

Viewpoint Q&A

Professor Linda Brennan

Can you tell us about yourself and your current role?

I am currently a Professor in the School of Media and Communication at RMIT University. As part of my role, I run the Communication Collaboratory (aka the Co-Lab), supervise PhD students and teach research methods as well as work with the Research Cafeteria.

What attracted you to social marketing?

When I was first enrolled as a mature age student, I realised that mainstream marketing was a bit too profit-oriented for my soul and I needed to find something to do with my skills that did not involve what I saw as manipulating people into buying more 'things'. Social marketing was just coming into the world (yes, I am that old) and it has only grown since then. It has been great to see what was a 'flaky' idea grow into a well-established profession and academic discipline that is making headway in a turbulent world.

What are the most satisfying parts of your work as a social marketing researcher?

The most satisfying parts of my work are making a real difference with my work. Being an academic researcher who works with industry, I am uniquely privileged to be able to work in collaboration with others on long term projects. I get to work with great people and use my skills to change policy and practice with my research.

Can you share with us a project that you are worked on that went particularly well?

One of the most exciting projects we have worked on recently has been the [Re-licious project](#) where an interdisciplinary team of social marketers, health professionals and nutritionists worked with young adolescents on co-creating a recipe book for using leftovers. That way they could reduce food waste and generate healthy eating habits. The results from this project have shown us that co-creation is a great way to get people involved in solving their own problems within their own systems.



In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges faced by social marketers and/or social marketing today?

In my view, the biggest challenge we face is that of relevance. Is social marketing relevant to the people we are trying to influence? Increasingly it is not. The ability of people to 'tune out' is growing. Sometimes, I worry, that all we are doing is adding to the volume of noise. It is difficult to take a long-term view when there are short term pressures to 'succeed'. Funding bodies must answer to boards who want results 'now' and most of my work in systems needs time horizons of at least 5 years for demonstrable results.

Finally, what tips do you have for other social marketing researchers?

Be patient and be kind. Keep educating yourself. Think creatively and collaboratively. Adjust your goals to suit the reality you face. Lastly, don't benchmark yourself against others, as it is not safe to assume that the others know what they are doing more than you do when it comes to innovating alternatives.



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