Strategy Document

By Jared Patterson
More than Drugs is a new NGO that has started up in Australia. Their purpose is to campaign for drug policy reform in Australia and further. Their point of difference from similar NGO’s is that they recognise the empowerment of criminals through the drug trade and the repercussions of this, as the most important flaw in the War on Drugs. They have a partnership with UK organisation Transform, and are working in tandem with their campaign - Count the Costs.
Illicit drug policy is a contentious topic at the current time, with different levels of activity occurring at a governmental level around the globe. For example, recently policy reform for marijuana has happened in some American states, suggesting a beginning of the end of prohibition. In the grand scheme of things these changes are a small drop in the ocean, and Western societies in particular still hold a conservative stance on drug use. Part of the reason for this is a widespread misunderstanding of both drug use and the repercussions of drug policy reform, as well as media and governmental propagation that drugs are morally wrong. The stigma fuelled by the media’s representation of drugs and drug users, falls in line with the current and past ‘normalised’ and accepted agenda of the War on Drugs.

The War on Drugs began as a political tactic by the Nixon government, with a hidden agenda to persecute the members of society who had opposing political views. Those were the anti-war left, who could be stereotyped as ‘Hippies’, and the Black population. The two groups had well known involvement in using marijuana and heroin respectively. The War on Drugs gave Nixon the power to disrupt these communities and create negative stigma towards them, and their values, though anti-drug association and propagation.

The War on Drugs was essentially built on a lie, which makes it unsurprising why it has become a complete and utter failure. It spiralled out of control by unintentionally creating a lucrative drug trade to empower criminals, which increases the size of the drug trade, which has demanded more hard-line responses, and so on, and on. The disastrous impact of the War on Drugs on the recent history of the world, and current global human issues is undeniable. Yet this is not common knowledge. It is not widely understood that many global issues are a product of drug prohibition.
As far as drug policy reform goes there are three main avenues for a government to pursue. These are drug Depenalisation, Decriminalisation, and Legalisation. The first two are more popular in terms of support, media discussion and the number of social campaigns in favour. Despite this, these two policy reforms do nothing to extinguish the drug trade, and only tackle issues in our backyard, with the end users of the drugs. Some of these approaches ignore the wider global issues involved, perhaps appealing to the Western lack of empathy for those in other countries, in less fortunate situations. There intention is honest and they mean well. Any drug policy reform would indeed be a success, however in terms of the bigger picture Depenalisation and Decriminalisation only scratches the surface.

At first glance, Drug Legalisation seems extreme, yet the main differences with Decriminalisation is that it actually works to shut down the illegal drug trade. By creating a legal market, with substances controlled by the government, there is no reason for the illegal drug trade to exist. This means that the billions of dollars that makes its way into the hands of criminals is stopped. Without this funding, criminal organisations will lose power, and all associated atrocities will decline. Drug legalisation has the potential to release the criminal stranglehold on developing countries.
Evaluation

Drug Policy Alliance
http://www.drugpolicy.org/

The Drug Policy Alliance (DPA) are a group in the United States focused on reducing the harms of drug use and drug prohibition. Members of the DPA are involved in the legislative process, working behind the scenes to achieve their goals. They also encourage communication between supporters and legislators to support their stance on the issue. The communication of the DPA is mainly through their website, which is rich in content, reasoning and facts that support their argument. To benefit from the content a user would have to spend a considerable amount of time and effort navigating through the site, which has over 50 insightful pages addressing different aspects and issues of the war on drugs and drug policy reform. The amount of content and information is great for having a coherent backing and evidence for their arguments. It is also arranged neatly and logically, which is effective in terms of educating their audience. However the downfall is that all the content is unlikely to either be read, or fully processed by their audience. There seems to be no overriding communication design strategy. The DPA use social media to engage with their audience, this is mainly through the posting of topical articles, blog links or links to donate. There is a weak call for people to view the website. The wealth of information they have acquired is unused in their social media, which should be their main source of content. The response rate and involvement of their social media content is also proportionally low, meaning that they have many disengaged supporters. For example the average likes of their last 10 Facebook post’s is around 700. The total of engaged ‘likers’ is just over 150,000. That means they having less than 0.5% active engagement with their Facebook posts. Part of the reason for this is that they post content that appeals mainly to people that already support their cause, rather than content that seeks to actively expand and grow their cause. They have enormous amounts of content, but it is too unrefined to be effective as ‘advertisement.’ Their website also requires the audience to be committed to learning comprehensively about the different aspects of the issue, rather than entice their knowledge.
Evaluation

Stop the Harm
https://stoptheharm.org/
Stop the Harm has quite an engaging visual language, which represents the campaign tone, epitomised by their tagline of “Demand Drug Policy Reform. The campaign is backed by a number of organisations that are seeking drug policy reform. Stop the Harm’s websites main goal is to give people the opportunity to take action through various initiatives. Like the DPA they have their information broken up into different pages referring to the ‘issues’ of the drug trade and prohibition. This website and organisation does not have a great ability to educate or convince new people to follow their cause, it is more tailored for those who already support the topic. Their social media pages are set up in a similar way to the DPA, however have significantly less followers. The intention of these pages seem to be more so about maintaining and supporting the online community of existing followers, rather than actively seek to engage new ones.
Evaluation

**Transform**
http://www.tdpf.org.uk/campaigns
Transform is an organisation that has various campaigns against drug prohibition and the drug trade that focus on different parties / groups of people. Count the Costs is the most relevant campaign shares similarities with both the DPA and Stop the Harm. Count the cost’s has divided the issues surrounding drug prohibition into 8 topics. These are summarised on the website through 8 individual pages, each with an in depth and comprehensive PDF document. In terms of education, Transform have offered the best format, yet still have the same issues as the DPA with the amount of content, and connecting the issues together. By breaking the issues apart, it is easier to focus on the specific information, however the scale and relationships become distant from their one key goal, of achieving drug policy reform. Transform’s social media presence is similar to that of Stop the Harm.
Problem

More than Drugs needs a way to effectively communicate and educate their audience about the global implications of the War on Drugs. The problem with existing campaigns is that they are not effectively engaging with the public, and growing strongly enough to be relevant for global action. Part of the reason for this is their social media strategy, which is flawed by a failure of communication pieces. The current information that they offer is mainly through the form of extensive web pages or PDF documents. The issue that they struggle with is processing the massive amounts of relevant information into a concise argument that supports the end of drug prohibition. The fact of the matter is that the problems with the War on Drugs, is massive. It has extended into and influenced so many people and events in recent history, and this information cannot be ignored. Additionally displaying or conveying the overwhelming amount of information, is beneficial in the education of the audience, because it is an overwhelming issue. This illustrates the scale of the issue, and the importance of attempting to fix it.
Strategy

Audience

Because this is a global issue the audience is wide ranging in terms of spatial location. The countries where policy reform would most have the most impact is in the developed world, for those countries are the ones fuelling the war on drugs. Therefore the audience could include people living North America, UK, developed Europe, Australia/ NZ. Whilst applicable for a large scale initiative, this initial campaign will only target Australians. The type of people targeted are those who have left, sympathetic to the left, or balanced political ideals. People from the lower and middle class will be targeted, because they are more likely to sympathise with the effects of the war on drugs, than the upper class. There is also more people in terms of the population breakdown in the lower and middle class, which is important as we are trying to achieve policy reform in democratic countries.

As outlined in the excerpt to the right, Australians are informed and support some forms of drug policy reform, but not legalisation. This could be attributed to stigma and the fact that they are uninformed about legalisation.

‘Most Australians support some form of decriminalisation (caution, civil penalty or diversion) for all drugs. Only 5% of Australians support a prison sentence for cannabis possession, with support for prison for ecstasy (14%), methamphetamine (21%) and heroin (24%) also relatively low. One in four Australians (26%) believe that personal use of cannabis should be legal and 69% support a change in legislation to allow the use of cannabis for medical purposes. Some 42% believe that a caution, warning or no action would be appropriate for possession of small amounts of cannabis. Between 5% and 7% of Australians support legalisation of other drugs.

It’s becoming increasingly clear that the illegal status of drugs causes significant harms to users and the community. There is increasing recognition that a new approach is needed.’

Strategy

The method of communication that will be used is a power map variation / information pamphlet. The map will illustrate and educate the audience on the issue in one condensed document. The benefit of the map is that it can convey different levels of meaning. The audience can gain a general understanding of the topic quickly, but are also able to read and process information with more detail at their discretion.

Supporting media will be an online webpage that allows the audience to sign petitions directed at their respective politicians.

The map will be available to view online, with links through to a website from social media pages. The map is only the document that the campaign will use to educate and inform the audience, the map is not the entire campaign.

Spokespeople will initially promote the campaign through Australian television news and current affairs programs, such as Q + A and the Project.

Stage 1 - Australian Focus
Printed map handouts at targeted locations.
Television promotion of campaign through existing news and current affairs programs.
Radio promotion through existing news and current affairs programs.
Press promotion through existing online and print media outlets.
Online globally access through social media, however no promotional focus.

Stage 2 - International Expansion
See stage one but tailored for countries in North America, UK and developed Europe.
**Strategy**

There are various campaign goals that would account to different measures of success.
1- Reduce the status quo around drug use and the drug trade.
2- Reduce the status quo around drug policy reform.
3- Recognise the drug trade as a global humanitarian crisis.
4- Promote discussion and support in favour of drug legalisation.

**The overall aim is to contribute to drug legalisation in Australia, and other countries.**

A scenario that depicts this happening is as follows.

**Scenario**

A member of the community will be informed about the More than Drugs organisation in one of the following ways - Television, Radio, Media, Physical interaction / handout. They will be informed that more information and petitions are available online through the website or social media pages. If they were not given a map as a physical handout they will be able to access it online. The person will be educated by the and motivated to sign the petition to their politicians. With enough signatures the politicians will recognise the campaign and issue as relevant, and will be obliged to discuss drug legalisation. Will enough public demand, politicians will support drug policy reform. Drugs will be legalised in Australia. Drug legalisation will be recognised internationally as a necessary policy reform. International support for Drug legalisation will grow, using Australia as an example, More than Drugs will continue to campaign internationally through this period. Drug Legalisation will occur in enough countries to see a significant decrease in the Drug trade and associated criminal activities. The drug trade will be abolished. Countries previously maligned by the drug trade will begin to rebuild under stable governments. The overall aim is to contribute to drug legalisation in Australia, and other countries.
mapping the war on drugs

more than drugs

policies in reform

sign the petition

the scale of the drug trade is enormous. it has become well established since the mid 20th century. the resulting criminal empowerment has caused sorrow and turmoil and undoubtably shaped the world for the worse.

as with many global issues, individual action can seem hopeless. fortunately ending the war on drugs is fundamentally simple, and your role is integral. all we have to do is help shift the status quo by supporting drug legalisation. we need to spread the word by informing our friends and family. our leaders need the publics backing to commit to policy change.

so what can you do? sign the petition for your politicians online at morethandrugs.com/petition

legalised drug system

an alternate past

one of the most profound, long term impacts of the war on drugs has been the destabilisation of developing countries. civil wars and corruption fueled by the drug trade have squandered the epidemiologic transition particularly in african, latin american and central asian countries.

simply, the development of a country comes from a stable government and economy, that hosts money into public services such as health and education. better health care improves life expectancy and increases infant and child mortality rates. governments can provide better drugs and addictions services through the public sector. this reduces the need for drugs that primarily promote crime and violence in the streets.

in overview the war on drugs has contributed to the war on crime in all of these countries. the goal of war on crime is not the eradication of crime, but rather maintaining peace for the people. the approach is the same as the drug trade. by managing crime and drugs in the streets, the war does not end crime.

an alternate future

legalisation of drugs is an uncommon concept in everyday society, such has the war on drugs been so engrained in our lives. the simplicity of the system is profound, especially when compared to what is currently in place.

no war on drugs?

think about every global issue that currently exists.

think about every shocking human event that has occurred since the mid 20th century.

think about the people who caused the problems.

think about the people who suffered.

think about the criminals enriched by the drug trade.

think about all the people who have lost their lives.

now think about what the world would look like if all this never happened.
MORE THAN DRUGS

PLEASURE
PAIN
ESCAlP
SHAKEN
ENJOY
DESPAIR
DRUGS
LIFE

AN ALTERNATE
FUTURE
AN ALTERNATE
PAST

DEVELOPED
COUNTRIES

CRIMINAL
FUNDING

DRUGS = MONEY = POWER

INTERNATIONALLY, the threat of drug use is a multi-sectoral problem, requiring a comprehensive and coordinated approach. 

GOVERNMENT

OFFICIALS

MIDDLEMEN

MUGGERS

DEMAND

SUPPLY

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