



Using Social Marketing to Increase Bicycle Ridership to Major Events in Vancouver, Canada

20

Better Environmentally Sound Transportation's Bicycle Valet

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Chapter Overview

This case examines the social marketing efforts of Better Environmentally Sound Transportation (BEST) in Vancouver, Canada. BEST encourages bicyclists to ride to major local entertainment events by providing convenient and secure bicycle parking at these events. The goal of BEST is to increase bicycle ridership to major events in order to reduce traffic congestion at events, with the secondary goal of encouraging bicycling more generally. BEST works with event planners to offer secure, professionally attended bicycle corrals at major events where cyclists can store their bikes and their bicycling gear. This can increase bicyclists' self-efficacy toward cycling to major events. By offering a useful service, making the service free for cyclists, conveniently locating bike corrals, and promoting their service in locations that cyclists frequent such as bike shops, BEST has developed a successful social marketing campaign to reduce event traffic congestion and encourage bicycling.

This case is based on an interview with a Better Environmentally Sustainable Transportation manager, follow-up information provided by email from a BEST representative, and the organization's project reports presented to their donors.

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Introduction

This case study examines how Better Environmentally Sound Transportation (BEST) made sustainable transportation easier for local residents of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Their efforts facilitated the use of sustainable transportation to attend major events in the area, thus reducing traffic congestion at events and encouraging cycling behavior. By reducing concerns of safety for their bicycles, the BEST program enhances self-efficacy for cyclists wishing to ride to events.

Bandura's (1989) Social cognitive theory describes how people's self-efficacy (i.e., one's belief in their ability to succeed at a task) influences their level of motivation. The more a person believes in their own capabilities, the more likely they are to complete a desired behavior (e.g., riding a bike to work). Naturally, those with low self-efficacy often abandon the behavior when they are faced with difficulties, opting for easier alternatives (e.g., driving a car). In these instances of self-doubt, social marketers have two options to encourage perseverance: (1) they can reassure their target audience of their own competency and the positive feelings associated with completing the action (which may or may not be successful given that ordinary social realities are full of setbacks, failures, and inequities; Bandura, 1989), or (2) they can simply make the desired behavior easier to complete.

Campaign Background and Environment

BEST has been a leader in promoting sustainable transportation in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia (BC) since 1991. With support from the City of Vancouver and other generous donors, BEST has implemented social marketing programs to make sustainable transportation easier. BEST also aids land use planning in order to support pedestrian, cycling, and transit-oriented neighborhoods.

With over 1.2 million licensed vehicles, the Lower Mainland of BC faces several challenges from automobile transportation. In the early 2000s, the Vancouver Sun published a poll showing that 47% of Lower Mainland citizens felt that transportation was the most important issue facing local residents, well ahead of crime (17%), health care (12%), and education (12%). The transportation problem in the region was fueled by vehicle levies and transportation taxes, a long transit strike, cuts to transit services, and the political difficulties facing TransLink (the region's transportation authority). To meet growing demand from predicted increases in economic activity, population growth, and environmental needs, innovative mechanisms were needed to increase the motivation of local residents to use sustainable transportation.

Bicycling is typically the fastest mode of transportation for trips less than 5 km. Since around 50% of all trips made in Metro Vancouver are less than 5 km, cycling is a time-competitive alternative to the automobile for about half of all trips made in the region (TransLink, 2011). Secure bicycle parking plays an important role in increasing self-efficacy beliefs toward cycling. More people will ride their bicycle knowing they have a safe place to park. The bicycle valet (BV) is intended to

provide secure bicycle parking at a variety of events in and around Metro Vancouver. Bikes are neatly organized in a custom-made, fenced corral, instead of having bikes locked up at every available pole.

The Bicycle Valet in Vancouver

BEST has run an annual Bike Month campaign promoting sustainable transportation in Metro Vancouver since 1996. After running Bike Month for ten years, BEST staff felt enough ground had been covered and moved from building awareness to making sustainable choices easier. In 2006, with the continued support of the City of Vancouver and TransLink, BEST launched a pilot program to increase motivation for cycling to local events and festivals. Because of the limited and unsecure bicycle parking at festivals at the time, the strategy was to provide a free “coat check” style parking service at community events for individuals using active transportation. BEST staff and volunteers would tag incoming bicycles and provide the user with a claim stub. Users would then bring back the claim stub when they want their bicycles returned. Users were also permitted to leave their helmets, panniers, trailers, and other accessories securely attached to their bicycle in the valet.

SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)

Strengths

BEST has a great reputation and brand recognition in the cycling community.
BEST has a strong volunteer base that could be trained to run the valet.
BEST has the ability to customize the service to meet the needs of specific events.

Weaknesses

The start-up costs to build a bicycle valet are expensive and require grant support.
The operational costs to run the valet at an event would require financial support from event organizers or sponsors.
BEST staff had no experience providing a well-executed valet service.

Opportunities

Users would feel like they're part of something exciting.
There was a high demand for a well-executed valet service from event patrons and organizers.

More people will ride their bikes knowing they have a safe place to park, and more people will attend an event that is easy to get to.

There are a substantial number of green consumers in the region.

A bicycle valet service at high traffic community events would create a unique marketing opportunity for businesses and event organizers to promote “green goodwill.” Since the valet would be the first point of contact at an event, the valet is a highly visual indicator that an event supports a local, sustainable initiative. BEST could enter into strategic partnerships with potential sponsors. Furthermore, BEST would be able to negotiate premium locations with event organizers who value “green goodwill.”

Consumers expect and value socially responsible efforts on the part of companies (Cone, 2015). Sponsors can use their support of BEST to demonstrate their commitment to social responsibility, which could increase companies’ willingness to sponsor.

Threats

Other non-profit organizations may enter the bicycle valet market.

Any bicycle theft from the valet could reduce the users’ confidence in the service.

The accessibility of the valet depends on the location and space provided by the event organizers.

The success of the valet at each event would depend on the event organizer’s commitment to promoting the service in their promotional material and on their website.

If users perceive that the service takes too long to use (slow check-in and check-out process), they may be unwilling to check their bikes at future events.

Past and Similar Efforts

BEST’s bicycle valet service was the first of its kind in the Lower Mainland of BC. Their research on similar efforts in other areas was the foundation of their operations. They learned how to provide good service in terms of speed and consistency from event organizers in San Francisco, California. The city of San Francisco has a bylaw that requires events of a certain size to offer a bicycle valet, so their event organizers had a lot of experience providing efficient service. However, BEST needed their equipment to be more customizable than that in San Francisco in order to accommodate events that varied in terms of size and space. Their equipment also had to be light and compact in order to reduce the burden on staff and volunteers moving and setting up the equipment in different locations. After carefully researching portable valet services, BEST concluded that they needed to fabricate custom-built racks and fencing. Their custom equipment allows them to fit enough racks and equipment to park 1000 bikes into one cargo van.

Target Audience

BEST chose two target audiences for their efforts. The program's primary target audience is the event organizers in the region. This program focused on event organizers for two reasons. First, event organizers are the decision makers that choose how their event will be accessible to their patrons. In order to run a bicycle valet, event organizers have to book the service and allocate enough space for equipment and racks. Second, event patrons use the event's communications materials for information about traveling to the event. Event patrons were not targeted by demographics, but rather by lifestyle. Individuals who ride bicycles were the target. This group tends to lead an active lifestyle. Event organizers are the messengers that deliver the valet's communication strategy to potential users.

Each event organizer, such as small community organizers, corporate clients, or event management companies, has different goals and challenges for each event that need to be targeted with a personalized marketing strategy. However, event organizers do have some mutual values that BEST needs to address for every event. These values are that:

- BEST operates effectively in the background.
- Clientele are treated well and are happy.
- The valet facilitates cross-promotion.
- The valet operates professionally.
- The valet is a practical solution for traffic management.

The program's secondary target audience consisted of men and women in the region committed to living a healthy lifestyle. In view of the high demand for a well-executed valet service, many event patrons want to use the service, but still need information about its availability and accessibility. For that reason, it was essential to build their knowledge of the valet prior to each event.

Target markets can be understood according to their proximity to and role in the ultimately desired behavior change. Lee and Kotler (2016, pp. 142–143) discuss downstream, midstream, and upstream targets. A downstream target is the group sought to actually adopt the behavior. In this case, these are the event patrons who valet their bicycles. Midstream targets are those who have close and influential relationships with the downstream group. In this case, no midstream groups were targeted, but a hypothetical example might be if employers in the local area had been targeted to encourage their employees to bike to the event and valet park with BEST, rather than driving cars, to reduce traffic congestion. Upstream targets facilitate adoption of the core desired behavior by creating infrastructure and environments that promote the desired behavior change. In that sense, event organizers can be seen as an upstream group targeted by BEST. In this case, it is actually the event organizers who compose the focal target group, because without adoption of the services of BEST, the infrastructure which makes it convenient to bicycle to events would be lacking.

Target Audience Barriers and Benefits

Through a market analysis, BEST identified that the main barrier preventing event organizers from offering the valet service was cost. Event organizers were uneasy about the idea of paying for a service that competed with one of their sources of revenue—motor transportation was often a source of revenue because they could employ a pay and park service. However, organizers also recognized that some patrons may avoid events if parking is perceived to be difficult. The valet service would enhance the attractiveness of bicycling as an alternative transportation mode for patrons, thus increasing potential event attendance.

Motor transportation was seen as a competing behavior for event patrons because of its convenience. However, parking at events around the city is often limited and costly. Patrons would be more likely to ride their bikes if they knew that parking their car was going to be a hassle. The valet service would provide a safe place to keep their bicycle, making bicycling an attractive option.

Positioning

The bicycle valet is positioned as an environmentally friendly alternative to driving and parking, for events in the Vancouver area. The service is positioned as offering-enhanced transportation convenience for those attending events, which appeals to both event patrons and event organizers. Since concern over traffic can discourage people from attending events, the valet service is positioned as a way for organizers to increase event attendance while being environmentally responsible.

Campaign Objectives and Goals

Behavior Objectives

For the event organizers, the program's overarching behavior goal was to provide not only the valet service at all main events held during the bike season, but also place the service in a visible location near the event's entrance. Event organizers had to understand that if they want the valet to run successfully, then they have to make it a priority in terms of location.

For event patrons, the behavior goal was first of course to bicycle to the event (rather than taking another mode of transportation) and to use their bicycle valet service. Beyond that, the goal for patrons was to encourage their cooperation to facilitate quick service by valet workers. Specifically, patrons must remove their helmet and other biking accessories before they get to the front of the line in order to minimize processing time.

Knowledge Objectives

BEST sought to increase knowledge of the following key facts among event organizers:

The valet invites repeat exposure: 44% of patrons said they used the valet more than once; 37% use the valet service regularly.

The valet adds value to the event: 99% of patrons said it contributes to a positive experience at the event.

The valet connects event organizers directly to their patrons: 66% of patrons said they used the resources provided at the valet's booth.

For event patrons, BEST wanted them to know that the valet was free and safe. They also wanted event patrons to know that they can leave all their gear, including bike accessories and trailers, with their bike in the valet.

Belief Objectives

The belief objective for event organizers was to promote the idea that the value of providing the valet at their event would be worth the cost. Specifically, organizers should believe that the valet is in high demand from event patrons, reduces traffic congestion at the event, and adds value to the overall event experience and brand. An additional belief objective for event organizers was to promote the idea that the bicycle valet was hassle free. BEST sets up the valet, provides the service, and then takes down the valet without leaving a mess. They are also flexible on how sponsors are seen and interacted with.

Campaign Strategies

Product Strategies

Since 2006, the bicycle valet has been providing professional, secure, coat-check style bicycle parking at a variety of events in and around Metro Vancouver. With over 80,000 bicycles (and counting) returned safely to happy owners, BEST is confident that their product strategy meets the needs of both event organizers and patrons. Given the varying attendance rates for each event, BEST made sure that valet staff could easily change the size of the valet corral to fit the needs of the event. A key product strategy was to make the valet highly efficient to set up and take down. This ensures that the valet is extremely mobile, with set up taking less than an hour. The valet is so efficient that they are able to compact a valet with a 1000 bike capacity into one van. The valet's efficiency also ensures that no

permanent damage results from their service—parking lots look the same after the valet leaves an event with no permanent damage.

For patrons, the product is safe and convenient bike storage during major events. This allows them to bicycle to events, thus avoiding traffic and the hassle and cost of parking.

Pricing Strategies

In order to offer the valet service free of charge to event patrons, event organizers are responsible for paying for the valet. BEST does not charge a fixed price for each event. Pricing depends on service factors, such as the bike capacity required, the length of the event, expected turnover rates, and staffing requirements. However, event organizers can mitigate the cost of the valet by partnering with third-party sponsors and selling ad space.

In addition to the actual charge for BEST services that event organizers must pay, there is the potential of losing revenue that would have otherwise flowed into their parking services. BEST encourages event organizers to recognize that this loss is offset by additional patrons drawn to the event through the promise of the convenience offered by bicycling rather than facing the hassle of driving and parking.

For patrons, the service should be a net benefit, by eliminating the hassle of driving and parking at a crowded event. However, if they are not confident in the service, they may be faced with concern for the safety of their bike and riding equipment. Additionally, they may be anxious about the potential inconvenience and wait time for checking in and checking out.

Place Strategies

A key place strategy was to establish a regular, high-exposure location for the bicycle valet at each event venue. It was therefore essential that BEST managers developed relationships with venue managers and event organizers. One way they managed these relationships was to provide preferred supplier agreements with key venues. Such agreements ensured that BEST has a regular and accessible location at many venues, thereby significantly increasing the valet's exposure to all forms of traffic.

Promotion Strategies

Given that event patrons often use the event's website for transportation options, it was important that BEST got the event organizers on board in promoting the service. BEST developed a promotional information guide to help event organizers promote the valet prior to their event. The guide gives advice on how to promote

nearby bike routes and how to link the location to online maps so patrons can map their own routes. The guide further explains that patrons need to know where the bike racks will be located and how they can be accessed. It was also important for the organizers to negatively frame motor parking by notifying patrons that parking is limited and comes at a cost.

BEST maintains an online presence on social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, in order to promote their exact location, encourage event attendees to ride their bikes, and provide a forum for feedback. BEST provides updates on their website and in their newsletter with a short description of all events that are offering the valet service in the coming weeks. Online presence is also a factor in attracting event organizers, as it allows patrons to request the service to event organizers who might not be aware of the service or have decided not to offer it. Personal recommendations from bloggers have also attracted new patrons.

Message Design

At each event, clear signage is critical to promote the valet service and its benefits. BEST wanted patrons to know that valet service was “free and safe bicycle parking.” Therefore, they created banners promoting this message that could be easily attached to their fencing for maximum exposure (Fig. 20.1). The banners also doubled as advertising for third-party sponsors. A clear and concise logo was created to brand the service in all their promotional material (Fig. 20.2).



Fig. 20.1 Bicycle valet at Sunset Beach. Courtesy of Better Environmentally Sound Transportation



Fig. 20.2 Bicycle valet logo

Other Important Strategies

Volunteer Engagement

Reliable volunteers are essential for smooth operations of The Bicycle Valet. In 2012, over 115 volunteers signed up for shifts at various events throughout the season. An increased reliance on volunteers is necessary, particularly as the bicycle valet became more popular at events and its operations became increasingly labor-intensive. In order to develop volunteer engagement and recognition, BEST focused on incentives such as volunteer parties, free entry to ticketed events, flexible scheduling, onsite training, discounts at local bike shops, and a complimentary T-shirt.

Strategic Third-Party Sponsors

In order to offset the costs of the valet, BEST sought out strategic partnerships with travel companies, such as TravelSmart, in the form of a cause-related marketing campaign. Companies, such as Lululemon, could financially sponsor the service at high-profile events like the UBC Grand Prix. Sponsors also increased the valet's marketing reach by ensuring that the service could be offered at events that could not afford it otherwise. To attract potential partners, BEST hired a branding professional to revise sponsorship documents, sales scripts, and language surrounding the service. Presenting sponsors were awarded a strong presence at the valet during the event. Promotion included the sponsor's banner on valet fencing, their logo on valet ticket stubs and tags—patrons often left their tags on their bicycles after the event—and their logo on flags ushering patrons through the valet line. Sponsors were also featured in monthly and special newsletters (which had over 7000 subscribers in 2013), on BEST's social networking pages, and on the valet's website. BEST was also flexible about taking on other promotional opportunities for sponsors on a case-by-case basis. For example, volunteers handed out TransLink transit maps as well as information cards promoting a sponsor's product or service.

Evaluation

Given the tremendous growth of cycling and the rampant theft of bicycles in Vancouver, the bicycle valet is in a great position to continually increase its popularity, while providing a valuable service for events and a highly visible, feel-good story for sponsors.

Performance and Growth Measure

BEST keeps track of the number of events attended and the number of riders using their valet service. Annual growth in these measurements is one way to evaluate their success. Using figures provided for 2013 and 2017, we are able to compare their performance over a five-year span. These figures show positive growth for the organization.

In 2013, the bicycle valet was present at 130 events from March to October, parking over 22,000 bikes. In 2017, the number of events was quite a bit lower, at 89, reflecting a decline of 32% in number of events. Despite attending fewer events, the overall number of bikes parked in 2017 increased by 33%, to 29,150.

Volunteer Engagement Measures

BEST kept track of active volunteers, and their number of hours logged each year. In 2013, there were 140 volunteers and staff, and volunteers logged in over 1000 hours. By 2017, BEST had 442 volunteers, who logged a total of 2267 hours. This reflects an increase in volunteer hours of about 127%.

Other Performance Highlights

The bicycle valet has parked a total of 182,310 bicycles as of April 2018, since their inception in 2006. BEST regularly receives inquiries for advice on starting and operating bicycle valets from other organizations in Canadian and international communities, some even as far away as Australia. In 2017, they received 849 Instagram “likes.”

Lessons Learned and Future Direction

With the growing success of the valet service, BEST is looking to expand its service into other regions by investing in a second set of valet equipment and transportation. Feedback from users and event organizers also suggests that BEST would benefit by expanding their range of products in order to serve people that would not

benefit from a full valet service. Some potential products include rental racks, pop-up valets, or perhaps in some conditions, a fee-for-service operation.

By providing a safe and free bicycle valet service, BEST increased self-efficacy beliefs associated with cycling to community events and motivated event patrons to keep their cars at home. Segmenting and targeting event organizers ensured that BEST provided the depth of communication necessary for debunking myths regarding the valet's cost/benefit ratio for event organizers, its demand by event patrons, and its ease of operations. Similarly, promotional material at each event, in the form of clear and visible banners that the valet was free and safe, encouraged event patrons to frequently use the valet and to request the service from event organizers that did not offer it. The bicycle valet's winning marketing and operations strategy has attracted international admiration, with organizations all over the world now approaching BEST for start-up tips and advice.

Discussion Questions

1. What can BEST do to further increase the number of patrons using the valet service at each event?
2. What are some other ways for BEST to benefit third-party sponsors?
3. Where might a similar valet service be successful or unsuccessful?
4. What types of events should BEST target?

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