

Seduction by Soccer Ball



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This may be the toughest challenge in marketing: selling a product or service to people who see no value in it and no need for it, and in fact have no desire to hear about it. How can you get them to listen?

WiRED International, a small San Francisco based non-profit organization trying to help reduce the high incidence of AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections in Kenya, found a way: soccer balls.

The toughest audience to attract to health education is young men. They don't see themselves ever getting sick, they often don't think ahead, and they don't like the idea of sitting in a health training session for an hour or two. And in too many cases, they don't know anything about the cause and prevention of things like sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

But, in Kenya as in much of the world, they do know about, and love, the game of soccer.

So, WiRED director Gary Selnow, Ph.D., headed to Kisumu, a small city near the Ugandan border, with a batch of soccer balls and potentially lifesaving presentation materials.

Lacking enough of the real thing, soccer teams in that area often practice with homemade balls, which are a patchwork of newspapers and tape. It's hardly ideal for perfecting one's

technique.



So, here was the deal: to get a soccer ball, the adult team leaders had to agree to bring in their players for a health education session on sexually transmitted infections. The program was set up and run by two local WiRED staffers, Denis Onyango and Joseph Otiende.

Dr. Selnow was delighted with the results, noting, “I sat in on that session and was intrigued by the fixed attention of the audience as Joseph went through detailed and often graphic displays of the most common STIs. During the Q and A sessions, it became evident that these young men had never had a frank discussion about STIs—what causes them, their signs and symptoms, treatments and, in some cases, the irreversible consequences of contracting these diseases.”

Dr. Selnow now concludes that sports offer a way to introduce young men to health issues—first STIs, then a range of topics including family planning, diet and exercise, basic anatomy, and illness fundamentals. Moving forward, WiRED will explore partnerships with U.S.-based sports teams to help foster health training opportunities in the low-resource regions in which WiRED works. Previous and current locations include the Middle East, Asia, and Central and South America in addition to Africa.

You can learn more about WiRED’s work or donate to this worthy cause by logging on to www.wiredinternational.org.

About the Author: Often referred to as “The Dean of Media Trainers,” Virgil is considered one of the world’s foremost communication experts. In a 30-year career that has covered

26 countries on five continents, he has provided coaching and counsel to heads of some of the world's largest corporations and government leaders. Virgil is a prolific writer and speaker. His book, *World Class Communication: how great CEOs win with the public, shareholders, employees, and the media*, written with his son Ken, was named one of the 25 best business books of 2012. His column, *In the C-Suite*, appears in every quarterly issue of the *Public Relations Strategist* and is read by leaders of major public relations agencies and global heads of public relations of large companies. He has written or been featured in articles that have appeared in *The New York Times*, *The International Herald Tribune*, *Reuters*, *Investors Business Daily*, and numerous professional publications. Two of his speeches have been reprinted in the prestigious *Vital Speeches of the Day*. Prior to founding *Virgil Scudder & Associates* in 1990, Virgil headed the media training units of two of the world's largest public relations firms, *Hill & Knowlton* and *Carl Byoir & Associates*. Earlier, he was an award-winning news broadcaster at major radio and television networks and stations in New York City. He was a first-night Broadway drama critic for six years during that period, broadcasting reviews on NBC's all-news radio network and all-news WINS radio.