

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the following people for their input:

- Charles (Charlie) Caty, Chair ParticipACTION Board, 1993-2000
- Cora Lynn Craig, President and CEO, Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute
- Nancy Dubois, Consultant, The Health Communication Unit, University of Toronto
- Robert (Bob) Duck, Ontario HIV Treatment Network
- Gerry Glassford, former Dean of the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation, University of Alberta
- Jeannette Hanna, Vice-President of Brand Strategy, Spencer Francey Peters
- Larry Hershfield, Manager, The Health Communication Unit, University of Toronto
- Marilyn Knox, President Nutrition, Nestlé Canada, Chair, ParticipACTION Board, 2000-2001
- François Lagarde, social marketing consultant
- Tom MacMillan, Senior Vice-President, Advanced Planning/MS and L
- Medhat Mahdy, Senior Vice-President, YMCA Canada
- Ebbe Marquardsen, Vice-President, Development & Community Relationships, Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital
- Richard (Dick) Oland, Chair ParticipACTION Board, 1986-1993
- Rob Petch, Executive Producer, Cormana Group
- Mark Sarner, President, Manifest Communications Inc.
- James (Jim) Struthers, Chair ParticipACTION Board, 1982-1986
- Michael Weil, President and CEO, YMCA Canada.

cific audiences. New information technologies and increasing access to the world wide web create unprecedented opportunities for ordinary people to access health information that is specific to their needs. Health communications and social marketing efforts can exploit these opportunities to spread the word more efficiently than has been the case in the past. Moreover, according to François Lagarde, “social marketing could be optimized if social marketers go the whole way in addressing product, price and place issues and considering taking the lead on advocating changes to the physical, social and economic environments that are conducive to the adoption of physical activity.”

Thus, on balance, the future of health communications and social marketing is secure, at least in part, because of the pioneering efforts of ParticipACTION – the “mouse that roared”.

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Appendix

Historical Milestones for ParticipACTION

ParticipACTION's First Decade: Creating Awareness and Changing Attitudes

1971

- Sport Participation Canada (later renamed ParticipACTION), a not-for-profit private company is formed on July 12. Rt. Hon. Lester B. Pearson is Chairman and Mr. Philippe de Gaspé Beaubien is President.

1972

- “ParticipACTION” is selected as the bilingual brand name and a logo is designed.
- A communication strategy is developed and initial TV and radio PSAs are launched in both official languages.
- ParticipACTION Saskatoon begins as the first pilot community.

1973

- The 60-year-old Swede television ad shakes up the country.

1974

- ParticipACTION launches newspaper (daily and weekly) PSA messages.

1976

- Sun Life Assurance Company and the Kinsmen Clubs of Canada work with ParticipACTION to build activity trails called “ParticiParks” in over 100 communities across Canada.

1979

- ParticipACTION and the Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (CAHPER) publish *What's the Matter With Kids Today*, an engaging booklet about children's lack of fitness and growing problems with overweight.

1980-81

- ParticipACTION reaches 100,000 employees and their families with FITNESS: THE FACTS, a comprehensive information campaign on employee fitness.
- Media support for ParticipACTION campaigns (not including in-kind) valued at \$8M.

ParticipACTION's Second Decade: Building Involvement and Motivation

1982

- ParticipACTION Saskatoon conducts “Great Canadian ParticipACTION Challenge,” involving 50 communities across Canada.

1983

- The CrownLife ParticipACTION Challenge begins and continues annually for 11 years. For many years, the Challenge involves an annual “community donation” of some 800 paid personnel, more than 22,000 volunteer leaders and over 4,000,000 registered participants.

1984

- ParticipACTION, Fitness Ontario and the Ontario Milk Marketing Board create APEX (Action Program on Eating and Exercise) for use in Ontario elementary schools.

1984-86

- The ParticipACTION Network is created in partnership with Fitness Canada, including a membership-based information magazine with sections targeting fitness/health leaders and the public.

1985

- ParticipACTION begins work with the Department of National Defence to develop training, exercise prescription and promotional materials for military staff and physical education instructors.
- The “Health Saver” educational pamphlets program is launched in cooperation with the College of Family Physicians of Canada and the financial support of the H. J. Heinz Company of Canada. Eventually, 2.5 million information pieces are distributed by family physicians.
- ParticipACTION adapts health education booklets produced by Krames Communications for sale to workplaces in Canada under the ParticipACTION brand. This continues into the mid-1990s.

1988

- Through the *Olympic Torch Relay and Celebration 88*, ParticipACTION mobilizes 1,730 communities in partnership with Petro-Canada and the Canadian government.
- ParticipACTION publishes *Expres: The Exercise Prescription*, an adaptation for the public of the exercise program developed for the Department of National Defence.

1989

- ParticipACTION designs and implements the Vitality awareness campaign in partnership with Health Canada and Fitness Canada, in response to the healthy weights initiative.
- ParticipACTION hosts the TRIM and Fitness International Sport for All conference (TAFISA) with 48 participating countries.
- The CrownLife ParticipACTION Challenge program is adopted internationally by TAFISA as “Challenge Day”, eventually attracting 25 million participants annually.
- The television campaign “Body Break With ParticipACTION” is launched and Canadians meet Hal and Joanne.

1990

- Fitness Ontario supports the development of “InformACTION”, a computer-based health communication resource for workplaces.

1991

- The Canadian Public Health Association presents ParticipACTION with the Ortho Award for “outstanding contribution to health in Canada”.
- Media support for ongoing campaigns and Vitality calculated to be \$15M.

ParticipACTION’s Third Decade: Enhancing Partnerships and Community Mobilization

1992

- ParticipACTION develops and distributes to 20,000 leaders of older adult programs, health information kits called *Live It Up!* in partnership with Merck Frosst Canada Inc. and six major health organizations, including CPHA. Over one million information pieces are hand-delivered to the target audience.
- Through a team of 50 community animation specialists and over one million local volunteer leaders, ParticipACTION stimulates over 20,000 community active living initiatives and extensive coverage for the Canada 125 campaign.
- ParticipACTION, with the support of many organizations and in collaboration with Fitness Canada, is contracted to expand and promote Summer Active and Winter Active campaigns.
- With the support of the Ontario government, ParticipACTION launches the Ontario Community Active Living Programme (OCALP). Four community animators mobilize individuals and organizations to build active living coalitions, and support physical activity in communities across Ontario.

1993

- In partnership with Crown Life Insurance Company, ParticipACTION develops and distributes a quarterly, bilingual, health newsletter called *Quality of Life* that goes to some 80,000 employees in some 1,000 small businesses and institutions across the country. This continues until 1997.

1994

- Nielsen media report shows that between February 1993 and January 1994, ParticipACTION gained a median monthly media exposure valued at \$230,000 (ranging from \$167,000 to \$538,000).

1995

- The Canadian Cardiovascular Society awards ParticipACTION the Doctor Harold N. Segall Award of Merit “in recognition of notable contributions to the prevention of cardiovascular diseases and the promotion of cardiovascular health in Canadians.”
- In partnership with Health Alliance (Astra Pharma Inc., now AstraZeneca) and the Government of New Brunswick, ParticipACTION works with a seniors group called Aîné(e)s en marche—Go Ahead Seniors! to develop and promote a bilingual, peer-assisted health information program for seniors.

1998

- ParticipACTION builds and launches an ambitious interactive website in both official languages.
- ParticipACTION promotes *Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living* developed by Health Canada.

1999

- ParticipACTION is one of the founding members of the Coalition for Active Living. It is made up of hundreds of groups, organizations and individuals committed to “making sure that the environments where we live, learn, work and play support regular physical activity.”
- ParticipACTION stops producing new national public service announcement campaign material.

2000

- ParticipACTION mobilizes over 800 communities to support Canada’s largest millennium project, “The Trans Canada Trail Relay 2000”.
- ParticipACTION works with the Department of National Defence (DND) to produce training resources for Land Force Command and special programs for DND firefighters, special forces and pregnant soldiers.
- The ParticipACTION Board decides to cease operations.

2001

- ParticipACTION officially closes in January.