

Using the Local for the Global – Marketing Reproductive Health Two-Ways

Written by: Michelle Jiles

SMANA attendees were treated to more than insightful conversations and a delightful atmosphere at the Population Institute on February 20th. The two presentations emphasized a global approach, with applicable lessons we can all utilize.



The evening started off with Chris Purdy, DKT International, discussing how social marketing is not just about ideas but products. His presentation, “How Contraceptive Social Marketing is Changing Lives”, was on how DKT is using social marketing to expand the understanding of contraceptives in improving men and women’s lives, and also expanding access to contraceptives through investment in local suppliers to distribute contraceptives. Investment is usually in large, poor countries, but they have expanded out to emerging markets. DKT is worldwide with a concentrated operation in China, India, Central and South America, and Western Africa.

Advertising in traditional media, digital platforms, and in-person conversations, DKT focuses not just on the health, but also the emotional and sexual benefits of deciding reproductive timing. They have moved towards eroticizing reproductive health, a bold move that led to DKT distributing 28 million injectable contraceptives, 96 million pills, and 700 million condoms in 2017. We often think of social marketing as altruistic, but DKT understands that profits are important to maintain the supply side of the equation. DKT decides pricing based on the local dollar value. Regions that can afford it are charged higher rates, those profits are then used to subsidize access for poorer regions. DKT evaluates markets and regularly reassess targets, message impact, and supply dynamics. It can take a year from initial assessments to final sales of a product.

Bob Walker, our host at the Population Institute, highlighted an innovative technique from the Population Media Center, using the Sabido method to improve contraception literacy. One of the main barriers to contraceptive use is access. Access is not just about availability but also opposition - from partners or other family members, particularly mothers-in-law, religious figures, fears about side

effects, and lack of control in decision making (ex. child marriage). The Sabido method uses telenovelas to focus on 5 or 6 key issues. Local people are trained in script development, production methods, and casting to create a two year program that addresses such issues as inequality, contraceptive myths, health, the environment and climate change, and nutrition.

Storytelling is central to good social marketing and people learn best when they are entertained. The programs PMC funds are usually the highest rated programs in the country. The programs use transitional characters who act as audience surrogates, with other characters giving advice from opposing viewpoints. This allows for dialogue in a non-threatening space. Is it not only countries like Ethiopia, India, and Sierra Leon where this has had an impact. The Hulu program, East Los High, used the same method to address teen pregnancy in the Latinx population. PMC has a reach of 500 million across 50 countries. Assessment is also key for PMC. Investigating key topics to explore, producing a program, and post-evaluations often take three years. All work is at the local level making these indigenous products with real impact and meaning.