

AN EFFECTIVE MARKETING PLAN

for Home Economics

BY BARBARA J. WARREN

A brief note recently appeared in several dozen newspapers in 25 states. It read, "If you live in a strong family, please contact us. We know a lot about what makes families fail; we need to know more about what makes them succeed."¹

Letters poured in—more than 3,000 families responded to the Family Strengths Research Project. The survey produced six key qualities that make for strong families. These qualities were commitment, time together, appreciation, communication, spiritual wellness, and coping with crisis.

The characteristics these respondents identified as crucial to family success also define the mission and spirit of a 90-year-old profession. Home economics has a long tradition of interest in and support of families and individuals. Training in home economics serves the dual purpose of helping young people prepare for home life as well as training them for a viable profession. Home economics classes allow students to practice academic skills in a real-life context.

Developing Survival Skills

At the core of the home economics program lies the challenge of helping students, *all students*, to develop survival skills—not just preparing them for some profession or occupation but more importantly, for personal fulfillment. In short, home economics equips students not only to "make a living" but also to "live a life" more abundantly.

But home economics has fallen on hard times. Few schools require it for graduation, and it is often perceived as merely training for homemaking. What kind of marketing strategies can help dispel this misconception?

Strategies

There are a number of promising strategies for marketing home economics. These include the following:

1. Enlisting home economics students as active agents to spread the "good news" about its programs;
2. Advertising and effectively marketing home economics in unique and effective ways on the high school level, as well as on and off the college campus. (As corporate executives say, Those who cannot afford a public-relations program need nothing so much as a public-relations program!);
3. Convincing the administration of each college of the need to include home economics in the general education core requirements for all students (male and female); and
4. Assessing the impact of home economics on the living skills of recent graduates. This will offer real-life examples of home economists who are serving in significant areas throughout the world marketplace. It will also help curriculum committees to fine-tune their programs.

Focus

In the setting of SDA schools, a curriculum usually achieves relevance to teachers, students, and constituents if it is perceived as central to the mission of Christian education, which Ellen G. White defined as "the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come."²

The biblical description of Jesus' growth (Luke 2:52) adds a fourth dimension, the social. It is interesting to see how many areas of home economics one can list under each of the four developmental dimensions of Christian education (e.g., *physical*: aging, nutrition; *mental*: adult education, self-concept training; *spiritual*: holistic development, counseling; *social*: teen pregnancy, child abuse).

Program Potpourri

One of home economics' most important contributions is its emphasis on family life education. However, the discipline must move beyond its traditional emphases so that "its practicing professionals are able to function effectively in the role of assisting individuals and families in this dramatically changing society."³

How can home economists accomplish this? They must first assess the scope and

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contributions of the profession. Today's competitive environment demands that home economics professionals be creative and well informed. Making the subject relevant to the lives of young people will require innovations in curriculum, student recruitment, enrollment management, and resource management.⁴

Strategies for Success

Here are some strategies that will help create a viable, up-to-date curriculum:

1. In the words of Bailey, et al., "The best preparation for the future is an education that enables students to adapt to a changing world, rather than preparation for a specific job."⁵ Home economics must continue to address current family, societal, and economics issues. At the same time, it must help students develop the ability to make reasoned decisions and assist them in identifying and developing basic competencies for a variety of personal and family living situations.

2. An evolutionary approach to trans-

forming the curriculum will better equip individuals with the theoretical, technical, and practical skills required to serve the changing needs of society. Effective programs must address current trends, issues, and student needs. For example, today's dual career family needs institutional services in fast-food preparation and child care (which have traditionally been family functions). These trends have compelled home economics programs to restructure food service and institute nursery school management programs. Additional adaptations will be required in the future.⁶

As today's family units have diversified into a mosaic of different sizes, gender roles, relationships, and living arrangements, the changing demographics have caused some to conclude that the family is about to collapse. Family-life educators must see this diversity as a challenge to prepare young people to cope successfully with life in the family of the future.

Recruiting Males

3. Recruitment innovations include a face-lift to make home economics attractive and relevant to the life-styles of today's male students. "At one time, males enrolled in home economics classes as a 'novelty' but they are now finding it a 'necessity' in today's technologically sophisticated world."⁷

Careers in home economics are

becoming increasingly appealing to male students. Many are now being recruited by the commercial food industry. Home economics provides a basic education for such careers in nutrition, menu planning, equipment orientation, comparison shopping, purchasing, and basic cooking skills. Males are also becoming interested in child and elderly care, institutional and home management, family-life education, courses in basic living skills, custodial and upholstery services, and other vocational and consumer areas.

"As new technologies (computer and other technological aids) are incorporated into the classroom, more males are enrolling in home economics classes."⁸ Efforts to recruit males have paid off as educators defeminized course titles and content.⁹ For example, calling a course Life Management instead of Home Management may attract males. At the secondary level, exploratory programs in personal development, family life, and career exploration have had substantial increases in male enrollment. Older males are returning to the classroom to learn independent living skills as single householders or to receive training to supplement retirement income.

"The increasing number of male faculty has also lessened the female gender image of Home Economics. The presence of male faculty makes it easier for male students to choose Home Economics courses and to pursue majors in Home Economics programs."¹⁰ The profession must aggressively seek to recruit and retain more male teachers and home economists.

Creative Ideas for Computer Programs

4. Home economists should explore innovative approaches that move the discipline into the Information Age. To do so will require programmers who can create imaginative educational software (another attractive career opportunity for males). In the area of nutrition, software can help students plan a balanced diet for a family, or estimate the amounts of fat, carbohydrate, calories, and nutrients in a weekly diet plan. These programs would make it easier to work out menus accommodating the special needs of family members, such as small children, the elderly, and those on special diets.

Other computer programs might calculate the quantities of recipe ingredients to feed varying numbers of people or produce shopping lists based on a weekly meal plan.

In the areas of clothing design, interior decorating, and budget planning, computer programs can be written that assist students in various ways while at the same time making the subject more interesting. The possibilities for creative

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programming are almost limitless.

Another suggestion to relate home economics to the high-tech age would be the study of a "wardrobe for outer space" in textile class, which will teach students about science as well as clothing design as they study how to construct clothing capable of protecting its wearers from the hostile atmosphere of outer space.¹¹

Teaching Entrepreneurship

5. "The big business story of the 1980s is the boom in small businesses."¹² Although many students hope to someday be self-employed, they rarely realize the immense responsibility inherent in small business ownership.

It is not enough to teach students merely a basic curriculum or general theory to prepare them for owning a business. A unit or course relating to entrepreneurship and the characteristics of successful entrepreneurs should be included as part of every curriculum within the field of Home Economics.¹³

(See F. Colleen Steck's article on home-based businesses on page 32 for additional information on this subject.)

6. Networking is essential to a successful home economics program. Teachers should support and participate in a network of secondary and postsecondary specialists such as the Home Economics Association of SDA (HEASDA).

Future Job Prospects

7. Surveying the employment outlook for the field, a recent USDA study has predicted that "employment opportunities—through 1990—for baccalaureate graduates in Home Economics would be substantial." The greatest need is expected in the areas of business, family/consumer resource management, food service and institutional management, human environment and shelter, and textiles and clothing.¹⁴

Home economists will find new opportunities and needs for their skills as the

Continued on page 31

Table 1

Clip and use the following survey¹⁵ to assess the attitudes of your target audience toward your home economics program.

Attitudes Toward Home Economics Survey

The statements below are designed to help us learn more about your attitudes toward home economics courses and programs. There are no right or wrong answers. Indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement by circling the appropriate letter. Circle **A** if you strongly agree, **a** if you agree, **?** if you are undecided, **d** if you disagree, and **D** if you strongly disagree.

- A a ? d D** 1. The primary goal of home economics is to teach students how to cook and sew.
- A a ? d D** 2. Home economics students study human growth and development.
- A a ? d D** 3. Home economics helps individuals and families improve the quality of their lives.
- A a ? d D** 4. Consumer education and resource management are part of home economics programs.
- A a ? d D** 5. You can get an easy A by enrolling in a home economics class.
- A a ? d D** 6. Home economics teaches people about proper nutrition.
- A a ? d D** 7. Home economics subject matter can be learned at home; it does not need to be taught at school.
- A a ? d D** 8. Home economics is just as important as science, math, social studies, and English.

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AN EFFECTIVE MARKETING PLAN

Continued from page 7

U.S. population ages in the next several decades. They may choose to work with legislators to shape laws that address catastrophic health-care costs, age discrimination, and guaranteed leave for workers who must meet family responsibilities and care for elderly relatives with health problems.

Home economists will also find their skills in demand in menu planning for the elderly or people with special dietary requirements, day care for the elderly, and interior design to accommodate the needs of older or handicapped citizens.¹⁶

An International Dimension

8. Modern technology has transformed our planet into what Marshall McLuhan called a "global village."¹⁷ The mission of home economics embraces a commitment to help individuals and families attain the quality of life they seek, regardless of their race, color, cultural background, or beliefs. Every human being has the same basic wants, needs, and problems, though the emphasis may be

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different from one place or one group of people to another.

Home economics programs should incorporate an international perspective. This will prepare students at all levels for possible work abroad, or for employment in companies with international interests. This training will help young people appreciate the differences and similarities between peoples of the world and inspire them to address common human problems.

Defining the Field

9. Butler, et al. surveyed 237 home economics administrators, faculty, and students, asking, "Do you think people know what you do if you call yourself a home economist?" The majority of respondents believed that there was public uncertainty about their identity.¹⁸ Consequently, some colleges and universities have chosen alternative titles for their departments that more clearly describe the work done there.

Home economics departments and teachers may want to survey attitudes toward their programs on the part of administrators, constituents, current enrollees, and academy students. They can then plan strategies to clarify misconceptions about the field of home economics as well as its specific applications. Results should be used in planning recruitment strategy. (See Table 1 on page 7 for sample survey.)

Home economists should undertake a public relations campaign to help people better understand their discipline's contributions to society. Home economics "enhances the quality of life for individuals and families from all socio-economic backgrounds by providing them with life-management knowledge, attitudes, and skills."¹⁹

Continued on page 47

REVITALIZING HOME ECONOMICS

Continued from page 35

dents to understand child development, as preparation for the challenge of parenting.

Our denomination has prided itself in demonstrating healthful eating habits through cooking schools and other means. However, our own young people are not as concerned as they should be about correct eating habits or a healthful diet. They will not choose good foods just because they are told to do so; they will participate in healthful living only if they understand the benefits to be derived. The future health and well being of tomorrow's church members and leaders depends on getting this message across to today's students.

Make the Course Academic

This does not mean that applied techniques be eliminated, but that theory be taught, homework be assigned, and testing be based on solid facts and information learned in the class. Without a solid curriculum, no amount of public relations or catchy names and phrases will change people's ideas about home economics. Once a quality program is in place, promotion will be much easier and more successful.

For education to achieve its goals, it must be concerned with producing constructive Christians, happy young people whose lives have meaning and value.

Use Community Resources

One of the best ways to communicate the value of the revitalized home economics program is to use professionals as consultants for the class. Have a doctor speak on acne or a crisis center professional discuss teen suicide.

Hire Well-qualified Teachers

Teachers who have been trained in the field have had exposure to all five areas of home economics so that they can competently address each area in the curriculum.

Schools often tend to look for special-

ists in one particular area to teach home economics classes. Such individuals will probably feel most comfortable sticking to their own specialty, whether it be cooking or sewing or some other area, than spending equal time in all the areas of home economics. Teacher education is just as important for home economics teachers as for instructors in English, mathematics, or the sciences.

In Conclusion

According to Carolyn Purgraski, a consultant working with home economics teachers,

Many parents want their children to reach beyond the basics and to develop higher levels of thinking skills—analysis, evaluation, listening, and decision-making related to the social and human issues. And, in my opinion, no other course but home economics does this.*

The challenge, then, comes to teachers and administrators alike to rethink the curriculum so that education can achieve its full potential to improve the lives of their students. □

*Carolyn Purgraski, "A Required Subject," *Forecast*, 31:2 (October 1985), pp. 30-32.

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AN EFFECTIVE MARKETING PLAN

Continued from page 31

To get out the message will require good organization and continuing effort. Dr. Lou Joanas asserts, "Whether we like it or not, Home Economics has a public relations function. . . . Public relations efforts cannot be a one-shot attempt; marketing must be a vital part of our careers."²⁰ Only as the ideas are repeated and reinforced will they gradually become known and accepted. "People need to hear a message three to ten times before they remember."²¹ Effective marketing will convince people that home economics today is much more than just "stitch and stir." □

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