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Operation Countdown

'Driving the Road Safety Message Home'

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Abstract

The Operation Countdown interactive multimedia bus, aims to spread the word about safe driving habits and reducing the state's road toll, to drivers of all ages.

The 12-metre Mercedes Benz bus has been transformed into a travelling bill board for road safety. It is decorated with eye catching road safety images and has an external DVD-linked plasma screen.

The mobile display vehicle is a valuable tool enabling Road Safety Awareness Unit members to deliver road safety presentations to audiences outside the Mobile Multi-Media Display Vehicle (MMDV).

Inside, the bus has another plasma screen and four information kiosks coupled to computers and LCD touch screens – all projecting road safety messages. The bus also features a static display, exploring the human, vehicle and environmental factors of road trauma.

“Our aim is to make people aware of some of the dangers they face when they are behind the wheel or as ordinary road users,”

“We hope that they will leave the bus with a better understanding of road safety issues and with a much higher level of road safety awareness.”

Background

Operation Countdown is a registered not for profit business which operates independent of Victoria Police and through its business networks provides assistance to Victoria Police by providing resources to delivering Road Safety messages throughout the State. This association between Operation

Countdown and Victoria Police has resulted in the supply of the Operation Countdown Mobile Multimedia Display Vehicle (MMDV) valued at \$750,000.00 at no cost to the Victoria Police budget.

Further details concerning the activities of Operation Countdown may be accessed via the Web site: <http://www.operationcountdown.com.au/index.htm>

The Board of Directors of Operation Countdown Limited consists of representatives of a variety of companies and senior Victorian Police. Operation Countdown Ltd receives sponsorship and services from organisations who want to be seen as responsible, committed and involved in this vital community issue. At the same time, Operation Countdown literally provides a road safety awareness display vehicle for that commitment to promote road safety to all Victorians. The original mobile display vehicle was a trailer towed by four wheel drive vehicle this vehicle was replaced with a truck and trailer combination which operated from 1990 until mid 2005 when it was retired. The display vehicles have been solely operated by members of the Victoria Police Road Safety Awareness Unit (RSAU) and travel around metropolitan and country Victoria imparting and educating the Victorian community on matters of road safety for all user groups.

The (MMDV) was officially launched by the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police, Ms Christine Nixon on 15 September 2005 at the National Freight Congress in Melbourne. The MMDV is a 2003 Mercedes Benz low floor rider bus that has been completely refurbished into a mobile Road Safety vehicle that travels the State of Victoria educating, raising awareness and imparting knowledge regarding Road Safety to all road users.

The MMDV and the unique funding source of this asset is put forward for consideration of the Prince Michael International Road Safety Award under the category of Improved Public Education.

Innovation

Victoria Police is the only state in Australia currently utilising a vehicle based display vehicle incorporating current state of the art technology to provide education and raise awareness of Road Safety to schools and community. The vehicle is staffed by a member of the RSAU enabling public interaction on road safety issues, relevant legislation and viewing of a collection of road safety statistics and images. The funding arrangement between Operation Countdown and Victoria Police has resulted in Victoria Police being provided with a high quality resource to assist its proactive approach to lowering the road toll.

External Vehicle Design:

The vehicle has an external design which has been planned to provide a striking contemporary road safety message avoiding commonly used appeals to emotion. A key message to the public is to ask them to consider their role in the overall road system "Are You Road Safe?" The design captures the full range of road user groups with the far side of the vehicle dedicated to the vulnerable road users i.e. pedestrians, cyclists, motor cyclists. The near side of the vehicle depicts interaction of the relatively more aggressive vehicles i.e. Trucks, buses and trams, with passenger vehicle being represented on either side of the display.

The design incorporates a number of subliminal road safety messages such as supervised child pedestrian activity, separated vehicle & pedestrian interaction as delineated by the use of police chequer band, use of personal protection equipment such as seat belts and helmet compliance.

Another worthwhile feature of the display vehicle is the programmable 'Mobitec' sign which can be set to a number of predetermined road safety messages which can be set as fixed messages or alternatively set to scroll through selected options.

Internal vehicle Design:

Internally the vehicle has been designed with two feature zones to maximise flow of pedestrian traffic with provision of static displays in the first zone located in the forward section of the display provides messages featuring the interacting role of human, vehicle and environmental factors that contribute to crash causation.

For those visitors seeking further involvement during their visit to the display, a series of road safety challenges are being developed with those attending the display able to test their knowledge on the interactive touch screen, staff rostered to the display have a range of DVD and Microsoft Power point resources relevant to the target audiences which can be selected for display on the plasma monitors whilst set up on display.

The vehicle has been designed to enable staff to deliver road safety presentations from either of it's two plasma screen monitors. There is ample storage of road safety brochures, pamphlets, posters and other paraphernalia located on the vehicle.

Future developments for the bus include satellite technology which will provide wireless linkage to the Operation Countdown web site.

Achievement

Development of the MMDV concept attracted support of a number of major sponsors Mercedes Benz Commercial Division sponsored the base vehicle to Operation Countdown, NEC sponsored the technological hardware components required for the computer based systems of this project a number of corporate sponsors provided finances necessary to fund other features of the project.

The MMDV has proven to be a highly sought after resource since being launched in October 2005. The RSAU has received many requests for the vehicle to support strategic Road Safety Initiatives state wide. The RSAU

has developed policy guidelines for allocation of the bus to attendance requests which has resulted in attendances being prioritised to events that can demonstrate strong road safety focus.

Road safety displays and presentations form an integral component of the Victorian Governments *Arrive Alive* Road Safety Strategy 2002-2007, “fostering greater community participation and partnership in improving road safety” Operation Countdown has utilised the business network of its directors to attract a broad range of quality business sponsors who share a vested interest in Road Safety outcomes to the MMDV program.

Treat et. al. (1979) and Haddon (1981) stated that reliance on any one approach to address the road injury problem is not useful or effective. What will work best is using a number of interventions or prevention strategies over different time frames and from each of the different fields – education, engineering and enforcement.

The Victorian approach of utilising a range of road safety countermeasures is arguably effective with the State enjoying relatively lower rates of road fatalities per head of population compared to other Australian states. Howard (2005)

Commitment

Operation Countdown has been committed to supporting Victoria Police since 1982. Until 1990, Operation Countdown was an annual Police operation to highlight the importance of vehicle road worthiness. In 1990 a program trust was established as trustee for Operation Countdown Limited. This company is limited by guarantee, does not have share capital and does not trade in its own right. The company was established as an association of free enterprise and Victoria Police, dedicated to the maximisation of support for road safety awareness.

Operation Countdown has funded vehicle based displays for use by Victoria Police for over 18 years this commitment has seen an evolution of display

vehicles from a 4WD vehicle towed trailer, heavy truck and trailer combination. to the current bus format.

Whilst travelling to events traffic following this vehicle are left in no doubt about the commitment of the sponsors to this program with sponsor support acknowledged with prominent display of sponsor logos on this travelling billboard for road safety.

Well researched

The Road Safety Awareness and Information Unit represent the primary proactive approach for Victoria Police road safety initiatives. The function of the unit encompasses the provision of interactive road safety information sessions and displays across the state. While a range of groups and information venues are addressed by the program, a key target is senior secondary school students who have, or are about to become independent drivers with elevated associated crash risk, as demonstrated in VicRoads crash Data analysis as presented by Howard, E.

The unit addresses more than 20,000 students per year and approximately 400 schools are visited in the year. Presentations are undertaken in co-operation with schools in association with other Pro-active pre-driver workshops etc. and whilst some large groups are addressed, the unit attempts to keep group sizes to no more than 50 or 100 students.

A police presenter provides a high quality computer based graphics and multi-media based presentation covering key aspects of the road toll, the involvement of speeding, alcohol, drugs and fatigue as contributing factors in crashes. Each program is concluded with a focus on risk taking and the consequences of unconsidered risky behaviour on the road. The unit presentations are supported by contemporary data on road crashes which represents timely & relevant information for the audience and contributes to high audience interaction. The focus on senior secondary student in the 17-18 year age bracket, together with the unit's activity as a visiting subject

matter expert means it is ideally placed to be an enrichment or enhancement of core teaching undertaken within the school.

Achievement

The MMDV has proven to be a highly sought after resource since being launched in September 2005 as at 31/3/2007 the MMDV has attended 32 requests and attracted 11,950 visitors.

Road Safety displays and presentation form an integral component of the Victorian Governments *Arrive Alive* Road Safety Strategy 2002 – 2007. Fostering greater community participation and partnership in improving road safety.

Operation Countdown has utilised the business network of it's directors to attract a broad range of quality business sponsors who share a vested interest in Road Safety outcomes to the MMDV program.

Replicability

The concept of a mobile display could be replicated elsewhere if desired, with trams, trains trucks and buses acting as appropriate base vehicles. The real benefit of the approach by Operation Countdown is that it attracts interaction of the business community to work in partnership with Road Safety Agencies to achieve improved community road safety awareness.

West Australia Police developed a purpose built pantechnicon dubbed 'RoadShow' for the purpose of providing a novel, exciting, interactive environment for all road users to gain an appreciation of the needs of other road users. The 'RoadShow' component of this project operated throughout the rural and remote areas of Western Australia. Whilst the concept for delivery of road safety information in a mobile display is similar, funding sources and business support to the program differ. Funding for the RoadShow project is derived from two separate sources, West Australian Police Service Internal Budget for Road Safety Section & Road Trauma Trust Fund Grant from Road Safety Council estimated cost of \$320,000.

Sustainability

Operation Countdown is administered by a board of directors, it is a not for profit organisation and relies solely on sponsorship for its continued operation the financial viability of Operation Countdown is scrutinised annually through independent Audit and ASIC reporting. Longevity of the program is demonstrated with growth of assets and income stream.

Future Initiatives

Key developments to the MMDV include development of survey analysis to enable strategic deployment of the MMDV ensuring the target demographic is serviced by this resource.

Enhancement of the Internal Display features creating a more engaging interactive experience for visitors attending the display.

Re-negotiating partnership and vehicle lease arrangements with Mercedes Benz Commercial Division. These negotiations will ensure continuity of the MMDV program.

Word Count

2,203

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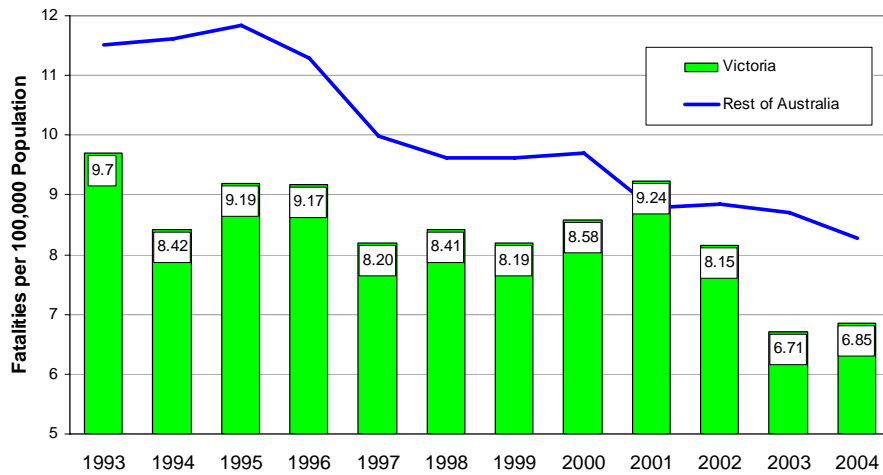
Victorian Road Safety Strategy *Arrive Alive* 2002-2007

Appendix 1.



Source: VicRoads (2005)

Victorian Fatalities per 100,000 population compared to that for the rest of Australia



Source: Howard (2005)

(Word Count 1,872)