

GLOBAL HEALTH

Innovation Insight Series

Local farmers and their families watch a pumping competition—one of KickStart’s early marketing techniques



Image provided by KickStart International

KICKSTART INTERNATIONAL III: Marketing to Hard-to-Reach Consumers

NAIROBI, KENYA

ESTABLISHED 2005

MARTIN FISHER AND
NICK MOON, COFOUNDERS

THE PROBLEM/SOLUTION SPACE

The relationship between poverty and poor health is well documented. According to a recent World Bank report, “Poverty around the world creates ill-health because it forces people to live in environments that make them sick, without decent shelter, clean water or adequate sanitation.”¹ Unfortunately, more than 1 billion people around the world remain trapped in poverty (i.e., living on less than \$1.25 per day).² Alleviating poverty is especially difficult in Africa, where approximately 80 percent of the poor are rural, subsistence farmers. Some of these farmers have an entrepreneurial spirit, but with limited education and access to information, they have limited means to increase their income and climb out of poverty, so they remain at greater risk for disease and ill-health.

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ABOUT KICKSTART INTERNATIONAL

KickStart International was founded by Martin Fisher and Nick Moon to design tools that would enable Africa's poor to launch and sustain profitable businesses. Its first product was a line of manually operated irrigation pumps—branded “MoneyMaker Pumps”—that would help subsistence farmers transform their farms into profitable family businesses. The pumps enable year-round irrigation, which allows farmers to grow more valuable crops, reap multiple harvests each year (instead of only one or two), remain productive during drought seasons, and increase their income substantially. The original Super MoneyMaker Pressure Pump was launched in 1998. This was followed in 2006 by the MoneyMaker Hip Pump, which resembled a bicycle pump.

ONE CHALLENGE: MARKETING TO HARD-TO-REACH CUSTOMERS

Once KickStart successfully designed, tested, and produced its MoneyMaker pumps, it faced a new challenge: how to effectively reach and market the products to its target markets in Kenya, Tanzania, and Mali. In these regions, average farmers and their families are physically isolated, living miles from the nearest road without an address or electricity. According to Fisher, “Very often people don't even leave their farm except for a few times a year to go to town.”³

Because they have few resources, most farmers are traditionally risk averse consumers. Purchasing a KickStart product may be the most expensive purchase they will ever make (often a quarter of a family's annual income). If that large investment were to fail, a family could starve for months.

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Moreover, many farmers understand little about pump technology and there are few if any existing channels to educate them about the benefits of KickStart products. The majority of farmers are not fully literate and many have no telephone. Some may have radios but they are only able to listen when they have enough money for batteries. Cultural norms in some areas also prevent the use of word-of-mouth sales and “viral marketing,” as East Africans are traditionally modest.

Practical considerations also discourage sharing news about success. “If you're very, very poor, you actually don't even tell your family that you made a lot of money, because, if you do, your extended family will come and beg from you. You certainly don't tell your neighbors. They will be jealous of you, and they will also beg from you. And so there's almost no word-of-mouth about good news of making money in Africa,” explained Fisher.⁴

THE SOLUTION: IMPLEMENTING UNIFIED BRANDING AND TARGETED MARKETING

To overcome these hurdles, KickStart dedicated the majority of its resources to building trust and communicating with rural farmers about the value of its products. Fisher called it “the hardest part of our work.” In fact, he confirmed, “The biggest part of our annual budget goes to marketing and sales.”⁵

Elaborating on the company’s strategy for reaching its target audience, Fisher said, “We need to have a strong and consistent physical presence in market centers and support that with as much mass media as we can afford. Our customers need to have confidence in our pumps and confidence in KickStart as an organization.”⁶ KickStart worked hard to reinforce the “MoneyMaker” brand, which was intended to clearly signal the cash generating potential of the pumps. It used all available media including newspapers, billboards, and radio to attract potential buyers.

On the ground, KickStart employed a commissioned sales force of more than 200 sales representatives stationed in major towns and trading centers. Sales representatives held pumping demonstrations and competitions in front of town squares, stores, and trucks to showcase the effectiveness of MoneyMaker pumps. They were willing to offer personal demos at farms. They also targeted wealthier individuals living in the city who visited relatives in rural areas periodically and could share product information with them. “The message is always the same—the buyers can make a lot of money and escape poverty if they buy our equipment and use it to start a new business,”⁷ said Fisher.



Visible signs of KickStart’s “Farming Is My Business” campaign at a retail outlet

Image provided by KickStart International

This strategy worked well for KickStart for a while, but eventually the company’s momentum began to stall. As a marketing consultant associated with the company described, “Pump sales started to slow down and drop. No global brand or standards were in place for the 600 dealers selling pumps. Each country had a different brand, advertising, and product display. Photos were outdated and unprofessional and didn’t show how the product worked. Marketing dollars were being spent that were not resulting in sales or demand. A new pump wasn’t selling. Donor communications were outdated and had different messages.”⁸ Fisher and Moon recognized that MoneyMaker pumps needed professional marketing leadership to boost understanding (and sales) among farmers.

As with the design of the pumps, the marketing campaign demanded detailed planning. Cindy Kerr, founder of ckarma Marketing, helped build the new approach. “It took a year of working day and night assessing, researching, planning, testing, traveling, fighting parasites, visiting shops, and learning farming. My mud-caked boots revealed insights into the sales challenges and understanding of small-scale farmers across Kenya,

Tanzania, Mali, and Burkina Faso.... I had to translate in four languages, use few words, cross different cultures, avoid tribal issues, and of course, be cost effective,”⁹ she said.

For many poor Africans, farming is not an ‘aspirational’ activity. People dream of being a successful business person but see farming as a dirty, backbreaking chore.

The new campaign, which launched in 2008, was intended to communicate the core message: “Farming Is My Business.” More than anything else, KickStart recognized that it needed to link small-scale agriculture with success. “For many poor Africans, farming is not an ‘aspirational’ activity.

People dream of being a successful business person but see farming as a dirty, backbreaking chore,”¹⁰ the company stated on its website. Thus, all messaging was directed at promoting farming as a dignified and exciting business, rather than a lowly occupation, that could be made significantly more profitable through the use of MoneyMaker pumps.

To support this overarching theme, the marketing team developed a new MoneyMaker logo with the tagline “Family. Life. Success.”¹¹ It also dedicated significant resources towards improving photography and creating new point-of-sale displays, brochures, signs, billboards, and other forms of media. These materials showcased successful farmers alongside their bountiful crops, with testimonials about the value of MoneyMaker pumps. Meanwhile, KickStart intensified the training of sales agents and adjusted sales strategies to include more storefront and on-farm demonstrations.¹² All of these aspects of the campaign worked together to show “how a MoneyMaker pump is all one needs to be a successful businessman,” noted Kerr.¹³

By early 2009, the “Farming Is My Business” campaign had yielded an 800 percent increase in sales.¹⁴ It was also recognized with an International Communicator Award. As of 2012, the campaign remained the foundation of KickStart’s marketing strategy. ♦

NOTES

- 1 “Dying for Change: Poor People’s Experience of Health and Ill-Health,” World Bank, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPAH/Resources/Publications/Dying-for-Change/dyifull2.pdf> (March 21, 2012).
- 2 “World Bank Updates Poverty Estimates for the Developing World,” Research at the World Bank, August 28, 2008, <http://web.worldbank.org/wbsite/external/extdec/extresearch/0,,contentMDK:21882162~pagePK:64165401~piPK:64165026~theSitePK:469382,00.html> (March 21, 2012).
- 3 “Britt Bravo, “Tools to End Poverty: An Interview with Martin Fisher of KickStart,” August 20, 2008, <http://www.blogger.com/tools-end-poverty-interview-martin-fisher-kickstart> (April 3, 2012).
- 4 “Fighting Poverty in Kenya by Selling Water Pumps to Poor Farmers,” An Interview with Martin Fisher by Jim Lehrer, PBS Newshour, July 13, 2010, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/social_issues/july-dec10/kickstart_07-13.html (April 4, 2012).

- 5 "The Old Ways of Ending Poverty Are Not Working," OneWorld.net, January 27, 2009, <http://us.oneworld.org/perspectives/peopleof2008/359738-online-dialogue-with-martin-fisher> (April 3, 2012).
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Martin Fisher, "Income Is Development: KickStart's Pumps Help Kenyan Farmers Transition to a Cash Economy," *Innovations*, Winter 2006, <http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/itgg.2006.1.1.9> (April 3, 2012).
- 8 Cindy Kerr, "Marketing to End Poverty," ICOSA, <http://www.theicosamagazine.com/marketing-to-end-poverty> (April 12, 2012).
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 "Farming Is My Business," ckarma Newsletter, January 2008, <http://www.ckarma.com/newsletterJan08.html> (April 12, 2012).
- 12 Kerr, op. cit.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 "Innovative Ideas for Ending Poverty," Gather.com, January 28, 2009, <http://www.gather.com/viewArticle.action?articleId=281474977577895> (April 12, 2012).