

PlayCleanGo: Marketing to Protect Native Plants

The Challenge:

Invasive plants such as garlic mustard, buckthorn, and others can take over local ecosystems if left unchecked, putting native plants at risk. People often unwittingly spread invasive plants on shoes and other equipment in part due to limited knowledge or understanding of the issue. Lack of agency coordination can slow down responses to the threat. With proper education, we can all be part of the solution.

The Solution:

In 2008, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MN DNR) conducted social research, including surveys and focus groups, to compile background information and develop an education plan about invasive species. They took their data and reports to a branding firm to design a logo and develop content for public awareness multimedia materials.

In 2012, they officially launched the project "[PlayCleanGo: Stop Invasive Species in Your Tracks](#)". The entire campaign is based on social research and social marketing, a science that focuses on changing and encouraging sustainable public behaviors. Initially, they provided free tools (videos, PSAs, vendor and partner packets, an image library, ad library, and other content) that partners could use to change public behaviors in their areas. Eventually, under guidance from the North American Invasive Species Management Association (NAISMA), their many partners took over ad development and distribution. Over the years, they used three USDA Forest Service competitive grants totaling \$449,340 along with 50/50 matching funds from state and local entities greatly exceeding that amount. The partners recently competed successfully for Forest Service funding through an additional Landscape Scale Restoration grant. Partners included the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Wisconsin Department of Transportation, and Wisconsin First Detector Network, among others.



A young boy uses a PlayCleanGo boot brush station to scrape off debris possibly containing invasive plant matter from his boot. (Courtesy photo by North American Invasive Species Management Association)

Resulting Benefits:

Private citizenry are often unaware of invasive species issues, and local outreach and education efforts can be inadequate in bringing widespread attention. This marketing project provided a recognizable brand that people could identify, along with information tools placed strategically for maximum public awareness effect. When provided with unifying outreach materials, grassroots efforts were found to be very nimble. "The more often the public sees a brand, the more it becomes a memory tool," said Susan Burks, a now retired MN DNR invasive species program coordinator who spearheaded the campaign. "It becomes not just a recognizable brand, but also a trigger for sustainable behaviors." When used across political boundaries, the brand and desired sustainable behaviors are greatly reinforced.

Sharing Success:

Since its inception, more than 650 partner organizations and communities across the United States, Canada, and Mexico have joined forces with the initiative. These partners provided suites of informational posters, handouts, and other information that organizers can share with the public to further their efforts. NAISMA is now the national campaign manager and is coordinating with its Canadian and Mexican counterparts.

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—Susan Burks



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