

# strategy+business

## Marketers of Life

by Kate Roberts

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The same techniques that sold cigarettes are slowing the spread of AIDS.

by Kate Roberts

In an ad campaign for global retailer Aldo Shoes, actress Charlize Theron poses in a black tank top, with duct tape covering her mouth. The caption reads: “Speak No Evil.” Another ad shows Ziggy Marley with his hands covering his ears. The caption: “Hear No Evil.” Another has Wynonna Judd with her eyes closed and the caption: “See No Evil.” There are now more than 25 ads in the series, each with a different celebrity, and not one of them shows a pair of shoes. But it’s one of the most profitable advertising campaigns that Aldo has ever run.

The ad works because it’s a call to action: The celebrities wear “empowerment” tags that sell for \$5 at any Aldo store (and online at [www.youthaids-aldo.org](http://www.youthaids-aldo.org)). One hundred percent of the net proceeds benefit YouthAIDS, the global health education initiative that I created as part of the not-for-profit organization Population Services International (PSI). YouthAIDS/PSI uses the money from those tag sales for HIV prevention efforts in more than 60 countries. And while you are at

Aldo, you can pick up a new pair of wedges.

An observer might assume that the Aldo campaign is just another example of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Indeed, Aldo has supported AIDS causes since the mid-1980s — a time when, because of the stigma the disease carried, very few companies were interested in visibly combating its spread. But Aldo’s campaign is a different kind of promotion entirely. It’s an example of “cause-related marketing,” in which brand promotion and social engagement are aligned. Aldo’s ads advance their own marketing purposes while opening their customers’ eyes to the AIDS pandemic and raising money for health-related programs.

Cause-related marketing draws its power from the fact that the same marketing techniques that sell shoes or cigarettes can also influence human behavior in other ways. I should know. Before I started YouthAIDS, I was an advertising executive in Eastern Europe, using celebrities and youth culture to market cigarettes. Today, YouthAIDS/PSI applies the same marketing methods to overcome cultural resis-



tance and encourage people to lead healthy lives.

I made the shift in 1999, during a short visit to Africa, when for the first time I saw the truly devastating effect of AIDS. I had already managed a national AIDS prevention campaign in Romania, so I knew that the media could communicate disease prevention. But suddenly I realized the power of a global initiative. AIDS is in many ways a young person's disease. It is spread when people have unprotected sex, either because they do not know enough about the disease, or they are not able to say no, or they simply do not want to use a condom. To stop the spread of the disease, one must reach large numbers of young people and change their behavior, and I realized I could help do that. I changed from a merchant of death to a marketer of life. If corporate leaders everywhere had the same kind of revelation, tapping not into their cash or sense of obligation (as CSR often does), but rather into their unique skills and capabilities, then we could truly make a difference against this disease — and against many other problems as well.

### **The Golden Brand**

Professionally, I have specialized in what agencies call “below-the-line” integrated marketing: the alternatives to mass-market advertising, such as promotions and events that create buzz and intrigue, particularly among young people. My first big job, in the early 1990s, was at a Russian publishing house, where I was assigned to help launch the Russian version of *Cosmopolitan* magazine. We recruited actress Sharon Stone to come to Moscow, and it was the first time I fully

understood the impact of celebrity. People really cared that a big Hollywood star would come to their country, and they translated that feeling into loyalty toward the magazine. *Cosmopolitan's* Russian edition is now the highest-circulation women's magazine — not only in Russia, but in Europe.

A couple of years later, I moved to the Bates Saatchi & Saatchi ad agency, heading up their Russian tobacco account. I was so young, I didn't even think about how appalling that product was. I saw it as an exciting opportunity to work with a global brand and to take on a challenge. Because cigarette advertising was banned in Russia, I had to rely exclusively on below-the-line approaches. We tried in-store promotions, samples, road shows, concerts, and anything else we thought would get our target audience — people 25 and younger — to change their behavior and ultimately become smokers.

Selling cigarettes is really selling behavior change. The appeal of smoking is being cool: socializing, holding a cigarette just so, building self-esteem with the product. Through the tobacco campaigns, I learned how to target human behavior and self-image to market just about anything. For example, in Russia, where nearly everyone eats yogurt, I introduced a brand called Yogo Yogo. Instead of advertising, I hired actors to dress up as a strawberry, a peach, an orange, and a cow, and I sent them into the Moscow Metro with a boom box playing the Yogo Yogo jingle. On the subway trains there, nearly every kind of behavior is illegal. You can't spit, run, or eat without a penalty. The actors got arrested, as I knew they would, and the press had a field day

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writing about these costumed fruits locked up in the metro jail. It made Yogo Yogo seem rebellious: the “naughty” yogurt. Kids loved it, and the product did well.

I gradually became recognized in Russia as a pioneer in below-the-line marketing. But Moscow was a rough place. I had run-ins with the mafia, got caught up in a case of tax evasion against the company for which I worked, and barely managed to leave the country before being killed or placed in jail. I then moved on to work in other Eastern bloc countries: Yugoslavia, Poland, Bulgaria. My last stop was Romania, which in the mid-1990s was an artist’s dream, a blank canvas

desperate to be part of our scene, and we didn’t even have major celebrities, just an MTV VJ. The power of MTV can make a campaign so successful that any brand that taps into it is golden.

### Sponsoring Love Plus

In 1997, I was approached by Michael Holscher, who ran a Romanian program for Population Services International. He wanted to launch a mass-media campaign to educate kids about AIDS prevention. Not only did he want my help, he wanted me to donate my time, and he said that he was asking five advertising agencies to bid on the project. I wanted to do it. I knew

the owner of ProTV, the main broadcast network in Romania, if he would donate airtime for us to develop a television show called *In Bed with You*. We invited prominent people onto the set, which featured a big heart-shaped bed, to talk with young people about sexual issues. The celebrities discussed their first experiences and their regrets about having sex too early or without protection, and the kids then shared their stories with the celebrities. The show was a massive hit. Naturally it caused controversy, because Romania is an Orthodox country, but that just meant that even more people talked about it. Safe sex was finally trendy!

Next we launched a brand of condoms, subsidized by the Dutch governments and distributed by PSI, called Love Plus. Free condoms were already available, but were not well regarded. The for-profit companies had expensive, branded condoms, but people couldn’t always afford them. We sold Love Plus for pennies, with cool packaging and a cutting-edge marketing campaign, and filled that critical gap between the government and the private sector. We also produced a series of very funky TV commercials for Love Plus condoms: One of an old couple being naughty in a photo booth, and another of kids going up and down in an elevator. It was all about making the brand affordable, accessible, and desirable, just as you would market a can of soda. I asked all of my clients, for-profit companies like Coca-Cola and Ballantine’s Whisky, to get involved as sponsors. Their reward was fantastic publicity.

One of the big factors in the spread of AIDS in Eastern Europe (as in Asia and Africa) was the commercial sex industry, which

## To start YouthAIDS, I did what I always do when I need help in a new country. I called MTV.

struggling out of Communism. Young people had very little entertainment or pop culture, and consumer goods were limited. They were hungry for everything.

My usual techniques — innovative media parties and celebrities — were front-page news there. I was working with about 20 product accounts, including brands of shampoo, whiskey, cigarettes, and washing machines. At one point, I brought together three of my youth brands — a pager company, a jeans company, and Coca-Cola — and partnered with MTV to throw Romania’s first rave. It turned out to be Romania’s Woodstock. We hosted the party in an airline hangar that could hold 7,000 people, but 50,000 kids turned up. They banged the doors down; cars were carried away. All of these kids were

that my agency could win. By then, I had relationships with Romanian media stations, actors, and companies. I asked a rock star friend and his band, Holograf, to write a song about safe sex, and when I pitched PSI for the account, I brought the band into the conference room to perform the song. We mocked up a CD with safe-sex messages on the cover and a condom attached. It won us the account, and the song, whose title translates as “I Do What I Want, but I Know What I’m Doing,” ended up being a huge hit in that country.

The pro bono work for PSI gave me the chance to pull together everything I’d learned thus far about reaching young people — the power of media, the appeal of celebrity and music, and the importance of appealing to kids’ self-image. I asked

is patronized mainly by transient workers such as truck drivers. So we thought, “Why not go to the root of the problem?” Rather than throw a party in a nightclub, we chartered a brothel in Bucharest. We threw a killer event, the party of the year, for Love Plus. We brought in high-profile rock stars and models. Of course the press came, and many news outlets in Romania ran a story on it. The message got out. We produced a segment for a local news program called *Atomic TV* around this party with the message “It’s cool to protect yourself.” In one year, we increased condom use by 100 percent. This was a huge source of satisfaction for me; together with our corporate sponsors, we were saving lives — and we could prove it.

### African Epiphany

At this point, in August 1999, I went to South Africa for a vacation. While there, I visited some townships, and saw funerals on every corner. That was when I learned the devastating extent of the AIDS crisis in sub-Saharan Africa. Romania was not experiencing anything like it. AIDS was destroying an entire generation of people in sub-Saharan Africa and creating a generation of orphans. And I thought, “Why can’t I do what I’m doing in Romania on a worldwide scale?”

If I’d made that trip today, I might not have had the guts to try this. But when you’re 29, you think you can do anything, and I decided I was going to go to the United States and rally the government, the corporate sector, Hollywood, the music industry, and potential donors. I left South Africa after three days, determined to start by tapping an existing health organization through which I could find

support. PSI gave me an office in Washington, D.C., and a salary. That’s how YouthAIDS was born. And then I did the first thing I’ve always done when I needed help in a new country. I called MTV.

MTV put me in touch with Georgia Franklin, who headed the AIDS social responsibility program for MTV Networks International, which reaches about 2 billion people worldwide. The eventual result of that conversation was “Staying Alive,” a concert series with musicians P. Diddy, Alicia Keys, Usher, Missy Elliot, Dave Matthews, and Michelle Branch. It was a collaborative project between YouthAIDS, PSI, Levi’s, the Paul Allen Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and MTV. We produced the series in two parts: one in Seattle at Paul Allen’s Experience Music Project concert venue, and one in Cape Town, South Africa, at the Green Point football (soccer) stadium, where the World Cup will be played in 2010. There were 50,000 African kids in that Cape Town audience; most of them had HIV.

Later, MTV released a documentary about the concert series, which we helped distribute using our local contacts in countries with no MTV affiliates. The artists not only performed in the concerts but visited people infected with HIV in South Africa, and those visits became the basis for the documentary. Alicia Keys, for example, came with us to a clinic that cared for women about to give birth to babies infected with HIV. They had heard that she was coming and they had rehearsed her song “Fallin’.” When she walked in, and all of these beautiful pregnant women burst into her song, it was a very emotional mo-

ment for everybody.

YouthAIDS and PSI developed the commentary for the documentary. We focused on reducing the stigma and discrimination. In Africa, those are the biggest problems; people are unwilling to talk about AIDS because they fear being shunned. The risk of embarrassment only fuels the ignorance surrounding the transmission and spread of the virus. Levi’s, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and Paul Allen were the three sponsors; the Gates Foundation donated ad time on MTV for public service announcements by prominent musicians. The concert and the documentary aired in 170 countries and reached 1.2 billion people. It also gave YouthAIDS the exposure it needed to recruit more help from the private sector.

Very early on, I realized that we needed a high-profile individual as a global ambassador, somebody who could be alluring for the media and our audience. I asked the actress and activist Ashley Judd to take that role. She generously agreed, and she has since opened many doors for us. She has graced the cover of dozens of magazines featuring YouthAIDS stories. Each year she visits a country as a YouthAIDS ambassador and we take a broadcast crew. We recently filmed a documentary for the Discovery Channel with actress Salma Hayek and the Colombian rock star Juanes. We wouldn’t have these opportunities without Ashley. Mainstream media, after all, is not interested in making a straightforward documentary; they want Ashley Judd in action in Africa or Salma Hayek traveling around Central America. Once you show that, then you can fit in nuggets of the real issue — which is the

behavior change that people need to make. And you know that it will sink in. It's escapist, perhaps, but people are also inspired by the fact that a beautiful and successful Hollywood actress cares enough about AIDS in a remote country to go there and raise awareness of the issue.

### Marketing Behavior Change

At YouthAIDS we also promote the prevention of malaria and tuberculosis, two devastating diseases that, like HIV/AIDS, can be largely prevented by behavior change. When I first started this initiative, I thought issues like disease prevention were the same around the world. Methods for marketing yogurt and cigarettes, after all, translated well from country to country. But for communications on such topics as family planning, malaria, and clean water to register with people, the approach must be relevant to local cultures. For example, in Africa, the "sugar daddy" syndrome is common: Young girls growing up in desperate poverty habitually sleep with older men, not as prostitutes, but simply to curry favor, to receive gifts and money, or even to pass a school exam. When AIDS is prevalent (or, frankly, at any time), this is deadly behavior. So we have designed campaigns aimed directly at both the men and the girls, to help them reject all their reasons to maintain the status quo.

That's not like selling cigarettes or yogurt. And yet, at the same time, partnerships with companies in the private sector have been a cornerstone of our efforts. My work with Levi's during the "Staying Alive" concert series gave me my first real experience with cause-related marketing. In the PSAs, the

artists wore Levi's clothes; the spots carried the Levi's brand. It was subtle, but it made people think, "Levi's cares about this issue. It's a good company. I'm going to buy its jeans."

The hidden potential of cause-related marketing lies in combining the needs of local cultures with the global reach of mainstream companies. Procter & Gamble, for example, has a water purification product called PUR (developed with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention); a couple of drops can clean 10 gallons of water. The company is donating it and PSI is

tioned its 20 years of AIDS prevention efforts in its marketing. Mr. Hoppenheim got in touch with us, and we started brainstorming together. The result was "Hear No Evil, See No Evil, Speak No Evil." It benefits young people through education; it provides publicity for celebrities; and, of course, it benefits Aldo in the form of increased sales and customer goodwill.

We are now rounding out the second phase of our campaign. Aldo continues to sell an average of 20,000 empowerment tags per week, and the campaign has raised more than \$2.5 million for

## Aldo's primary product is no longer a shoe, but an idea: the combination of being healthy and being cool.

marketing it in places where clean water is needed. We can get it into the hands of the people who need it most, which P&G wasn't able to do on its own. Similarly, Coca-Cola wanted to get involved in AIDS prevention, but was concerned about using YouthAIDS branding on its products. So we suggested sharing the company's distribution system. Coca-Cola has trucks going to villages in 200 countries all over the world. Why not tap into that transportation system and deliver condoms?

Probably the best example is Aldo Shoes. Its participation started in early 2005 when Robert Hoppenheim, Aldo's general manager, saw a magazine photo of actress Kristin Davis from *Sex and the City* wearing a YouthAIDS T-shirt. Aldo Shoes had never men-

YouthAIDS thus far. It has reached 20-plus countries and has accounted for more than 1.5 billion editorial impressions. And Aldo's increased sales and brand recognition are such that one could say the company's primary product is no longer a shoe, it is an idea: the combination of being healthy and being cool.

This campaign, in short, is a tribute to the power that companies gain when they embark on cause-related marketing. They increase their sales. They change themselves. They change their customers. And they change the world. +

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