

## ShowCase

### VERB™

**Topic:**

Physical activity

**Organisation:**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

**Location:**

USA

**Dates:**

2002 to 2006

**Budget:**

US\$339 million (over 5 years)

**Website:**

[www.cdc.gov/youthcampaign](http://www.cdc.gov/youthcampaign)

**Contact:**

CDC-INFO Contact Center

**Email:**

[cdcinfo@cdc.gov](mailto:cdcinfo@cdc.gov)



### Overview

This 'for-kids-by-kids' multicultural campaign aimed to increase and maintain physical activity among 'tweens' (children aged 9 to 13). Launched in 2002 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the US, VERB™ used commercial methods of youth marketing to promote being physically active as cool, fun and a chance to have a good time with friends.

In addition to its strong brand identity and communications presence, the five-year campaign offered opportunities and support for active and rewarding participation, including: community-based activity events; activity start-up kits; innovative teaching materials; 'street teams' to engage tweens at events; small grants to support physical activity in schools; and contests, competitions and sweepstakes.

### Results:

- After 1 year, effects were found in free-play physical activity in sub-populations, notably younger tweens (9 to 10 years) and girls
- In years two and three, effects were found for the entire target population for free-time physical activity
- Findings from year four (2006) showed that the level of exposure to VERB™ by tweens was significantly associated with physical activity the day before the survey and on each of the psychosocial variables



In the US, today's youth spend less time being physically active and tend to exchange physical for sedentary play. Self-reported data indicate that almost one-quarter of children aged 9 to 13 engage in no free-time physical activity during a typical week.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), childhood obesity is on the rise and an estimated nine million US children are considered obese. Research shows that being overweight in childhood can increase one's risk for Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

The VERB™ campaign was initiated because the US Congress was concerned about children's poor lifestyle habits and believed it was important to reach children with positive health messages early in life using commercial marketing strategies.

### **Behavioural goals**

Originally the US Congress wanted to fund a campaign that promoted 'positive behaviours amongst American youth'. However once work began it became clear to the CDC that this was too broad a concept to develop a marketing campaign around, and so it was decided to focus specifically on physical activity. Subsequently the behavioural goals became to:

#### *Primary goal*

- Increase and maintain physical activity among tweens (youth aged 9 to 13)

#### *Secondary goals*

- Increase knowledge and improve attitudes and beliefs about tweens' regular participation in physical activity

- Increase parental and influencer support and encouragement of tweens' participation in physical activity
- Heighten awareness of options and opportunities for tween participation in physical activity
- Facilitate opportunities for tweens to participate in regular physical activity

### **Segmentation**

#### *Primary audience: Tweens*

The CDC recognised that it is at this age that children become more independent from their parents in their decision-making processes, although some influence is still apparent. If behavioural change can occur during this critical time in socialisation, it may carry over to the later adolescent years when the numbers of non-active teens rises even higher.

The campaign thus aimed to reach a general audience of tweens. The CDC wanted to specifically reach four racial or ethnic audiences that might not be reached by the general campaign – African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans and American Indians.

#### *Secondary audience: Parents and adult influencers*

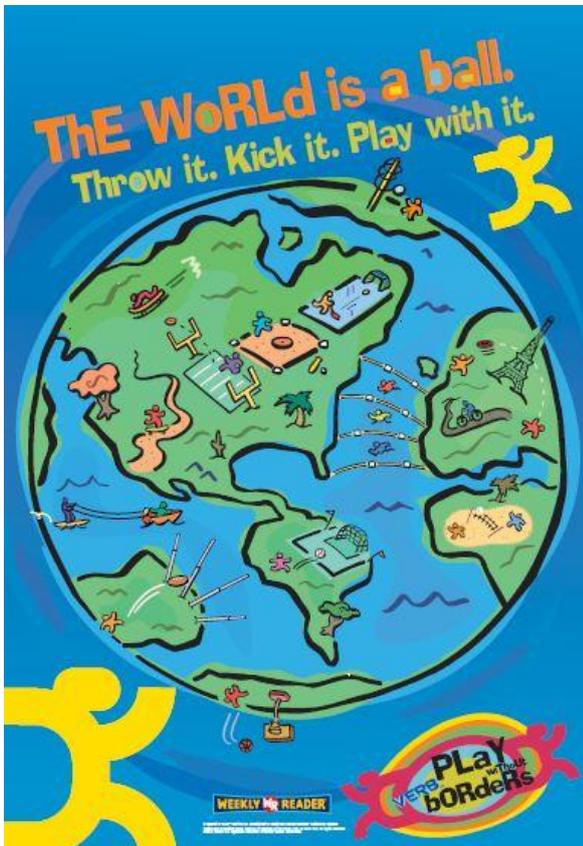
This included teachers, youth leaders, physical education and health professionals, paediatricians, health care providers and coaches. These groups were targeted to encourage, recognise, support and reward tweens for being physically active.

### **Funding**

The US Congress funded the CDC to develop, implement and evaluate the campaign. Funding was allocated on a year-by-year basis, and over the course of the five years the campaign received the following approximate allocations:

- Year one: US\$125 million
- Year two: US\$68 million

- Year three: US\$51 million
- Year four: US\$36 million
- Year five: US\$59 million



VERB™ used extensive scoping research to drive the content, tone and execution of the entire campaign, including the brand and its messages. Formative research began with an extensive literature review to understand the primary target audience. Campaign strategists endeavoured to learn about tweens' attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of the world around them. A key finding from the literature review was the physical and emotional changes associated with being a tween and tweens' needs to develop their own identity, likes and preferences. Desk reviews of other campaigns that targeted tweens were also conducted to

help planners understand how commercial marketers sell their products to tweens.

Primary research was then conducted to learn how to brand physical activity in a way that would excite tweens and make them enthusiastic about participating. Research included focus groups, interviews and ethnographic inquiries among multi-ethnic groups across the country. Additional audience research was conducted separately with African American, Hispanic/Latino, American Indian and Asian American tweens and parents to gain deeper insights into their physical activity views and practices. This information contributed to the creation of VERB™, a 'for kids, by kids' brand that embraced the characteristics valued by tweens.

After the brand was developed, formative evaluation focused on identifying and developing advertisements to communicate campaign messages to tweens in a way that would resonate with them.

VERB™ used a three-step process, drawing on qualitative methods to develop its advertising messages. For each step, data were collected through focus groups, individual and dyadic interviews.

The first step was exploratory – understanding what motivates children to help develop a general communication strategy and advertisements that would appeal to children. The research showed that there were a wide variety of barriers and motivators that either inhibited or encouraged physical activity.

### Key insights

*Pressure to perform, excel and achieve (in school, sports and extracurricular activities)*  
Children felt this pressure and stress in their lives. One of their responses was to look for ways to relax and have fun when they had 'free' time (time without structured obligations)

like school, sports, other classes and family outings).

#### *Change creates tension*

There is desire to remain in a 'comfort zone' of the familiar. In trying to encourage children to take on new activities one must be sensitive to this tension and identify ways to encourage tweens to try new things in a way that conveys encouragement and support, without being judged or badgered.

#### *Self-esteem and self-confidence are vital*

Most tweens agreed that self-esteem was a critical factor that influenced their decision-making and quality of life. While their self-esteem was still fragile and in development, many tweens said it could affect anything from whether they chose to participate in a certain activity to their future goals and career aspirations. Tweens indicated that feeling good about themselves gave them the confidence to try new things and the motivation to stick with something even when it became difficult.

#### *Tweens think short-term*

Trying to promote longer-term benefits to tweens should be avoided or done in a developmentally appropriate way that children can relate to. Tweens think predominantly in terms of short-term gratification. If it is not fun, they will not be motivated to do it.

#### *Setting and achieving goals*

Some tweens suggested they did not want to make bad choices now because it might hinder their ability to reach their goals in the future. For example, some said they wanted to be professional athletes, and drugs and cigarettes could negatively affect their athletic performance. Others said their future profession requires years of education and a lot of studying, so they had to stay on track and out of trouble. Furthermore, many tweens indicated setting and achieving goals, large and small, helped boost their confidence and helped them feel good about themselves.

#### *Tweens are increasingly independent and self-defining*

Their peer and friendship worlds are crucially important in this process of individuation and separation. Therefore, the benefits of social development and self-discovery are powerful motivators. Activities that are associated with social and personal development are immediately more attractive to tweens.



#### *Tweens are looking to improve themselves*

The potential of an activity to help children improve themselves, to become 'good' at something, was a powerful motivator. Getting tweens to develop a sense of personal relationship with an activity could ensure they stick with the activity. At this developmental stage, children were eager to become a 'better me.'

#### *Tweens associate the word 'activity' with organised sports*

This connection needed to be broken. Lots of tweens might never become involved in organised sports (because they are too expensive, too intimidating, too time-intensive,

etc.), but that should not inhibit them from being physically active or create a perceptual barrier that 'I'm not the kind of kid who is physically active.'

#### *Staying active and involved helps tweens make good choices*

Many tweens indicated that certain activities and sports could help encourage them to make healthier choices. More specifically, some suggested that when they excelled, extracurricular activities helped boost their self-esteem and self-confidence. Others said they tried to make good choices so they could continue to participate in certain activities. For example, a few tweens mentioned they worked hard to get good grades so they could stay on the basketball or softball team.

#### *Family and friends are important influencers*

According to many tweens, their decisions were influenced by their friends and family members. For example, many said their friends and family provided them with advice and encouragement, which helped them make the right choices. However, some tweens also said friends and family, especially friends, could be a negative influence when they discouraged them from striving for certain goals or encouraged them to get into trouble.

#### *Positive role models encourage tweens to be their best*

Tweens reported that strong and positive role models gave them more confidence to reach for their goals and motivation to try new things. Their role models include parents, teachers, coaches, celebrities, musicians and professional athletes.

### **Motivators**

- Being with friends
- Engaging in self-discovery
- Participating in events with an element of friendly competition

### **Barriers**

- Fear of failure
- Lack of time
- Family responsibilities
- Competing interests

### **Competition**

- Other activities, lifestyle choices and ideas
- A crowded media environment that competes for tweens attention

The second step, concept testing, identified the message that best promoted physical activity to tweens. Concepts were tested to validate the communication strategy and to aid in selecting concepts that resonated strongly with the target audience whilst being acceptable, understandable, culturally appropriate and motivating.

In the third step, a rough version of the advertisement was produced and evaluated through message testing. VERB™ assessed whether the audience interpreted the main message about physical activity as intended and whether anything was confusing or controversial. Participants were shown almost completed versions of the final advertisements and asked for their initial reactions, likes and dislikes, perception of the advertisement's relevance to the campaign's main message, and perception of the advertisement's ability to motivate children to be physically active. Results were used to improve the final version of the advertisements.



The VERB™ campaign used a logic model to share information, facilitate programme planning and provide direction for evaluation.

Behaviour change and communication theories, including Theory of Planned Behaviour and Social Cognitive Theory, were incorporated to hypothesise how behaviour change might occur. This logic model posits that campaign awareness would result in changes to intermediate variables, such as subjective norms and attitudes among the target group, which would in turn result in physical activity participation.



VERB™ was designed to minimise perceived barriers to physical activity and motivate tweens to seek opportunities to explore their goals and develop their skills. For example, self-esteem and self-confidence are key factors in whether tweens will try out new activities. For this reason VERB™ attempted to boost self-

esteem by conveying that tweens would not be judged based on their individual level of physical activity. Additionally, many tweens associate physical activity with organised sports, which puts them off. VERB™ messages were designed to show tweens that physical activity took many forms and was not only about organised sports or athletic competition.

Furthermore, VERB™ was positioned as tweens' own brand, not something imposed by adults. This positioning was essential if VERB was to communicate effectively with tweens and inspire them to get active. VERB™ messages were also positively framed – a 'can do' rather than a 'don't do' message.

The campaign had four phases – each phase was characterised by a message platform (the foundation for a campaign's message), a communication strategy and a main idea for the message of the phase. Each phase was based on the unifying concept 'Free tweens to play out their dreams'.

**Phase I (June 2002 to May 2003)** sought awareness of the VERB™ brand by associating it with the usual meaning of verb as an action word. Children were encouraged to 'Find your VERB™'. Advertisements centred on tweens and celebrities acting out different verb actions such as 'bounce' and 'jump'. To build brand awareness, the campaign's advertising agencies partnered with brands (such as Nickelodeon and Disney) that were already popular with tweens.

**Phase II (June 2003 to May 2004)** focused on associating free-time play with the fun and exhilaration of being on an organised sports team. The message platform suggested that the good qualities of organised sports can be brought to children's own backyards. The core idea behind the message was 'Everyday is game day. Get out and go play'. TV adverts in this phase featured tweens playing while a professional sports announcer called the action.

**Phase III (June 2004 to May 2005)** built on the notion of associating play with the status of organised sports. Messages were refreshed with the nuance that tweens do not need to play like professional athletes to be active and have fun and that physical activity can happen 'Anytime. Anywhere.' The central idea was for tweens to create their own games and play them by their own rules. Messages focused on games that could be played anywhere, encouraging tweens to find a physical activity that was right for them, and emphasising 'You don't have to be a pro to play'. Advertisements in this phase featured professional athletes (like Venus Williams) playing sports with tweens using variations of the games' rules that tweens had developed. Turnkey kits were created to help tweens create their own games by combining various sports.

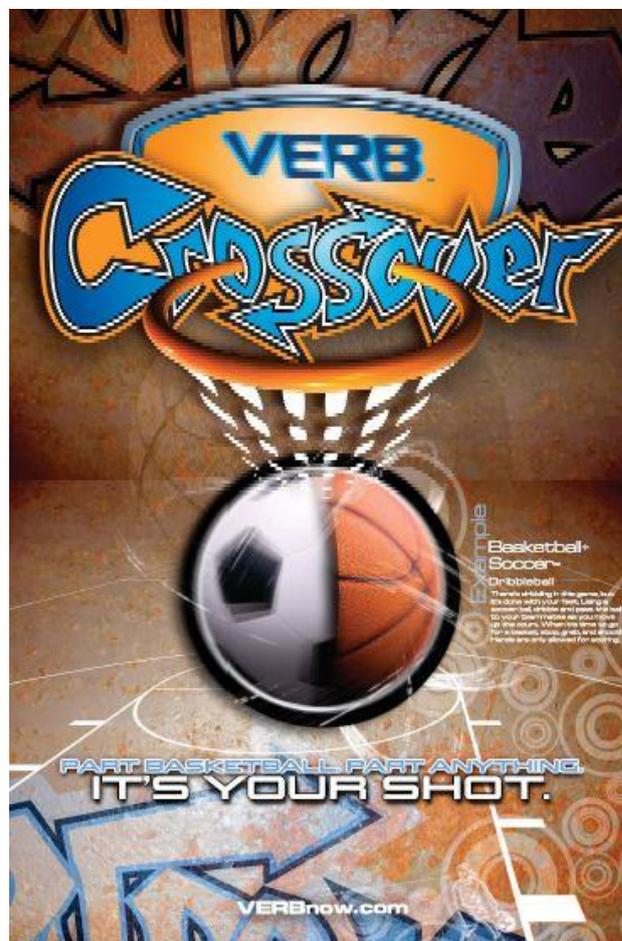
**Phase IV (June 2005 to September 2006)** had the messaging platform of 'igniting in tweens a desire for physical activity'. The message was that nothing replaces the rush and exhilaration of physical activity – wanting to play is an intense desire within each child. The central idea was 'I can't not play'. This phase encouraged tweens to internalise the VERB™ ideals. The goal was to motivate tweens to continue showcasing 'their VERB™' through their own continued physical activity as they mature. One series of TV adverts showed the visual of a tween taking a rising sun from the sky, playing with it as if it were a ball that gets passed from tween to tween throughout a day. This was tied into a turnkey kit – the VERB™ Yellowball – which encouraged tweens to play with the yellow ball and then pass it on to their friends.

### Marketing mix

#### *Paid media advertising*

VERB™ commercials aired on age-appropriate television and radio channels such as Cartoon Network and Nickelodeon. Print advertising was placed in youth publications like Sports Illustrated for Tweens and Teen People. To

reach parents, adverts were placed in publications such as Family Circle and Parent Magazine. Spanish and Asian language advertising appeared in publications like Korea Times, World Journal and Los Padres.



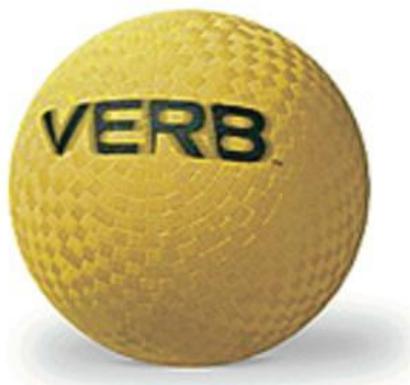
#### *Added-value opportunities*

The campaign's media partners donated their talent, properties or placements to help promote physical activity messages to tweens. For example, media partners produced VERB™ Public Service Announcements (PSAs), including stars of The Gilmore Girls and 7th Heaven and characters from Disney's Kim Possible and Cartoon Network's Courage the Cowardly Dog.

#### *Contests and sweepstakes*

To increase the value of the product and reward tweens for being active, many media partners sponsored VERB™ contests and sweepstakes. For example, Channel One

sponsored a pedometer-based middle-school competition, Make Every Move Count. The schools that accumulated the most steps won an action pack of physical activity equipment and materials.



#### *Public relations*

The campaign continuously communicated with the news media, stakeholders and partner organisations to offer information on the importance of youth physical activity to parents and other influencers and to spotlight current campaign activities, such as events and promotions.

#### *Website*

A website was designed exclusively for tweens that included the VERB™ Recorder, where tweens reported their participation in physical activity and became eligible to win prizes for being active. The website allowed tweens to create virtual character identities and blog about their physical fitness activities. The site offered a virtual 'playground' that included jokes, games and Playlibs for tweens to explore, with the ending message of taking this knowledge to the real playground in your neighbourhood. The site enabled this by providing a search mechanism to look for playgrounds and recreational activities by zip code. A parent website included multi-language pages (Spanish, Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese) in partnership with ethnic media partners. In addition, a website was created for partners and stakeholders to access information about the campaign and to view advertising.

#### *Schools*

Schools were a natural venue for reaching tweens. Working with youth publications like Weekly Reader and TIME for Tweens, the campaign distributed custom developed materials to middle schools throughout the country. In-school materials included book covers, day planners and customised lesson plans that incorporate physical activity into the classroom.

#### *Turnkey kits*

The campaign recognised the difficulty in maintaining interest and motivation to be physically active amongst children. Thus the campaign developed turnkey kits for educators and community leaders to engage tweens in physical activity in a fun, creative way. The turnkey kits drew from the active imagination of this age group and encouraged them to develop new and exciting ways to get active. Whether it meant combining two sports such as basketball and volleyball to invent a new game, or encouraging tweens to play traditional games with a creative twist, these turnkey kits motivated children's minds and bodies.

#### *Activity promotions*

Several times a year, the campaign featured promotions that invited community-based organisations and schools throughout the US to participate. Participating schools and organisations were eligible to apply for a small grant to support physical activity at the end of the promotions.

#### *Community-based event sponsorship*

The campaign participated in existing community and cultural events. VERB™ sponsored or co-sponsored events to leverage brand affinity and provide opportunities for tweens to interact with VERB™. These events included Nickelodeon's Wild 'N Crazy Tweens (WACK) events, concerts and sporting events where the VERB™ logo was displayed prominently. VERB™ hosted 'activity zones' at the events, which were dedicated spaces for

tweens to try out different activities such as kicking a ball, dancing or martial arts.

#### *Guerrilla, street team and mobile marketing*

The campaign used experiential marketing tactics. The campaign used a community-based tactic of 'street teams', teams of five to eight college-aged men and women hired to engage tweens in being physically active at events and tween hangouts, including malls, parks and community centres. The street teams distributed VERB™ foot bags, T-shirts, temporary tattoos and Frisbee disks to tweens. The campaign also had a national mobile tour with six custom trucks with colourful designs on them. The trucks toured the nation and reached tweens at venues such as amusement parks, summer camps, community-based organisations and other local venues where tweens could be found.

#### *VERB™ Yellowball*



The campaign distributed more than 500,000 yellow balls to tweens through a variety of channels and asked those tweens to join in and help create a movement of play. The campaign informed tweens that by playing with the yellow ball, telling their story on the VERB™ website,

and passing that ball on to another tween, they could directly affect all children's participation in play. Teen celebrity Hilary Duff helped spread the Yellowball message. Through the tween website, visitors could view photographs of her with the Yellowball and read her blog about getting physically active. As tweens tends to be greatly influenced by what is 'cool', using Hilary's celebrity status and influence was a key motivator.

#### *Community and national partnerships*

The campaign recruited as partners national organisations whose local affiliates provided opportunities for tweens to be active, as well as community coalitions and local and state health departments that had access to funding to promote healthy lifestyles among tweens. The campaign provided turnkey kits, technical assistance and other support to partners.



The VERB™ campaign used the yearly monitoring and evaluation to ensure it was on the right track and reaching the target audiences. This monitoring was particularly helpful when assessing the tailored marketing to different ethnic or racial audiences. The approach for all four segmented ethnic or racial groups was tailored according to focus group research with these audiences. For example, the VERB™ tagline 'It's what you do!' was changed when targeting the different groups:

- African American – 'What's your VERB™?'
- Hispanic or Latino – 'Ponte Las Pilas' (meaning 'Get Going')
- Asian-American – 'Healthy families/happy children'
- Native American – 'It's what you do! Native style'



“All the general market advertising was inclusive of disabled kids and kids of various ethnicities, so they could see that this was for them. But the advertising agencies we hired to reach certain ethnic groups really wanted to put their own spin on the VERB™ brand. So that took a lot of negotiation, because each of those four agencies had their own ideas about what would appeal to their audience, yet it had to be very consistent with what the general market advertising was doing.” (Marian Huhman, Lead on VERB™ Evaluation)



Further monitoring found that African American tweens had less awareness of the VERB™ brand after the second year when compared to white and Hispanic tweens. This led to increased media buys the following year in networks with high viewing figures from African American tweens, and more participation in

popular musical and sporting events that targeted African American tweens.

The campaign used a number of activity promotions with schools and community-based organisations that were linked to specific occasions throughout the year. An example of this occurred in 2003 when VERB™ proclaimed the day of the summer solstice as the ‘Longest Day of Play’ and created a promotion with Radio Disney to motivate tweens to be active all day long. During that autumn when the clocks were turned back for daylight saving, VERB™ featured its ‘Extra Hour for Extra Action’ promotion, which included a kit of innovative and fun VERB™ materials for teachers and youth-serving organisations to use in activating tweens.

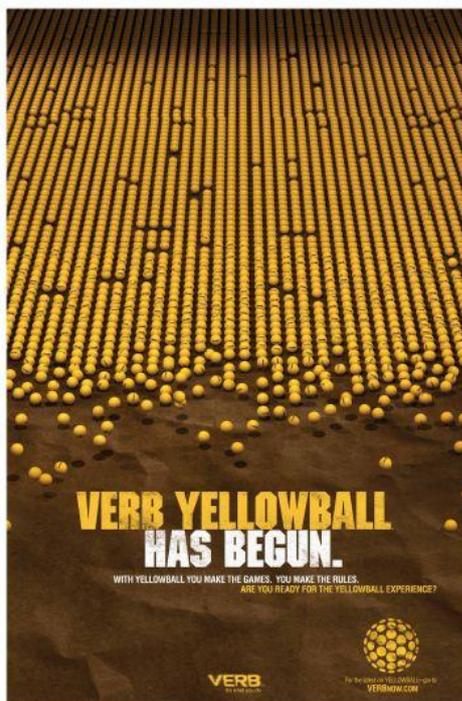
The campaign sought to combine a large-scale national mass media campaign with grassroots activities, but this proved challenging at times. One example was the difficulties that occurred when organising Nickelodeon’s WACK events with local communities. For instance, Nickelodeon wanted to bring the event to 1 community and said it could guarantee an attendance of 7,000 children. However, the community wanted a different venue for the event than the one suggested and wanted the community itself to organise the children attending. This turned out to be a lot harder for the community than they expected and approximately 700 children attended the event. In hindsight, more work was needed with communities beforehand to prepare for large-scale events, and actually, communities that approached the campaign asking to be involved tended to be more successful than communities the campaign had approached to become involved.

“When you do something that is a big media campaign and you’re also trying to work with a community coalition, unless you’ve got people that are really up and running already and are very familiar with the pace of an advertising campaign, you’re going to have a clash of

cultures there which could cause a lot of hard feelings.” (Marian Huhman, Lead on VERB™ Evaluation)



The CDC commissioned Westat to independently evaluate the VERB™ campaign.



## Methodology

### Outcome

Cohorts of tweens and parents were interviewed annually via the Youth Media Campaign Longitudinal Survey (YMCLS) concerning their physical activity, related beliefs and behaviours. Cohort One (baseline) was surveyed in 2002 (April to June) prior to VERB™ advertising and was repeated annually through 2006. Cohort Two was surveyed in 2004 to 2006. A cross-sectional sample was surveyed in 2006. Each cohort consisted of a nationally representative sample of tweens for generalisability. The survey used random-digit-

dialling and computer-assisted telephone interviewing methods.

### Attitudes toward physical activity

Three psychosocial scales were developed from the 15 attitude and belief items contained in the longitudinal survey:

- Outcome expectations (beliefs about the benefits of participating in physical activities)
- Self-efficacy (confidence to overcome barriers to engaging in physical activities)
- Social influences (influences of family and peers)

### Process

The process evaluation included activities to measure reach and to monitor implementation of promotions and experiential marketing activities. It used qualitative and quantitative methods to ensure the campaign's activities, promotions and events were implemented as planned. The data was used to track the campaign's progress and adjust marketing strategies.

## Results

### Initial

After one year, tweens' unprompted awareness of VERB™ was 17 per cent and prompted awareness was 57 per cent. Among tweens aware of VERB™, 61 per cent reported physical activity on the previous day in 2004, while 46 per cent of those unaware of the campaign reported previous-day physical activity. Tweens who reported being aware of VERB™ engaged in 3.9 weekly sessions of free-time activity in 2004, whereas those with no VERB™ awareness reported 3 session.

The VERB™ campaign had a dose-response effect on outcome expectations and an awareness effect – children who were aware of VERB™ averaged a scale score of 10.07 compared with a score of 9.71 among

children who were unaware of VERB. Positive campaign effects were also detected for the two other psychosocial scales, social influences and self-efficacy.

#### *Final*

In 2006, 28 per cent of children aged 9 to 13 had unprompted recall of VERB™ and 47 per cent recalled VERB™ after prompting.

The positive dose-response effects for previous-day physical activity were found for tweens across all three years – 2004, 2005 and 2006. Children’s reports of free-time physical activity in the past week showed a significant association with campaign exposure in 2004 and 2005, but not in 2006. Organised physical activity consistently failed to be significantly associated with campaign exposure, which did not surprise campaign planners because organised activity was not a targeted behaviour due to the many barriers of organised sport (such as transportation and fees). In 2004, 2005 and 2006, the more that tweens saw the campaign, the more positive their scale scores for outcome expectations, self-efficacy and social influences.

For Cohort One (baseline) youths, positive dose-response associations were found for free-time physical activity and outcome expectations in 2006. As frequency of exposure to VERB™ increased, teenagers aged 13 to 17 reported more free-time physical activity sessions in the week prior to the survey, ranging from 2 sessions for those unexposed to the campaign to 5 sessions for those exposed every day. Likewise, as exposure increased, outcome expectations among teens aged 13 to 17 grew more positive. As with the other two cohorts, organised physical activity was not significantly associated with the campaign.

#### **Secondary analyses**

##### *Augmented advertising*

An analysis was conducted to examine the impact of additional marketing activities and

advertising in six communities. After two years, children in the high-dose communities reported higher awareness and understanding of VERB™, greater self-efficacy, more sessions of free-time physical activity per week, and were more active the day before being surveyed than children in the comparison group who received the average national dose.

##### *Parents of tweens*

YMCLS data was used to explore the effects of the VERB™ campaign on parents. More than 50 per cent of parents were aware of VERB™ by the third year of the campaign. Awareness of VERB™ was predictive of positive attitudes about physical activity for all tweens, belief in the importance of physical activity for their own children, and the number of days parents were physically active with their children.



After five years of funding, the campaign ended in 2006 leaving a lasting legacy of how branding a behaviour and using marketing strategies can impact on public health objectives. The final evaluation and lessons learned were distributed to stakeholders and partners and an article about the VERB™ campaign was published in a special edition of the America Journal of Preventative Medicine.

An outcome paper published in 2010 highlighted that the campaign has had a sustained effect on the first cohort of 13- to 17-year-olds despite no longer being targeted by the campaign. This provides some support for the sustainability the campaign was trying to achieve through encouraging young people to internalise its physical activity messages.

“The fact that children who were 13 to 17 and were in our original cohort still have strong

images of the VERB™ brand, and it's still having some effects in that group, is what we would call sustained effect. I have students all the time in my classes that are 21 and remember the VERB™ commercials.” (Marian Huhman, Lead on VERB™ Evaluation)

### Lessons learned

Initially, VERB™ delivered broad social messages to tweens, encouraging them to be physically active and socially involved (such as taking dance lessons with other tweens, joining the orchestra or debate club). However, about six months after the campaign was launched it was observed that combining physical activity and pro-social messages was confusing and sent a mixed message to tweens to be both physically active and sedentary. As a result, the campaign became focused on only one message and outcome objective – that of becoming physically active.

The initial, highly protective positioning of VERB™ as a campaign 'for-kids-by-kids' resulted in a delay in building support for VERB™ among partner organisations and professional colleagues. In retrospect, a PR strategy to inform and establish an understanding of VERB™ as a tweens' marketing initiative, as well as information about how partners could support the campaign's goals, might have been helpful. While campaign strategists did this internally within the CDC, attempts to protect the 'coolness' of VERB™ for tweens led to neglecting the importance of timely outreach to adults to gain their early buy-in. Doing so may have allowed grassroots and community support for the campaign to be built more effectively and quickly.

“A lesson that should be taken away from the VERB™ campaign is that communities can successfully leverage a national campaign without confusing the target or diminishing the brand, but you have to work with them and give

the community clear guidelines on using the brand to ensure consistency with the national brand and messages. Work with community coalitions which are already together so you don't have to work with all the developmental parts of getting a coalition going, which takes so long.” (Marian Huhman, Lead on VERB™ Evaluation)

Evaluation results provided vital feedback to make adjustments to the campaign strategy. For example, the first year's findings suggested that VERB™ saw more success and influence over 9- to 10-year-olds. Planners reasoned that VERB™ influenced this younger tween population because of its focus on social and friendship aspects of physical activity, stating 'getting active is fun'. Advertisements developed for the subsequent campaign years placed a larger influence on the mastery, inclusiveness and fun competition that resonates more soundly with 11- to 13-year-olds.

From the outset, VERB™ looked at both individual and structural changes. VERB™ advertisements targeted individual behaviours, yet the team believed that for behaviour change to be sustainable, communities had to remove environmental and structural barriers that inhibit physical activity. The CDC's partnership team worked to foster relationships with communities and organisations that serve youth. It took a few years for the partnership efforts to begin to have traction and to develop successful techniques to leverage the national brand at the local level. Over time, the campaign developed non-monetary assets that could be shared with communities, allowing communities to bring the campaign home and create ownership. Some of the communities that launched their own VERB™ branded programmes have continued, despite the end of the national campaign in 2006.