

An unacceptable truth: changing the road safety conversation with young drivers to save those most vulnerable on our roads.

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Abstract

No road deaths are acceptable. But it is an unacceptable truth that the most at risk group of drivers on South Australian roads is also the youngest.

Road crash statistics show us that in the first three months after getting their ‘P’ plate, young male drivers are at their most vulnerable. This is the time when they need the most attention, yet catching their attention (which has never been easy) is getting harder and harder.

And even when you can catch their attention, young men aged 16 – 20 are the least receptive of any group to messages about safety because they have an uncommon confidence that common sense will not penetrate.

In 2010, the Motor Accident Commission of South Australia tasked Clemenger BBDO Adelaide with developing an advertising campaign that would impact the incidence of road accidents and deaths among young male ‘P’ platers.

Qualitative research revealed that the loss of a newly gained licence was a key motivator to driving safely. The thought that young people feared social death more than death itself was subsequently leveraged in a way that spoke to young people on their level and challenged them to think about the social consequences driving dangerously could have.

The resulting ‘Lose your license and you’re screwed’ advertising campaign was launched in South Australia in 2011 and contributed to positively changing behaviours and a decrease in fatalities in the 16 to 24 year old age group.

Keywords: young drivers, P-platers, advertising, social marketing, behavior change

Introduction

Young people are over-represented in road crashes in South Australia. At the time of campaign development people aged 16 to 24 years made up 12% of the population, yet accounted for 28% of road fatalities and 30% of serious injuries each year.

There are three broad reasons for their increased rate of casualty crashes.

1. **Lack of experience** – applies to all young and novice drivers.
2. **Exposure to risk** – young drivers are more likely to drive at higher risk times such as nights and weekends and they are more likely to drive older, less road worthy cars.
3. **Attitudinal** – risk taking and sensation seeking, often exacerbated by a susceptibility to peer pressure, lack of understanding of their developing skill base and underestimation of crash risk. Applies to some young drivers, typically male.

The Young Drivers campaign sought to achieve an attitudinal change of young drivers. Our pre-campaign research led us to the view that a traditional fear-based approach would be ineffective. The key priorities for young males were their independence, becoming adults and

their status amongst peers and with the opposite sex - all symbolised and empowered by their licence.

Research also found that the loss of a newly gained licence was a key motivator to drive safely. The thought that young people feared social death more than death itself was an insight that could be leveraged and potentially force them to think about the social consequences driving dangerously could have.

With this in mind, we resolved that an advertising campaign needed to be developed that would help:

- Raise awareness of the social and practical value of the driver’s licence.
- Raise awareness of the practical and social implications of the loss of a driver’s licence.
- Raise awareness of the ease at which undesirable driving behaviour will result in loss of licence.
- Increase compliance with road rules and decrease undesirable driving behaviour.
- Foster a positive attitude toward desirable driving behaviour.
- Encourage discussion and reinforcement amongst peers and influencers of desirable driving behaviour, as sparked by the prospect of licence loss.

Methodology

When young people first get their licence they quickly forget what their world was like without it. Life suddenly becomes faster, more social, and more convenient. It’s not long before drivers reach a point where they start to rely on their licences. We knew our campaign needed young drivers to reflect on what their life would now look like if they suddenly returned to not having a licence.

Beyond the rational reasons for driving safely, the risk of social exclusion meant that you couldn’t go out, hold down a job or impress members of the opposite sex. We presented everyday scenarios to show young drivers what could happen if their driver’s licences were suddenly taken out of the equation, just when they were starting to get in the swing of having one.

We knew that young drivers would reject shock tactics because they don’t believe it could happen to them. We felt they would be far more likely to engage with a campaign based around irreverence and humour.

With all this in mind, our advertising campaign idea was simple:

If you lose your licence, you’re screwed.

Not having a licence could mean that your mum will need to pick you up from the pub, or that you’re unable to keep your new job, or that you can’t take girls on dates.

The advertising campaign was launched through TV, Cinema, Radio, Outdoor and Online. Each media channel was tailored to the younger demographic by focusing on TV networks and titles that would be watched by the younger audiences. We also found appropriate cinema releases, outdoor locations and radio networks.

Strategic timing of campaign bursts were coordinated to strike during school and Uni breaks because young drivers are more active and more mobile around these times.

Results

Since its introduction in 2011, the campaign has contributed to achieving record low fatalities amongst young drivers in South Australia in both 2011 and 2012. The number of fatalities is down versus the 5-year average of 2006 – 2010 (Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1

Fatalities amongst South Australian drivers 16 – 24 years old and total South Australian population, 2006 – 2010

Year	Young Drivers (Number)	Total population (Number)
	Fatalities	Fatalities
2006	29	117
2007	34	125
2008	28	99
2009	42	119
2010	31	118
Average	33	116

Table 2

Fatalities amongst South Australian drivers 16 – 24 years old vs total South Australian population 2011 and 2012

Year	Young Drivers (Number)	Total population (Number)
	Fatalities	Fatalities
2011	11	103
2012	17	94

The reduction in fatalities has contributed to a decline in the proportion of Young Drivers as part of the total South Australian road toll. As evident in Table 3, young drivers made up 10.7% and 18.1% of the total road toll in 2011 and 2012 respectively – which is a considerable shift from the 5-year average of 28.4% (Table 4).

Table 3

Proportion of young driver fatalities as part of total South Australian road toll 2011 and 2012

Year	Percentage	
	Young Driver fatalities	Total fatalities
2011	10.7	100.00
2012	18.1	100.00

Table 4

Proportion of young driver fatalities as part of total South Australian road toll 2006 – 2010

Year	Percentage	
	Young Driver fatalities	Total fatalities
2006	24.8	100.00
2007	27.2	100.00
2008	28.3	100.00
2009	35.3	100.00
2010	26.3	100.00
Average	28.4	

Ultimately, the campaign’s aim is to reduce deliberate violations by the target audience. With that in mind, positive results were also recorded in the area of self-reported behaviour change. The campaign seems to have most significantly impacted speeding. As evident in Table 5, all speeding measures reduced significantly following the introduction of the campaign.

Table 5
Self-reported speeding behaviours amongst South Australian drivers 16 – 24 years old.
n = 600

Period	Percentage			
	Speeding (Any)	Speeding (1–5 kms)	Speeding (5–10 kms)	Speeding (10+ kms)
Q3 2010 (pre-campaign)	66	65	41	19
Q4 2010 (pre-campaign)	75	73	49	24
Q1 2011 (pre-campaign)	74	72	49	22
Q2 2011 (pre-campaign)	74	71	50	23
Q3 2011	75	72	45	22
Q4 2011	70	69	40	19
Q1 2012	67	66	34	14
Q2 2012	69	67	35	17
Q3 2012	65	63	34	15
Q4 2012	65	63	33	17

Significantly, most recent findings show 85% of the target considered the behavioural objectives as a result of seeing the campaign, while 67% acted on them and 43% talked with their peers around the issues. Each of these measures has been steadily building since the campaign launched in Q3, 2011; as evident in Table 6.

Table 6
Self-reported behaviour amongst South Australian drivers 16 – 24 years old. Average n = 318

Period	Percentage		
	Thought about not breaking road rules	Ensured not breaking the road rules	Talked to someone about not breaking road rules
Q3 2011	77	60	38
Q4 2011	79	59	35
Q1 2012	76	59	37
Q2 2012	82	57	35
Q3 2012	84	67	37
Q4 2012	81	66	40
Q1 2013	85	67	43

Finally, qualitative research of the completed campaign has also been undertaken on two occasions since launching in 2011 and identified the campaign was both recognized and well liked. The most pertinent out-takes were:

- The campaign has been successful in getting the attention of young drivers; using humour to attract attention and encourage sharing; and in communicating a relevant message about the value of one’s licence.
- It is a liked campaign and is considered memorable and relevant.
- The television concepts were more likely to have achieved exposure than the other executions and were spontaneously recalled when young people were asked about recall of advertising about what might happen if they lost their licence.

- All executions (including the radio and outdoor) were thought to convey a relevant, meaningful and credible message. A particular advantage of the different executions was the highlighting of the different ways in which losing one’s licence might impact: loss of privacy, impost on friends and potential impact on employment in addition to inconvenience and social embarrassment.
- All respondents could recall the existing road safety campaigns and a high percentage of the respondents were able to identify the key message outtake for the various campaigns and appreciated the intent behind them. There was strong recall and recognition of the ‘Lose your licence and you’re screwed’ campaign and it was felt to be a strong theme.

Discussion

Despite the positive results reported, the total awareness of the campaign amongst the main target audience is comparatively lower as compared with some other Motor Accident Commission advertising campaigns. The campaign has certainly improved its awareness since its first launch, but arguably it hasn’t yet reached its full potential.

It is felt the reliance on traditional advertising channels such as TV, radio, outdoor and standard web banners whilst trying to reach an audience who are consuming these mediums less frequently, is contributing to this awareness issue.

The shift from traditional media to digital media is well reported – almost half of all media time spent by Australians is now spent online. What’s more, smartphone and tablet ownership are both rising rapidly in Australia, a trend exerting a major impact on media consumption habits. A study by AIMIA, the Australian digital trade body, predicted that uptake would hit 84% by mid-2013.

Young Australians are at the forefront of this growth, with “Generation Y” (18 – 33 years old) now spending more time on tablets and smartphones than watching TV. Older generations, on the other hand, spend nearly twice as much time watching TV as those classified as Generation Y. What is becoming apparent is that those who entered adulthood prior to the 1990’s, while consuming new media extensively, still mostly consume traditional broadcast media. However, the generations who were still in their formative years in the 1990’s and were shaped by the advent of the World Wide Web and rise in technology, spend more time online than watching broadcast television.

With this in mind, the Motor Accident Commission of South Australia made the decision to invest further in the ‘Lose your licence and you’re screwed’ road safety campaign by extending the campaign into digital/social media channels. This campaign extension would subscribe to the same advertising idea but be executed so that it more closely aligns with the reported changes in media consumption habits amongst young Australians.

Conclusion

The Australia Safe System is part of the National Road Safety Action Plans endorsed by the Australian Transport Council (2004) and underpins the 2011-2020 National Road Safety Strategy. It recognises the need for responsible road user behaviour, but also accepts that human error and unpredictable environmental factors are inevitable. The approach is structured around four elements:

1. Safer roads: Improving infrastructure and making roads and roadsides more forgiving in the event of a crash.
2. Safer vehicles: Improving car technology that helps minimise crash involvement and reduces the impact in the event of a crash
3. Safer speeds: Legislate speeds that are appropriate to the environment while allowing for mobility of the population. Promote public acceptance of safer speeds.
4. Safer road users: Reducing both accidental human error and deliberate violations.

Reductions in road trauma are determined by the interaction of all of these key elements.

MAC cooperates with other road safety agencies and contributes to each element of the wider approach, however the main difference is that MAC seeks to improve attitudes and behaviours in order to reduce deliberate road user violations that cause avoidable crashes. To achieve this, MAC’s primary concern is to develop safer road users through public education campaigns, like this one.

Prior to the campaign we recognised that finding a clear correlation between an advertising campaign and a reduction in road trauma would be difficult. There are a multitude of variables that come in to play and the downward trend in road tolls observed in recent years is also the result of safer vehicles, safer roads and increased enforcement.

However, it is evident that the road toll for young drivers in the previous years has fluctuated between approximately 25 to 40 fatalities per annum - while 2011 saw just 11 fatalities and 2012 saw 18 fatalities.

With this in mind, changing the road safety conversation with young drivers from one that is solely based on the potential negative crash outcomes to one that reinforces the potential negative social implications has potential to change unsafe driving behaviours and thereby positively influence the number of fatalities and serious injuries.

In addition to this, although humour and irreverence are still highly effective ways of getting young drivers to re-consider their driving behaviour, it is becoming increasingly important to find new ways to broadcast our message as young drivers’ media consumption habits are vastly different from older generations.

Recommendations

With above conclusions in mind, our two main recommendations when aiming to change unsafe driving behaviours amongst young drivers are as follows:

1. Focus on the potential social implications of unsafe driving behaviour as young drivers are less likely to be influenced by the potential risk of death or bodily harm alone.
2. Evolve your media strategy and associated campaign executions to reflect a vastly different approach to consuming media.

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