

ISSC

VIBRIO VULNIFICUS EDUCATION

On Point

ARTICLE

**Tools for
Vibrio vulnificus
Education**

R_x for Success: **Teaming up with Pharmacies to Reach High-Risk Consumers**

by Michelle Bashin

***New sections to
guide you through
the article:***

- ***The Idea in Brief***
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THE IDEA IN BRIEF

Each year, 20-30 people die after dining on raw oysters. A potent bacterium, *Vibrio vulnificus* is responsible. While harmless to most consumers of raw oysters, this microbe can be lethal to people with liver disease, diabetes or a weakened immune system. While not all oysters contain *Vibrio vulnificus*, it is impossible to tell by their appearance, smell or taste. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) therefore, strongly cautions people with any of these health conditions never to eat raw oysters.

The good news is that we can prevent serious illness by educating those at-risk. But reaching this group can be challenging,

especially for public agencies with limited funds. Florida's Department of Seafood Marketing, however, recently overcame these obstacles through an innovative collaboration with Winn-Dixie Pharmacies. By utilizing this chain of supermarket-based pharmacies, the Department disseminated over 30,000 brochures on *Vibrio vulnificus* directly to those most vulnerable to illness. The approach they used is easy, inexpensive and effective. The California Department of Health Services adopted a similar approach with pharmacies in Safeway supermarkets to prevent childhood lead poisoning. This paper will provide you the tools to replicate this effort and achieve similar results.

THE IDEA AT WORK

This is a four-part process:

1. Identifying Partners

The goal is to connect with businesses already serving this target audience. Home Depot, for example, would be a poor choice for educating consumers about eating raw oysters, but an excellent one for back injury prevention. Restaurants and raw bars attract the right people, but some may be reluctant to share information that could undermine sales. Pharmacies are a good venue for sharing health information because there is no such conflict of interest. People with diabetes and other immune disorders visit pharmacies regularly and many depend on pharmacists for health information and advice.

2. Pitching the Idea

A letter will be your first contact with potential partners. One well-written letter is all it takes to reach dozens of possible collaborators. Addressed to the CEO or Director of Marketing, this letter will convey the importance of the issue and how their participation will make a difference. Phone calls and face-to-face meetings with

interested companies follow. During your first encounter, let them know you intend to send press releases about the partnership to local media. Retailers will find this positive press to be a powerful incentive for collaboration.

3. Doing Your Part

Achieving successful outcome depends largely on you. The primary responsibility for ensuring that materials are delivered on time, to the right place and to the right consumers rests with you. Collaborators play an auxiliary role. They provide the distribution network for information. Despite the benefits they accrue, collaborators see the project as yours, not theirs. This means personal involvement and close project monitoring, especially during start-up. Your collaborators will appreciate your close attention and prompt resolution of any problems that arise.

4. Gauging Your Success

Because it is not possible to know how many at-risk consumers stopped eating raw oysters following your efforts, other, indirect measures are used. These include:

counts of materials disseminated, numbers of stores participating, number of stories generated by your press releases and the number of people reached through these

stories. A careful accounting of these numbers will provide an indication how many people received information as a result of your collaboration.

BEST PRACTICE

Why would a retailer want to educate consumers about raw oysters? Because educating people about food safety fits with pharmacies' role as health promoters. Since physicians have less and less time to spend with patients, consumers turn increasingly to pharmacists for medical information and advice. They consider pharmacists to be trustworthy sources of information, and consumer confidence is for good business.

Pharmacies build their reputation as good citizens by providing health information to customers. It sends a positive message about the company's integrity and helps certain businesses stand out. A good reputation also promotes customer loyalty, communicating that the pharmacy cares about more than profits. The fact that consumers have confidence in pharmacies makes pharmacies desirable advisors about food safety.

This educational strategy is simple: utilize a retail pharmacy chain to deliver information to those most susceptible to illness from raw oysters. Such adults often have health conditions requiring pharmacy medications. By including brochures about raw oysters with drugs prescribed to treat these conditions, you will get the information to those who need it most. This targeted approach is very efficient, reaching only those at-risk. Distribution costs are absorbed primarily by the pharmacy. With brochures currently subsidized by the ISSC, the only real cost to health programs is a few hours of staff time overseeing implementation with a pharmacy chain.

Partnerships between public programs and retailers have great benefits for both parties. They position the pharmacy as a concerned corporate citizen and consumer ally. Pharmacies benefit from good publicity among

consumers as well as among their corporate peers. The pharmacy differentiates itself by sharing health and safety information with consumers—all this at no expense and minimal effort. Participation in such a partnership is a win-win situation, with lots of credit going to your partners.

Identifying Partners

Figuring out which pharmacy to approach is as simple as picking up a local phone book. Most pharmacies belong to a few chains. Don't forget about major supermarkets. Many now include their own pharmacies. While pharmacies are the primary focus, no need to limit your efforts to them alone. Consider approaching other retailers, especially those who serve the target audience. They may be receptive to the benefits of partnership too.

Plugging into a network of stores has big advantages over working with an individual retailer. By piggy-backing on a chain of stores, you'll multiply the number of people reached with no additional effort. Since chain stores are similar in design, one distribution strategy will usually suffice. Most important, just one person makes decisions affecting many stores. You need only persuade this decision-maker and doors will open to dozens of stores.

Once you've identified several potential partners, use the Internet to find the information you need about who to approach. Large companies usually have their own websites. If not, look up the company through the Division of Corporations website. Where is their corporate headquarters? Where is their state headquarters? Who are their corporate officers? If their headquarters is in your state, so much the better. This may make access to the top decision-makers easier. Identify the person you need to reach, in this case, the CEO or Director

of Public Affairs.

Pitch the Idea

Once you have identified several retailers, the next step is to draft a proposal letter. It need not be long. A single page is best. Use letterhead to establish your credentials. Open with a strong statement about why this issue is so important--such as saving lives. No need to go into all the details. They just need to know that they can contribute by providing information to their high-risk customers. Include a copy of the brochure with the letter. Mention that you will be sending a press release to newspapers and trade organizations describing the partnership. Then provide a phone number where they can reach you. One week later, follow the letters up with a personal phone call. (A sample letter is included on Page 5).

Do Your Part

Respond to interested respondents promptly. Set a time for an initial meeting in person. Face-to-face contact builds trust and will help establish rapport early on. After the initial meeting, you can conduct business by telephone and e-mail. Congratulate them on their public interest. Let them know that they can count on you.

Now is your opportunity to hammer out the logistics. Materials distribution is key to your effort. How many stores will be involved? Where are they located? How many materials will be needed per store? Which stores have a large proportion of Spanish-speaking customers? Consider sending Spanish brochures to these stores. How will materials be distributed to each pharmacy? Can they send the brochures through internal channels or do they need you send materials to each store? Ask about other potential avenues for distribution such as in-store brochure racks or bulletin boards.

Clarify who is responsible for doing what, then develop a timetable for implementation, with a beginning and an end. Set a launch date--because without a last minute, most things never get done. Try tying the start to another meaningful date, such as the beginning of summer, high-risk season, national diabetes

week, or another pharmacy promotion.

Discuss how to educate pharmacy staff about this topic before the campaign. Staff will need some basic knowledge to respond to customers' questions intelligently. Explore how the leadership will inform store managers about the partnership. Offer to help by attending managers meetings or writing an employee newsletter article about *Vibrio vulnificus*. After all, you are the expert!

Make it easy for the company to participate. Don't expect them to do the lion's share of the work. This is YOUR project. You have more invested in its success than they do, so be reliable. They need to be able to count on you. Ensure that materials are sent on time to the correct recipient, for example. Follow up with your contact to make sure that materials have been received. Keep in touch, re-supply stores as needed. Keep up your end of the bargain. Good follow-through is really critical with a voluntary partnership.

Now that you've identified a partner and worked out brochure dissemination, it's time to inform the media about this endeavor. Draft a press celebrating the pharmacy's participation in protecting public health. (Sample press releases are included on Pages 6 & 7.) E-mail it to newspaper food, health and science editors. (Your agency's press office likely has such a list.) These editors are the ones most likely to pick up the story. Follow up with a phone call a few days later. Send the press release to related industry publications such as pharmacy, seafood business, and supermarket magazines. Not only will you gain the attention of the company's peers, you may also open doors for collaboration with other firms.

Keep an eye out for articles that result from your press release. They are great evidence of your effectiveness. Send copies to your pharmacy collaborators. You can be sure they will send them up their chain of command. Positive publicity makes everyone involved look good.

Gauge Your Success

There is no substitute for a first-hand look to

see how things are going. After the launch, visit local stores. Look around; introduce yourself to pharmacy managers. Ask their impressions. Are they distributing materials? How are customers responding? Comments from pharmacy managers and customers are very useful. While not quantitative, favorable responses from pharmacists or the public can really help to expand the program to other outlets. Congratulate managers on their participation and ask you can do anything for them. If you encounter any problems you can't resolve, bring them up with your corporate contact.

The number of materials distributed is an important measure of your success. Keep track of the number of brochures sent. This becomes especially important once you begin re-supplying stores that have run out. Press coverage is another important evaluation measure. Collect copies of any articles that follow your press release. Find out the circulation of papers that carry the story. Share these statistics and any interesting anecdotes with your corporate partners. They may come in handy for future articles, interviews or press releases.

At the conclusion of this partnership, write a letter of congratulations to the corporate CEO. Thank him for participating in this effort to prevent serious illness. Have the highest-placed individual in your organization sign the letter, such as the State Health Director. Your collaborators will greatly appreciate this gesture. (A sample letter is included on Page 8.) Thank your contact personally for his/her participation and support. Ask them how this educational effort might be improved upon in the future.

Conclusion

Working with pharmacies to educate consumers is a win-win proposition. This approach truly benefits all parties. For health educators, partnerships offer a highly targeted way of reaching those at-risk. The cost per person reached is extremely low and minimal materials are wasted. Distribution costs are absorbed by the pharmacies. With subsidized print material

production, the only real expense to the initiating agency is a few hours of staff time.

Pharmacies have a good deal to gain from this collaboration as well. Looking after the health of their community, they present themselves as good corporate citizens. They also benefit from positive, unpaid media coverage. Smart CEOs know that opportunities for such publicity are rare and the payoffs substantial. Moreover, pharmacies realize all these gains with little effort or expense. By educating high-risk consumers, pharmacies do well by doing good.



October 2, 2002

Mr. Al Rowland, CEO
Winn Dixie Stores
5050 Edgewood Court
Jacksonville, Florida 32254

Dear Mr. Rowland:

As you know, there are many people who, with a little help from others and a little knowledge of their own individual condition, can prevent a serious illness or death. Such is the case of an at-risk group with diabetes, liver disease, iron overload disease, cancer, stomach disorder, or any illness or medical treatment that weakens the body's immune system.

Americans have always shown a great liking for eating oysters -- especially raw oysters on the half shell. For some consumers raw oysters, as well as other raw foods, are not safe. Naturally occurring bacteria in raw oysters can lead to serious illness and in some cases death in those persons with weakened immune systems. The culprit that should keep those with weakened immune systems from eating raw oysters is *Vibrio vulnificus*. This bacterium naturally exists in oysters. Most people either process this bacteria within their digestive systems with either no or mild symptoms.

I am writing to propose that as a public service, and in the interests of public safety, Winn Dixie's pharmacists insert the enclosed brochure in the prescription packages of individuals who fit the profile of compromised immune systems. For example, individuals purchasing insulin would fit the profile. The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services in cooperation with the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference can provide these brochures at no cost to Winn Dixie.

This project could start with Winn Dixie's Florida locations and gradually expand to other states. If our partnership in this project can prevent one illness, or save one life, it will be a success. Please contact me at 850-488-0163 for more information.

Sincerely,

CHARLES H. BRONSON
COMMISSIONER OF
AGRICULTURE

Paul Balthrop
Bureau of Seafood and Aquaculture Marketing

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

INFORMATION:

**Paul Balthrop
(850) 488-0163**

Winn Dixie Educates At-Risk Consumers

Winn Dixie pharmacies, the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Bureau of Seafood and Aquaculture Marketing have launched a campaign to educate the at-risk consumer about the risks of eating raw oysters. A certain segment of the population with immune suppressed systems is at-risk if they consume raw oysters. As a public service, Winn Dixie has agreed to place a brochure containing valuable information about the risks of eating raw oysters in each prescription that is filled for individuals with compromised immune systems. These brochures, all provided by the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference, will be distributed by Winn-Dixie at their 300 Florida pharmacies in English and Spanish.

If you would like additional information or a copy of the brochure, contact Paul Balthrop, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services at 850-488-0163, or e-mail, balthrp@doacs.state.fl.us.

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Please send a tearsheet of your published article to: Paul Balthrop Bureau of Seafood and Aquaculture, 2051 East Dirac Drive, Tallahassee, Fl 32310-3760

Press Release
California Department of Health Services

Safeway & State Collaborate on Lead Education Campaign

SACRAMENTO State Health Director Kim Belshe today announced that the California Department of Health Services (DHS) has teamed up with Safeway stores to launch an extensive childhood lead poisoning prevention campaign that is expected to reach more than four million people.

“This public-private partnership provides us with the opportunity to educate hundreds of thousands of parents about childhood lead poisoning and its potential impact on their children,” said Belshe.

The multicultural campaign began this week at 222 Safeway stores throughout northern California and features a toll-free number (800-644-LEAD) and written materials to educate parents about the problems of lead poisoning. The materials are available in both English and Spanish.

Childhood lead poisoning is a problem that crosses socio-economic, ethnic and geographical boundaries. It can undermine a child's ability to think, learn and pay attention. National studies show that one in eleven children has unsafe levels of lead in the blood. Lead sources range from household paint and contaminated soil to imported ceramics. In California, more than 4,000 children were found to have unsafe blood lead levels last year. Many more probably went undiagnosed. Children with lead poisoning do not appear sick but still can be adversely affected.

To make parents aware of this problem, Safeway has committed to a prevention campaign to be conducted throughout the month of July. Safeway's efforts include an article in coupon books mailed to 5 million households and in-store information such as brochures, posters, checkout coupons and grocery bags. Even milk cartons will feature information to parents about child lead poisoning.

CONGRATULATORY LETTER

November 1, 1995

Mr. Steven Burd
Chief Executive Officer
Safeway, Inc.
201 Fourth Street
Oakland, CA 94660

Dear Steve:

I am writing to congratulate Safeway, Inc. for its important contribution to protecting the health of California's children through sponsorship of a child lead poisoning prevention campaign. Through Safeway's efforts, millions of parents have learned how to protect their children from this entirely preventable illness. By increasing public awareness, Safeway has spared children unnecessary suffering while saving thousands of dollars in medical and special education expenses.

In this era of scarce resources, it is more important than ever that government and industry work together to inform the public about critical health issues. This campaign is a fine example of corporate responsibility. The public-private partnership between Safeway and the Department of Health Services is a model for corporations and health programs across the country.

With best wishes,

Pete Wilson
Governor