

The success of the 'Pinkie' campaign - Speeding. No one thinks big of you: A new approach to road safety marketing

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Abstract

Speeding is the biggest road safety problem in NSW and young male drivers are significantly over represented in speeding related crashes. This is not an emerging trend; it has been the case for decades. This is despite the introduction of new technology to help detect and penalise speeding drivers, targeted legislation, improved vehicle safety features and education campaigns to ensure drivers are aware of and understand the dangers of speeding.

In 2007 the RTA adopted a new approach to make contact with a traditionally difficult to reach target audience (young men) with an anti speeding message that would have an impact on their attitudes, beliefs and motivate behaviour change. The 'Pinkie' campaign 'Speeding. No one thinks big of you' has not only broken through the youth barrier but has been embraced by popular youth culture. Amazingly the campaign has generated worldwide interest, confirming that young male speeding drivers are a global problem and that the campaign has adopted a unique approach. The campaign has won industry awards and gained unparalleled media exposure but most importantly it has combined with other anti speeding initiatives to help significantly reduce speeding related fatalities in NSW. The campaign was extensively researched during its development and subsequent campaign tracking confirms the methodology was on target. The Pinkie campaign has introduced a new paradigm into road safety marketing in Australia.

Keywords

Speeding, young male drivers, behaviour and cultural change

Introduction

The paper details the groundbreaking approach adopted in 2007 by the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority in tackling an endemic community issue – the high level of youth speeding deaths.

In NSW speeding is predominantly a male problem, with 85 per cent of drivers involved in fatal speeding crashes being males. Prior to 2007 speeding regularly accounted for 40 per cent of the road toll and young men have been over represented in fatal speed related crashes for many years.

The issue was evident, when despite an overall reduction in the road toll in 2006 there was an increase in fatal speeding related crashes involving young male drivers.

In 2006 the number of speeding male drivers aged 25 years and under involved in fatal crashes rose by 24 per cent compared to 2005.

The deaths generated media stories highlighting the impact of these crashes on family, friends and the whole community.

Of all speeding drivers involved in fatal crashes between 2002 and 2006, 34 per cent were aged 17- 25 years of age, although they accounted for only 14 per cent of all licence holders.

Young drivers are also over represented in high range speeding infringements. P-platers represent 7 per cent of licence holders but account for 34 per cent of speeding infringements 30km/h and above and 41 per cent of speeding infringements 45km/h and above.

Many factors contribute to these statistics including inexperience, poor risk perception, impulsiveness, sensation-seeking, recklessness and rushing.

The RTA introduced new P plate reforms to help deter their speeding behaviour and police enforcement programs targeting speeding p-plate drivers were enhanced.

However, driving is a social activity and there is a need for voluntary adherence of speed limits to achieve long term road safety benefits.

Education and publicity play a key role in raising consumer awareness and acceptance of road safety issues. The 'Speeding. No one thinks big of you' campaign was developed to help make speeding socially unacceptable.

Methods

The challenge was to develop an innovative, multimedia, public education campaign to reach young male drivers to encourage a change in speeding behaviour.

Unlike previous speeding campaigns, which either provided drivers with information about the risks of speeding or highlighted the likelihood of being caught, this campaign took a fundamentally different approach.

It was designed to undermine the perceived pay-off young men feel from speeding. For some young male drivers speeding is exciting and fun, associated with power, masculinity, freedom and status. While they may think speeding is cool, the wider community think they are acting irresponsibly and foolishly.

The solution was an unconventional communication campaign that focused on the social consequences of speeding by linking risky driving behaviour to being regarded as 'uncool' by peers and the community.

The strategy was to provoke the core target into thinking differently about speeding, making it less admirable among peers while encouraging the community to be involved and share ownership of the issue. The overriding concept was to create social disapproval of speeding.

Creative concepts were extensively researched (Consumer Contact 2007).

Audience testing was undertaken at three major stages of campaign development, including initial concepts, refinement of concepts and off-line edit stage. Focus groups were conducted in metropolitan and country areas.

Research groups included the target audience of males 17-25 years of age, male and female P plate drivers and male and female drivers from 30 to 50 years of age, representing the wider community. A spread of occupations, family status and ethnicity was also achieved.

At least one-third of the drivers in each of the focus groups assembled for the three audience testing stages had received a speeding conviction within the last three years.

Without exception, the audience reactions were overwhelmingly positive and their feedback provided the encouragement for the RTA to pursue the development of a campaign.

Even though there are no spoken words in the television commercial it is a complex piece of communication. During research the TVC emerged as very powerful and was extremely well received by the core target audience of males, 17 to 25 years. The general impression was that the ad would catch on. The primary target predicted that the ad had the ability to change driving culture and that the concept was a welcome change in advertising approach.

The commercial depicts three vignettes, each one designed to undermine the perceived benefits young drivers believe they achieve by speeding. While young drivers think they are being a man by speeding, behind their back the wider community thinks they are foolish and trying to compensate for some personal deficiency. The campaign articulates this using a well-known gesture – the ‘pinkie’. All three vignettes work as a package but it is the last scenario that hits hardest of all. The disapproval of one’s mates is the most powerful deterrent to youth speeding and poor driving.

Results

The campaign has been an outstanding success in every way. It helped achieve a record low road toll in NSW in 2007, it made speeding ‘uncool’ among its target audience, and it empowered the community to play a role in addressing the issue.

At time of launch, the campaign’s impact was immediate. The freshness of the approach and execution attracted unprecedented local, national and global attention.

Twelve months after the launch of the 'Pinkie' campaign, ‘Speeding. No one thinks big of you’ qualitative research confirmed it had achieved spectacular results. The campaign has given young male drivers a valid and personally relevant rationale to consider changing their driving behaviour. Additionally the campaign communicated collective opinion of speeding as being idiotic and was successful in garnering the support of the general community (Consumer Contact 2008).

Quantitative Tracking

Independent tracking surveys reaffirmed it is the most successful road safety advertising campaign ever, by RTA/in NSW? achieving 97% awareness among young male drivers and 95% among the general community (TNS 2008). It is delivering a strong anti-speeding message that makes speeding 'uncool'. It is making drivers think about their behaviour with 78% reporting the campaign will be effective in encouraging them to obey the speed limit.

The results of the evaluation demonstrate that the campaign has broken through the youth barrier and is successfully reaching young males and communicating a credible and believable anti-speeding message to them.

Speeding is now being repositioned as a socially undesirable activity with more and more young males responding positively to the campaign.

Young males are now significantly more likely to agree with the statement 'Drivers are more likely to obey the speed limit if they have friends in the car with them', up from 2% before the launch of the campaign, to 16% in the latest evaluation.

The survey results also suggest that the campaign may be affecting a real change in the behaviour of young male drivers, with increasingly fewer of them reporting that they have recently been in a car that has driven over the speed limit (down from 84% in the pre-test to 69% post-test).

The results of the evaluation demonstrate that the campaign is successfully reaching both young males and members of the NSW public in general, and communicating a credible and believable message consistently to both groups.

The results of the evaluation show that the campaign is very successfully working to reposition speeding as a socially undesirable activity.

The advertising is effectively gaining the attention of a very large majority of young male drivers and the general public, and the saliency of the campaign is increasing over time.

Young male drivers and the broader audience continue to understand the message of the campaign, and not just in a generic anti-speeding sense. The 'speeding is not cool' message continues to be effectively communicated to ad recognisers.

The results of this evaluation demonstrate that the campaign is very effectively targeting young male drivers; the ad is being seen repeatedly, gaining saliency and being recognised, understood in an increasingly subtle fashion, communicating what is seen to be a credible/ believable message and positively influencing the attitudes of young male drivers.

Crash statistics

Recent provisional road fatality statistics show that NSW has experienced significant reductions compared to the rest of Australia. Pleasingly the reductions have been even greater among the high risk road user group of young drivers.

Provisional figures for the twelve months ending July 2008 show that the NSW road toll has decreased by 22% since the year 2006. In contrast the road toll for the rest of Australia over the same period actually increased by 1%.

A breakdown of the NSW data for this same period shows that

- Speed related fatalities decreased by 32%
- Fatalities from Young Driver Crashes (Aged 17 to 25 Years) decreased by 30%
- Fatalities from Speeding Young Driver Crashes (Aged 17 to 25 Years) decreased by 45%

Youth Culture

The campaign set out to be different, and surpassed the expectations of even the RTA's staunchest critics – young male drivers. It has not only broken through the youth barrier but has been embraced by popular culture; the commercial was used in the Australian 2008 MTV Remake Awards, and the creative concept has been parodied in national television advertising including the Top Gear magazine campaign and Eagle Boy pizza commercial. It was also

adopted by *Movement* surfing magazine as its Corporate Social Responsibility program, whereby they developed a designated website to promote the campaign to its young male audience.

The campaign has generated more news media stories than any previous road safety initiative in the RTA's history. Aside from the local media coverage, prompting extensive discussion and debate over the issue, the commercial was aired and reported extensively world-wide.

Although there was no paid online advertising or seeding strategy implemented it has generated enormous interest online. On Youtube alone people have uploaded the commercial which has then been viewed more than 500,000 times and have generated hundreds of comments and also numerous video responses.

Industry Awards

The campaign has also been acknowledged by the advertising industry. It won the national Adnews campaign of the year award and was shortlisted for a Cannes Titanium award. Although it didn't win the award, to be shortlisted at this incredibly competitive global awards event, in such an important category, is a real achievement.

Conclusion

The 'Speeding. No One Thinks Big of You' campaign took a fundamentally different tact – a social approach. It put the issue back in the hands of the community, empowering people to increase the social unacceptability of speeding, building on and extending the gains of previous speeding campaigns.

In the context of the campaign the 'Pinkie' gesture, as it became known, created a way for the whole community to come together to demonstrate their disapproval of a speeder's actions – family, friends and peers alike. The key to the success of the gesture is it is never directed at a motorist, it is always the behaviour being targeted.

One of the key innovations of the campaign was delivering the anti-speeding message in a youthful, non-authoritative way, a noticeable move away from convention. It also served to provoke a timely public debate and galvanise the wider community behind a campaign to make speeding socially unacceptable.

It was understood that, while the ad may depict young offenders, the message would be aimed at all of those who speed and drive in a loutish manner.

Our P Plate drivers in this exploratory research were engaged by the concept and immediately saw its potential to deter poor driving practice motivated by the need to show off. It provides an avenue for peer group pressure to work towards more positive, rather than negative outcomes.

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