



Mandela MarketPlace: Healthy Retail Case Study

Introduction

With the proliferation of diet related disease, communities across the country are seeking means to transform the health landscape and create food secure neighborhoods. Mandela MarketPlace's Healthy Retail Network was created to support an evolutionary movement in West Oakland to make this a reality, securing residents' right to access fresh, affordable and healthy food. The Healthy Retail Network works in partnership with participating corner store owners to improve their product mix and deliver produce biweekly from Mandela's network of farmers, creating more local access points for healthy food, while supporting thriving small businesses.

History and Motivation

Though grocery store chains served West Oakland in the past, supermarket flight to more affluent neighborhoods left the community without access to healthy food. As of 2005, there were 350 corner stores licensed to sell liquor in Oakland for a population of 400,000 residents – or one store for every 1,150 people. In West Oakland, the concentration is even greater – with one corner store licensed to sell liquor for every 300 residents. There is also an ever-increasing presence of unhealthy fast food chains. In a 2011 survey, West Oakland residents shopped at corner stores 3 or more times a week.

Through a strengths-based resource mapping project, West Oakland neighbors recognized these corner stores—predominantly small family-owned shops—as assets to be harnessed for their food access potential. Beginning in 2003, Mandela MarketPlace built relationships with corner store owners to encourage them to sell healthy, fresh food. Over the last few years, staff have worked with more than eight local stores to pilot, and then operate, a refined produce delivery service program through the Healthy Retail Network. The network supports local, family-owned businesses that are a part of the existing social fabric of a neighborhood, helping them implement healthy changes in the store, that translates to improved health throughout the community. By delivering produce to neighborhood corner stores, the Healthy Retail Network increases local access points for nutritious food, making produce and grocery items readily available in the places that community members frequent the most. In addition to increasing access to healthy food, the Healthy Retail Network also provides complementary services to encourage consumption, which include improving the store environment, marketing, and nutrition education. Most importantly, we see the power of this network to serve as a





stabilizing force in a community facing historic disinvestment and housing displacement as a result of ballooning costs of living.

Program Elements

Mandela MarketPlace's Healthy Retail team delivers produce biweekly: 15-20 produce items in predetermined quantities for each store. Deliveries occur every Tuesday and Friday, during which time delivery staff remove unsold produce and replace items that were sold. While servicing the store, the staff can educate the customers about consumption, as well as engage the store employees on produce handling and pricing guidelines. The team advises our partner stores on inventory updates and product mixes, based on both feedback from customer surveys and nutrition guidelines for each product category (canned, frozen, healthy beverages, healthy snacks, etc.). We also work with the stores to determine the best placement for the sale of healthy food items, moving the alcohol to the back of the store and ensuring the tobacco is behind the counter.

Our community nutrition educator facilitates monthly health education events in front of the stores, offering fresh food samples along with recipes, coupons and giveaways to promote the healthy eating and the availability of nutritious items in the store. These demos are set-up in front of the store intentionally to reach the local community at the point of purchase.

In addition to community outreach, Mandela MarketPlace's Healthy Retail team markets the stores and their healthy offerings through a targeted branding and awareness campaign. We have marketing collateral including facade posters, sandwich boards, recipes, price tags and shelf talkers, and we also work with the store owners to develop custom materials and place them in the store. As a community-driven organization, we help the store foster community partnerships with local schools, apartment buildings and faith-based institutions to sustain customer support.

Our work with stores is informed by data and evaluation. Customer intercept surveys provide valuable feedback to the store owner about changes in the store, including specific products and activities the customers prefer. Transaction tallies make it easy for stores to track the number of produce purchases in a defined period even if stores don't have an advanced point of sales system. As the produce service providers, Mandela MarketPlace's Healthy Retail team also collects detailed sales data on each variety of produce stocked. We are able to stock items in quantities that will sell between service visits.



"As food trends change, more and more of my customers are asking for healthy foods, for the fresh fruits and veggies. It's like a trickle-down thing- if it's in the expensive stores, why can't it be at my store, too?"

- Ali Mohamed,
Oakland corner store owner





Impact

Mandela MarketPlace's healthy retail program is expanding. We added two new stores in 2015, and are planning to add four more in 2016, for a total of ten stores by the end of this year. Sales at our new partner stores grow steadily over time as the owner implements changes in advertising, product selection and the layout of the store. The network has sustained through change, including the transition of ownership in two stores. It was the customer's demand for the produce at the two stores that ensured Mandela MarketPlace could establish a partnership with the new owners. Network store owners are interested in referring us to their other stores or their family's stores as we expand our work in Oakland.

Over 36,500 individual pieces of produce sold through our healthy retail network in 2015. Broken down by item, for example, our network stores sold over 120 cases of bananas. We delivered over 38 varieties of seasonal fruits and vegetables throughout the year, maintaining an inventory of at least 15 varieties at each store. Based on our 2015 purchase data, in one day, eighty customers bought fresh fruits or vegetables in six of our partner stores.

Mandela MarketPlace's healthy retail network has achieved this success by prioritizing our relationships with the store owners, staff and customers. Our regular presence in the store builds trust and allows for stores to implement incremental change at a pace they're comfortable with. As we expand, we are challenged to create an ever clearer pathway for stores to make healthy changes. We also continue to offer valuable technical assistance for owners to grow their customer base.

