

Applying Social Marketing to Koala Conservation: The “Leave It” Pilot Program

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Chapter Overview

Koala populations are declining, and there are needs to reverse this trend. Using social marketing which aims to change behavior for social or environmental benefit, this case study demonstrates how social marketing was applied to achieve environmental change. A pilot program name “Leave It” was designed and developed with dog owners and experts including koala conservation officers and dog trainers in order to reduce dog and koala interactions. A four-week dog obedience training program was implemented, and a mixed method outcome evaluation was undertaken. Results indicate that five of seven dog behaviors measures were changed from baseline to follow-up, namely sit, stay, come back when called every time, wildlife aversion, and stay quiet on command. Findings of this pilot program provide evidence of the effectiveness and potential of social marketing to change behaviors in an environmental context.

Campaign Background

Koala (*Phascolarctos cinereus*) population levels are steadily decreasing in South East Queensland (Redlands Koala Conservation Strategy 2016). Primary koala threats include urban development, fragmentation of habitat, traffic, and predation

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by dogs (McAlpine et al., 2015; Law et al., 2017). In urban and semi-rural areas, mortality from domestic dogs poses a significant and often underestimated threat to koalas and other urban wildlife. According to the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (2008), dog attacks and predation are the third most common cause of death in koalas after habitat loss and vehicle strikes. It is estimated that more than 600 koalas have been attacked by dogs over the past 15 years in the local council area that forms the basis of this study. Although various control measures that lower the likelihood of dog and koala interactions have been identified, including reducing pets' roaming periods, setting up buffer zones, provision of wildlife corridors, and placing a pole against a fence for koala egress, calls have been made for practitioners to be open to different ways of thinking to effectively engage the target community with the use of a social science approach to improve conservation policy, practice, and outcomes.

A social marketing pilot program named *Leave It* (see www.leaveit.com.au) was co-created with dog owners. The program drew on expert advice (e.g., koala conservation, environmental scientists, and dog training professionals) to deliver a program that engaged dog owners to participate in a training program, which had wildlife aversion training embedded as one of many skills. The overall aim of *Leave It* was to help residents change their dogs' behaviors through four training sessions. *Leave It* focused on the delivery of dog obedience training and was priced at \$AUD150 for four sessions. These sessions were designed to decrease dog and koala interactions in the local council region over time. *Leave It* focused on helping dog owners to establish effective basic control of their dogs and training emphasized a series of behaviors including sit, stay, and koala aversion (*Leave It*). A community event *DogFest* was launched to raise awareness for the *Leave It* training program. The campaign was designed based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991). According to the TPB, three factors contribute to behavioral intentions and in turn behavior, namely subjective norms, attitudes toward the behavior, and perceived behavioral control. Data analysis indicated that the TPB model could explain the intentions of people to confine and restrain their dogs with 66% of variance explained, a level that is higher than most of other studies that have utilized the TPB to explain intention. Moreover, the provision of dog training for dog owners was designed to improve perceived behavioral control, which in turn was expected to change intentions to confine and restrain their dogs in addition to increasing the dog owners' control over their dog.

One canine expert was invited to partner with *Leave It* delivering positive dog management and wildlife aversion skills for the dog trainers leading the *Leave It* program. The canine expert demonstrated a range of positive dog training principles in addition to on koala aversion. The canine expert delivered one session to six dog trainers who indicated interest in partnering with *Leave It*. *Leave It* trainers were free to include koala aversion in their training programs where appropriate. The one-day canine expert led session covered a range of operant conditioning strategies, training plans, and canine problem-solving.

SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)

Strengths

Leave It was positively received by the majority of participants, and willingness to re-engage with the program was very strong.

DogFest was well attended (more than 1500 dog owners), positively received, and community intention to attend in future years was very high.

Australians are more inclined to accept pets as a potential conservation hazard than their overseas counterparts (Hall et al., 2016).

Weaknesses

There were confusions between Leave It and DogFest brands.

Program uptake for available Leave It group sessions was 31.25%. Uptake levels were impacted by limited promotion time and program availability (only one four-week period was available, which coincided with peak holiday season).

Pilot was reliant on volunteers leading to poor advice in some instances.

There was limited time to administer the pilot (10 weeks from approval to final Leave It session delivery, 3 weeks to promote Leave It).

Opportunities

Dog ability levels are low (sit, stay, Leave It, etc.).

Community is willing to partner in koala protection programs that are fun and dog-focused (not stigmatizing and victim blaming).

There is little competition in the region.

City council is willing to provide additional funding to support the program.

Threats

There existed a lack of interest in dog training from some members of the community.

Low dog abilities are sit, stay, come when called, and wildlife aversion.

Target Audience

The program targeted residents of the Redland area who are dog owners. The primary target audience of the program has a dog as a family pet. The audience believes that some dogs can pose a risk to koalas, but not small dogs. They also believe that dogs feel safe when they have their own space, such as a crate.

The secondary target audience consists of people that have a dog for security reasons. They believe a dog should roam freely in their backyard at night because they have a fenced area, they can go to the toilet, and they bark otherwise. Dogs of the target audience have received some type of training, such as puppy pre-school. However, despite having received training, dogs do not respond to basic obedience behaviors such as come back every time they are called, not chase things, and stay quiet on command.

Target Audience Barriers and Benefits

Research has shown that in order for people to control their dogs, they have to train their dogs. A series of questions about perceived benefits and barriers were asked in a community survey. On average, the target audience had a perception that by confining their dogs, they would be helping protect wildlife (benefit). On the other hand, the findings from the survey showed the target audience thought it would be cruel to confine their dogs, and that a barking nuisance could be created by engaging in this behavior (barrier).

Campaign Objectives

Following community based formative research identifying that 2 out of 3 people report that their dog does not respond to basic verbal commands, Leave It was designed as a program that focuses on basic dog obedience training; given that training basics must be in place before koala aversion can be taught. The overall aim of Leave It was to help local residents to improve their dogs' behavior and over time decrease dog and koala interactions. Leave It focused on helping dog owners to establish effective basic control of their dogs.

Specific objectives for the Leave It campaign were set according to the RE-AIM framework (Table 25.1).

Table 25.1 Leave It pilot program objectives

RE-AIM dimension	Objective
Reach	30% session uptake 1000 unique visits on Leave It website 10 registrations in the Leave It program 1000 DogFest attendees
Effectiveness	All dog obedience abilities will increase 10% through the training program Dog owners' perceived barriers to den the dog during the night will be significantly lower after the program
Adoption	High stakeholder satisfaction rating (6.5 out of 7) High stakeholder perceived benefit in pilot program participation (6.5 out of 7)
Implementation	Positive experience with DogFest (6.5 out of 7) High Leave It registrant satisfaction (6.5 out of 7)
Maintenance	High intention to participate in Leave It again in the future (10% increase)

Positioning

In order to define a clear and potentially effective Leave It pilot program, six co-design workshops were held with residents of the local council area who gave their informed consent to participate and who owned one or more dogs. Co-design sessions started by eliciting dog owner opinions of ten campaigns that had previously been implemented to decrease koala and dog interactions. A group discussion followed to gain insights into program features, assisting the project team to understand what dog owners valued.

Participants were then split into groups of three or four. They were asked to design an effective campaign that they felt would engage community members in the local council area to decrease dog and koala interactions. Co-design workshops were audio recorded, and field notes were made. Workshop discussions were transcribed, and trends and patterns within and across groups were analyzed.

Taken together, co-design sessions highlighted that a positive, dog-focused program that delivered training, giving dog owners the skills needed to avoid wildlife, and was promoted through community events, could be offered within the project timeframe. The program actively avoided linking koala fatality to dogs and dog owners, so the target audience would engage with the program. Participants also indicated training should be convenient in terms of location and timing in order to increase commitment.

Competition

The competitors of the Leave It training program consisted of other training companies in the Redlands area. Companies such as Positive Dog Training competed directly with Leave It especially in location. Their competitive advantage was

the fact they were established companies, while Leave It was a new program. However, Leave It was a city council endorsed program and was positioned as a program with a substantially lower cost, ensuring that more people in the community could afford the program. Another competition for the Leave It program to be considered is the opposite behavior: not engaging in a training program. There are benefits such as not spending time and money with registration. These are important factors to consider before creating the marketing strategy.

Marketing Strategy (Product, Price, Place, Promotion)

Product Strategies

Leave It was designed as a program that focuses on basic dog obedience training; given that training basics must be in place before koala aversion can be taught. The overall aim of Leave It was to help residents to improve their dogs' behavior and over time decrease dog and koala interactions in Redland City Council. In social marketing, product in its most direct form should be considered as a tangible product, or even a service that can be offered for purchase. Drawn upon the TPB framework, the core product for Leave It consisted of a four-week dog training program, which had koala aversion embedded as one of the skills in the program. Leave It focused on helping dog owners to establish effective basic control of their dogs, which was designed based on the perceived behavioral control construct in the TPB model. Steve Austin, Certified Professional Dog Trainer-Knowledge Assessed (CPTD-KA), partnered with Leave It delivering positive dog training and wildlife aversion training to Leave It dog trainers on June 2, 2017. Steve Austin demonstrated a range of positive dog training principles and provided training focused on koala aversion. Training was delivered to a total of 6 dog trainers who indicated interest in partnering with Leave It. Training offered by Steve Austin transferred skills allowing trainers to include koala aversion in training programs where appropriate. Leave It was designed as a multi-strategy, pilot social enterprise program and featured recruitment and awareness building activities which commenced at RSPCA Million Paws Walk, Indigi Day Out, and concluded with DogFest.

Pricing Strategies

Research was undertaken to understand the costs of a training package for dog owners in the Redland area. Leave It offered a package of four obedience training sessions charging a lower price than the average market price. The training package was advertised at AUD \$150 per dog. In order to ensure an attractive offer, a discounted rate of AUD \$120 was also promoted, as well as bundle discounts for dog owners that enrolled two dogs or more into the program.

In social marketing, price is the cost the consumer incurs, which in its most direct form is monetary cost. For Leave It, the fully listed price was AUD\$150 for four training sessions. Moreover, the training sessions required the dog owner's time, energy, and consistent commitment, which also represented costs for participants in this social marketing pilot program. The program attempted to reduce costs by offering training sessions in convenient locations, limiting the length of each session to no longer than 90 min, and offering various training options to best suit dog owners' demands.

Place Strategies

The training sessions offered were within the Redland City Council area in Thornlands, Cleveland, and surrounding areas (Manly and Springwood). The trainers who provided Leave It training were experienced and qualified individuals who had completed training with Steve Austin on June 2, 2017. Ten dog training businesses in the Redland area were invited to partner with Leave It. Trainers were shortlisted from an initial list by interviews with experts. In addition, a Web search for local trainers in the Redland region was conducted. All potential trainers were contacted and screened for suitability according to Steve Austin's criteria. Given the short notice and training requirements for trainers to supply the location, the list was narrowed down to locals who had experience, were available within the project timeframe, could supply the venue, and were qualified according to Steve Austin's criteria. The dog training businesses that have delivered Leave It were Positive Response Dog Training (<https://www.positiveresponse.net.au/>) and ABC Dog Training (<http://abcdogtraining.net.au/>).

Promotion Strategies

To promote Leave It, a targeted integrated promotional strategy was implemented to reach dog owners residing in the Redland City Council area. The main promotional methods included: Web site (www.leaveit.com.au), Leave It flyers, email marketing, social media marketing (Facebook and Instagram), a promotional event (DogFest), and event exhibitions leading up to pilot program launch (RSPCA Million Paws Walk, Indigi Day Out). The Leave It promotion commenced on May 21, 2017, giving a total of 3 weeks to promote the pilot program. All the promotion materials were aiming to change residents' attitudes toward dog training, which was designed based on the TPB framework.

DogFest

DogFest was a free event held at Capalaba Regional Park two weeks before Leave It commenced. DogFest delivered a "mini-festival" feel, aiming to increase audience engagement, extend awareness, and to promote partnerships with retailers. Food trucks including a coffee van, a pizza stall, and a sausage sizzle were offered.

A wide variety of different retailers were present selling dog treats (puppicinos, dog beer, and dog tea), dog food, pet photography, dog washing, dog grooming, dog clothing, and more. Importantly, dog trainers and obedience clubs were present to deliver talks and obedience displays for interested dog owners. DogFest attracted over 1500 attendees.

Web site

All promotion strategies featured the Web site link, where detailed Leave It program information was made available. The Web site contained information on Leave It session types, the Leave It trainers, frequently asked questions, and program pricing. Further, the Web site provided information communicating the DogFest program of events.

Flyers and Emails

Both DogFest and Leave It were promoted through flyers and emails. Over 2500 flyers were distributed (Fig. 25.1). Over 450 emails were sent out to Redland residents.



Fig. 25.1 Flyer promoting DogFest

Social Media

A Facebook event was created for DogFest and promoted to Redland residents by Redland City Council. Over the course of the Facebook campaign, a total of 37,000 people were reached with 7200 people viewing the DogFest event page and 1000 people responding to the event, indicating interest in attending, sharing a post, and more. In addition, an Instagram account for Leave It was created in order to run a social media competition with the hashtag #leaveit2017. The aim of this strategy was to increase engagement with the brand and to raise awareness of both DogFest and Leave It.

Program Evaluation

The DogFest event attracted over 1500 attendees indicating that Leave It reached 5–10% of the 21,000 dog owners in the local council area. Specifically, the visitor survey sought to understand attendees' attitudes toward the event and their intention to attend the DogFest in the following year. Attitudes were measured with three seven-point bipolar scales, where respondents had to choose from opposite adjectives such as “Unpleasant–Pleasant” and intentions were measured using one unipolar scale from 1 to 7. The visitor survey was emailed to 319 people, with a response rate of 19.1%. Results show that attitudes toward DogFest were generally high. In addition, over 90% of all respondents reported a positive experience with DogFest, less than 5% a neutral reaction, and there was no negative experience reported. Next, visitors were asked how likely it would be for them to attend DogFest next year, if it was held again. 92.1% of respondents replied it was likely they would attend. When asked their opinions on the DogFest, the event visitors provided positive responses:

Dogs got to socialize, and I saw vendors, vets, and groomers I may not have seen or been to before. Def needs to be back again next year. (Visitor's survey respondent)

the training tip talks and the stalls and free gifts. (Visitor's survey respondent)

To evaluate the overall satisfaction with Leave It and to understand areas for improvement, four questions were included in the Leave It follow-up survey. Over 85% of respondents reported a positive experience and satisfaction with the training program. Participants were also asked whether they would participate in Leave It training program again next year if the program was run again and two-thirds indicated future participation in the program.

Field notes on 15 dogs that participated in the training sessions were collected over the four-week period. Trainers recorded the progress of each dog over the course of the training period and commented on the performance of both dogs and their owners during the training sessions. Successful koala aversion behaviors were noted for most of the dogs at the end of the Leave It program.

Discussion and Lessons Learned

This case study demonstrated that a program co-created with dog-owning residents that was fun, dog-focused, and helped owners to understand what they needed to do could effectively engage people. The pilot program, which was designed by dog owners and planned and implemented in partnership with stakeholders, was well received and positively evaluated. The process enabled effective engagement with dog owners and generated positive feedback and promising behavioral change outcomes. Additionally, having received instructions in koala aversion training, local dog trainers are now aware of conservation challenges and they are able and encouraged to integrate koala aversion elements into their regular training offerings, creating change that can last beyond the pilot program.

The program was valued by members of the local council community given they were willing to pay AUD \$150 for four training sessions, which suggests that a program can be delivered in the longer term, and revenue can be generated to sustain programs. The results of this study provide pilot evidence that community members can voluntarily be engaged in activities that contribute to koala conservation and they are willing to pay for specialized dog obedience and koala aversion behavioral training. Upscaling this pilot program where two-thirds of participants are willing to continue to participate in the program can deliver a sustained revenue stream to support ongoing program administration that is not reliant on public funding. Results demonstrated that social marketing can effectively engage dog owners and can attract dog owners to enroll in a four-week paid training program that improves dogs' koala aversion skills. Participants who attended the project expressed high intention to rejoin DogFest and the Leave It project, which indicates potential for program sustainability and alterations of community norms in relation to dog training in the long term. This program is currently being developed into city-wide implementation with the support of the local city council. By scaling the program up to a city-wide implementation, an added benefit is raising awareness of the importance of dog training for wildlife conservation, and word of mouth can play an important role.

Leave It was designed and implemented in a short timeframe of 10 weeks, limiting the core dog training program offering to one four-week program that coincided with a peak holiday period. The program was limited to group dog training sessions, which limits the types of dogs that can participate (e.g., dogs must be socialized). A further limitation was the program which was only promoted via free channels such as social media. No paid broadcast media was used which limited broader community awareness. Delivery of sequenced alternatives is needed for enrolments in the advanced option given very few dogs are trained to this level.

Limited lead time was available in this pilot project to promote the community event and to secure dog trainers and training alternatives to advertise. Longer project time frames are needed to improve outcomes attained. Based on experience gained in this project, a 12-week time frame is needed to generate awareness for the program, word of mouth, and to promote the event within the community targeted.

Lead time ahead of promotion is needed to ensure a sufficient cross section of dog trainers, and training options can be secured. Further, broadcast media such as local radio is recommended to generate wider awareness for Leave It. Together, these changes would assist to increase the number of training registrations due to more available options and time to promote the program.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the core product Leave It provides to the target audience?
2. What “exchange” does Leave It offer to encourage dog owners to take their service? How could this be improved?
3. Do you have suggestions for improving their promotional efforts?
4. What can be offered to dog owners that do not feel confident to bring their dogs to training sessions due to dog behavioral issues?
5. How can Leave It improve the evaluation with a better response rate?

Practical Activity

Carins and Rundle-Thiele’s (2014) paper identified that behavior change is more likely when more of social marketing’s benchmarks are used. Find a benchmark framework and using information presented in the case identify the benchmarks that are present.

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