MARKETING TRAFFIC SAFETY AS A CONSUMER PRODUCT IN VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

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Abstract.

The State of Victoria, Australia has placed a strong emphasis on high profile public education as the key element in achieving permanent reductions in the road toll. The Transport Accident Commission has developed a communication strategy to compliment the law enforcement initiatives discussed elsewhere. The campaign is unashamedly provocative in order to force a fundamental change in thinking about attitudes to drinking/driving, speed and concentration on the driving task. The aim was market road safety as a desirable consumer product in order to achieve lasting changes in attitude and behaviour. This campaign has been powerful and effective. In random survey, 92% of people are able to recall the material unaided and 98% approve the content even if they found it personally disturbing. This community support has been maintained over two years. The campaign has had a total budget of $AUS25 million.

1 Introduction

Victoria is the second most populous state of Australia, located in the south-eastern corner of the vast continent. It has a population of 4.5 million people, most of whom live in the sprawling capital city of Melbourne. There are 2.9 million registered vehicles in the state which gives us one of the highest car ownership rates in the world. With widely separated communities and sprawling cities, Australians are very dependent on their cars. As communities we have paid dearly for our personal mobility.

The Traffic Accident Corporation (TAC) is the single agency responsible for the compulsory third party insurance of all vehicles in Victoria. It is Australia’s largest general insurer, with assets approaching $4 billion, 3
million customers and a specific responsibility to prevent transport accidents. The task of reducing road trauma was complicated by the huge variety of road safety ads, public relations campaigns and good corporate citizen messages, that had cluttered the market.

2 The Road Safety Advertising Strategy

2.1 Background Research

In 1989 Victoria’s road toll reached 777 and all indications were that the toll would continue to rise into the 1990s. TAC Insurance, became involved in road safety as a result of its role as the provider of compulsory transport accident, personal injury insurance in Victoria. TAC became committed to selling the traffic safety message. The campaign would have to cut through this confusion of messages, and establish a new, single-minded focus for road safety.

As a starting point, we tested a wide range of road safety ads from both Australia and overseas. The research identified a series of fundamental 'DOs' and 'DON'Ts':

THE "DOs"

Do-be as shocking as you like.
Do-be as emotional as possible.
Do-ensure that any communication leaves us thinking that "this could happen to me"
Do-emphasise the link between drink/drive, speed, and real accidents.

THE "DON'Ts"

Don’t-concentrate on twisted metal
Don’t-bore us with statistics
Don’t-lecture us
Don’t-threaten us with authority, uniforms or financial penalties
Don’t -suggest that we cannot have a drink

Let’s take a look at two of the ads from our campaign. The first shows a young man distressed after an accident in which his girlfriend is seriously injured. He is intoxicated and has to face her family. The second depicts a young mother distraught with the body of her child struck down by a
speeding motorist. We took the decision to market road safety as though we were marketing a consumer product. A product that had to survive in a tough, cynical market.

We focused on the principal causes of road trauma - initially, drink driving and speeding. The first task was to develop brand names:

- **Drink driving:** "If you drink, then drive, you’re a bloody idiot".
- **Speed:** "Don’t fool yourself, speed kills".

The research indicated that the key was to confront the community in a way that would strike deep at core emotions, personal fears and feelings of vulnerability. Prior to this campaign, the greatest single deterrent to drink/driving was the "rational" fear of losing your licence. But only six weeks in to the campaign, the "emotional" fear of finding yourself responsible for the death of another human being had become a far more powerful deterrent. It was a proposition that compelled our target market to buy our product.

### 2.2 Advertising

The next task was to segment our target market. With drivers of different age, sex and driving experience, there was a real need to develop specific messages to target specific problem groups within the community.

Our first advertisement was targeted at male drink/drivers, under 25 years. The second targeted drivers who try to justify excessive speed by blaming the speed of surrounding traffic. The third advertisement was targeted at young, female Provisional Licence drivers who tend to speed. Then we targeted undisciplined male drivers, under 20 years of age, particularly in the country. Finally, a seat belt campaign was targeted at males and females in their mid twenties.

No single ad, no matter how powerful, could ever effectively address the whole problem. Merchandising became a key part of our strategy. Our aim was to build the same kind of market presence for our brand names as high profile brands, like Mars, Coca-Cola and Macdonald’s. We have used extensive outdoor promotion, including fixed and mobile billboards, strong, visible promotional support for major sporting events, like football, and The 1990 World Motorcycle Grand Prix.
2.3 Community Support

Community debate was another key element of our strategy. Through close media contact, the drink/drive and speed campaigns became 'hard' news and as far as road safety campaigns go, the focus of unprecedented media attention. Throughout the campaign, one of Australia's most respected researchers tracked market reaction. We have conducted seven tracking studies with each study involving interviews with more than 600 adults in Victorian metro and country areas. Within 4 weeks of the first ad going to air we achieved an unprecedented 92% unaided recall. 25 months later, this figure had increased to 95%.

We offered respondents a series of statements, including the following, to measure the degree of community support:

"these ads may disturb me, but if powerful ads like that can help save lives, I'm all for running them ..."

97% of the community pledged their support for this campaign.

Our best evidence for effectiveness beyond reasonable doubt, lies in the fact that the critical statistics quoted today, are a matter of public record. But to prove the case, we offer a brief case history of just how effectively one of the ads worked in practice.

2.4 Effectiveness

Early in 1991 we made a strategic decision to give the campaign an 8-week break off-air. During the first 3 weeks, the road toll remained stable. But then we had 3 horror weekends in a row. 33 people died. More than double the number for the corresponding period in 1990. Not surprising, the community was outraged.

We immediately brought forward the launch of a concept called "Country Kids". It was targeted at first year drivers, 17 to 20 years of age who, in research, found it easier to identify with the problems of poor concentration and peer group distraction while behind the wheel, than to the problems of "drink/driving" or "speed".

During its first 3 weeks on-air, including the 1991 Easter holiday break, not one driver under the age of 20, died on Victorian roads. All the evidence suggests that when the ads are off-air, the road toll goes up. And when the ads are back on-air, the road toll comes down. We are beginning to conclude that road safety is not a rational, considered-purchase decision. Road Safety is an impulse decision that requires constant, high, top-of-mind product promotion.
3 Conclusions

The critical bottom line results: Victoria's road toll fell 29% to 548 in 1990; in 1991 the toll fell a further 8% to 503 - the lowest figure since 1953. So far this year, the road toll is down 23% on the same time last year and about 53% lower than the same time in 1989. Victoria has achieved one of the lowest death rates per 10,000 vehicles of any country or state in the world.

SUMMARY: WHY IS THIS CAMPAIGN REDUCING ROAD TRAUMA?

1. Consumer marketing approach

We were the first to market road safety as though it were a consumer product.

2. Major research component

We sought consumer involvement every step of the way. Through concept development, and then in measuring the effectiveness of communication against target audience.

3. Outstanding creative

We went to the edge to achieve the credibility and relevance that were critical to effective communication.

4. "Pull-through" media weight

We quickly learnt that consistent exposure to the message was required to cause long term behaviour change.
5. Strong Police enforcement

We cannot underestimate the importance of coordinating with Police activity. Nor the importance of Booze Buses, Speed Cameras and highly visible Police presence on our roads.

6. Community and media support

A critical factor in putting road safety on the social agenda and maintaining community debate. We quickly learnt that consistent exposure to the message was required to cause long term behaviour change.