

The Heart Truth: Using the Power of Branding and Social Marketing to Increase Awareness of Heart Disease in Women



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ABSTRACT

In September 2002, the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute launched *The Heart Truth*, the first federally sponsored national campaign aimed at increasing awareness among women about their risk of heart disease. A traditional social marketing approach, including an extensive formative research phase, was used to plan, implement, and evaluate the campaign. With the creation of the Red Dress as the national symbol for women and heart disease awareness, the campaign integrated a branding strategy into its social marketing framework. The aim was to develop and promote a women's heart disease brand that would create a strong emotional connection with women. The Red Dress brand has had a powerful appeal to a wide diversity of women and has given momentum to the campaign's three-part implementation strategy of partnership development, media relations, and community action. In addition to generating its own substantial programming, *The Heart Truth* became a catalyst for a host of other national and local educational initiatives, both large and small. By the campaign's fifth anniversary, surveys showed that women were increasingly aware of heart disease as their leading cause of death and that the rise in awareness was associated with increased action to reduce heart disease risk.
