

Road policing - Telling It and Selling It – old media versus new media

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Abstract

Road policing and the media is an odd relationship at best. For the subject matter to be covered misfortune generally has to occur. Then there is the matter of what stage to tell the story from - New Media? Old Media? Some combination of the two?

As more newsrooms in metropolitan areas close and/or merge and country newsrooms disappear altogether – the question for road policing professionals is - Are we heading towards a media environment where the enforcement story is told only on the social media stage?

During the NSW Police Force Christmas road policing campaign of 1996/1997 more than 60 media interviews were conducted on radio and television.

During the 2015 Easter road policing campaign, a keynote post on the NSW Police Force and Traffic and Highway Patrol Command Facebook page received a combined reach of 143,200 and an engagement rate of 15%.

Just as the early edition newspapers and 6am radio news bulletins used to set the tone for the media cycle of the day – as road policing professionals we must ask ourselves: do we and how should we use social media to prompt mainstream media into telling our story?

Who is in the audience?

As at 2 July 2015 the Traffic and Highway Patrol Command (THWPC) had 173,000 followers on Facebook. The NSW Police Force (NSWPF) Facebook page had 488,000 followers. The NSW Police Force Twitter account had 90,400 followers,

Compare this against the ratings for main weekday television Sydney news bulletin which ranged from 157,000 to 286,000 viewers (Source MediaSpy.org – June 11 2015).

The demographic of the NSW Police Force Facebook page was a largely female audience (61%). Of those female fans 31% are aged between 18-34 years. The largest demographic for male followers is 18-24 year-olds who make up 12% of the NSWPF Facebook audience.

Of the THWP page's 169,000 fans - 54% are male and 45% are female. Of the female fans – 21% are aged between 25-44 years. Of the male fans 31% are aged between 18-34 years, while 10% are aged between 35-44 years.

The NSW Police Force has more than 80 Facebook pages, including an Eyewatch page covering local areas.

The NSW Police Force Facebook page provides crime information, warnings and crime prevention tips that are of major or state wide significance.

At the local community level the NSW Police Force has the Eyewatch program which has established a Facebook page in every Local Area Command (LAC) and specialist command.

Eyewatch is all about connecting the local community with local police and has been an outstanding success to date with more than 500,000 people connected to their local police or specialist commands of interest to them via Facebook.

Eyewatch is now providing the community with an alternative to attending meetings in the local hall. Community members can participate in crime prevention meetings online subject to your Neighbourhood Watch participation.

Telling their stories so they also tell ours

Within the social media sphere there is an appetite for smaller, more strategic pieces as demonstrated by responses to enforcement campaigns for railway level crossings and also more basic messaging on the locations of Driver Reviver Stations during holiday weekend.

Social media was used to highlight a Transport for NSW and NSW Police display at the 2014 Henty Field Days. The display comprised the “Pearly Gates” as featured in the Don’t Rush to the Other Side campaign and the wreckage of a car that had been involved in a crash with a train at a level crossing. The car was donated by the driver who escaped unharmed.

The image was posted to the NSWPF and THWPC Facebook pages on 24 September 2014 along with brief description of display.

Table 1: Analysis of Facebook Post on Henty Field Days 2014

	Likes	Shares	Comments	Total Post Reach	Engagement Rate
NSWPF	326	2	11	117,400	15%
THWPC	304	66	29	158,464	18%

The post allowed followers to share their stories ranging from those who have had near hits -

“I didn't realise you did this that is great I came from the country and had a couple of near misses. Very scary. And we lost some of our young friends on rail crossings. Keep up the good work and everyone please be aware of the danger”

-to those who simply wanted to show their support or offer suggestions on how to improve on the next display.

”Never play stupid games with trains. They take too long to stop and it's not just your life you affect. Don't be selfish

“Great example of sharing what happens... Luckily the girl walked away.”

A simple platform of an image allowed for people, regardless of the reason, to share their stories around a particular topic. This facilitated peer based road safety and road policing education to occur in a diverse audience without having to compete with other stories in the mainstream news cycle at the time.

The display did receive limited local mainstream media coverage as it was part of the larger Henty Field Days event.

It’s no yawning matter

The issue of tired driving recently regained social and mainstream media attention through the “Don’t Trust Your Tired Self” campaign. While Driver Reviver sites were mentioned in mainstream radio interviews undertaken by senior Highway Patrol spokesperson – the question still lingered. Did the public still care about the Driver Reviver stations that had been a part of the Australian driving culture for at least a generation?

Driving while tired remains one of the biggest contributing factors in road crashes that kill or injure people. The Centre for Road safety reports that fatigue was identified as a factor in 18% of fatal crashes that occurred in 2013. <http://roadsafety.transport.nsw.gov.au/downloads/crashstats2013.pdf> (page 33).

At the start of the NSW Police Force Christmas 2014/15 road policing campaign, a post was placed on the NSWPF Twitter account along with the THWPC Facebook page that highlighted the locations of Driver Reviver stations across New South Wales during the festive season.

Table 2: Analysis of Facebook Post on Driver Reviver

	Likes	Shares	Total Post Reach	Engagement Rate
THWPC	385	67	28,200	5%

The share rate showed that people were still using the Driver Reviver locations and turning to social media as the easiest means to access that information.

In some circles, could this post be called a failure because of its lower engagement rate? Possibly so.

However the comments on the Facebook post, where members of the public engaged in passionate debate generated by users of the Driver Reviver program who also sought to clarify misinformation regarding whether truck drivers were refused service at Driver Reviver. The debate concluded with a member of the organising committee for one Driver Reviver site refuting the allegation and declaring that all were welcome.

The posting of Driver Reviver locations to social media at key times in the road policing calendar has allowed drivers to have location information in a readily accessible way and encourage positive road user behaviour.

A perfect media merger – Operation Tortoise 2015 - #SharetoSurvive

Rob and Karin Kinny’s son Nathan was critically injured in a motorcycle crash on 15 October 2013. He was kept alive on life support until the following day as recipients for his lungs, kidneys and heart valves were made ready for the surgery. Rob, a respected radio journalist, and Karin, a nurse, agreed to speak at the launch of Operation Tortoise – the NSW Police Easter 2015 road policing campaign.

While having the family of a crash victim speak at a road policing campaign launch is not a new strategy, the nexus between old and new media in telling the Kinny’s story and the road policing messages accompanying it, was pivotal.

All stories in the campaign, whether they were a photo caption, daily operation wrap up or the launch release were accompanied by the #SharetoSurvive hashtag.

Following the media launch involving NSW Police Commissioner Andrew Scipione, Rob and Karin Kinny and then Centre for Road Safety General Manager Marg Prendergast – all four television networks showed prominently placed packages in the key evening news bulletin and numerous radio interviews were conducted across the state.

Table 3: Analysis of Facebook Post for Operation Tortoise 2015 launch

	Likes	Shares	Total Post Reach	Engagement Rate
NSWPF	385	67	28,200	5%

Author of the media strategy for Operation Tortoise, Sergeant Kevin Daley APM said it was important that the language of the campaign be kept real and not descend into white noise.

This was nowhere more evident than in a quote from THWP Command's Assistant Commissioner John Hartley in the Operation Tortoise wrap-up release:

"It is apparent some of the behaviour and attitude of motorists has to change. We have to call it for what it is – it's killing people"

and

"Last week the parents of a young man who died in a collision a little over 12 months ago, pleaded with everyone to not let the worst decision in your life be your last.

"Today I'm asking everyone who uses the roads, those on holidays, those going to and from work, pedestrians alike, to think about what they're doing, if not for their own sake but for the sake of their family and friends," Assistant Commissioner Hartley said"

"The other key point in the campaign was the consistent use of the #SharetoSurvive tagline in all campaign materials and sharing the posts from the THWP Command Facebook page across onto the NSWPF Facebook page.

"This meant the road policing messages and our pleas to #SharetoSurvive were being sent to a potential audience of more than half a million people which is quite something when you compare this to nightly television news ratings.

"There was also an important element of having daily, varied social media messages to keep the social media conversation moving."

Rob said:

"Agreeing to put ourselves in front of the media for the high profile Easter road safety campaign was a big decision, so while getting our message out there to the greatest number of people was important to us both, knowing it was having an impact was the biggest reward.

Through the coverage provided by mainstream media, particularly television news and current affairs, we knew it was being seen.

However, it was through watching the response on social media, particularly Facebook, that confirmed for us that people had not just heard our message but were moved sufficiently by it to respond to, 'Like' and 'Share' it."

Rob went on:

“It’s my understanding that the Police Facebook page with Nathan’s picture and our words received 776 comments, around 7,400 likes and close to 3,000 shares in the days leading up to and through Easter.

For us, the best part of the social media element of the campaign was that it gave so many people the chance to share our words and comment on them and that their comments largely reflected the share to survive message.

Indeed, reading that our words would have a positive influence on people’s driving and that many would take the time to sit down with and talk to their driving age children about the message really did make the effort worthwhile.”

The use of relevant messaging that was easily translatable between the mainstream media platforms as well as into the social media sphere was a key factor in ensuring the campaign remained in the media and public eye throughout the five day operation.

Media outlets, across traditional and online media – including specialist sites such as www.carsguide.com.au also made mention of the heightened social media campaign by NSW Police Force during this critical time on state roads.

Four people died on NSW roads this Easter 2015 long weekend compared to two people in 2014, with 189 people being injured down 17 on last year (206 injured).

It’s all fun and games until someone learns something

But what of those quirkier on road moments in road policing that were once strictly in the domain of tall tales told in the police station meal room?

Social media allows road policing practitioners to start a conversation and convey a road safety message while using humour and also highlighting the penalties attached to taking unnecessary risks on the road.

During January 2015, one of the most popular posts of the NSW Police Force Traffic and Highway Patrol Command’s Facebook page was:

20 January 2015 - On Sunday 17 January, two people were found to be driving motorised Eskies on Jersey Road, Emerton in Sydney’s west. One person was charged with special range PCA and drive unregistered vehicle and while the other person dumped it and ran from the scene. He was apprehended by police and allegedly resisted arrest. He was charged with resist arrest and received infringement notices for drive unregistered and uninsured vehicle, and drive on footpath.

Table 4: Analysis of Facebook Post on Motorised Eskies

	Likes	Shares	Total Post Reach	Comments	Engagement Rate
THWPC	3132	1162	406,000	2200	12%

Figure 1: The motorised eskies



Source: THWP Facebook

Through use of the #loadfail, NSW Police Traffic and Highway Patrol has maintained an ongoing social media campaign highlighting the dangers of unsecured loads. Some of the photos published have been contributed by passing motorists while others were contributed by Highway Patrol personnel.

Earlier this year (**21 January 2015**), a driver and two passengers fined after Parramatta Highway Patrol stopped a car on Isabella Street at North Parramatta on 20 January 2015. The driver was issued penalty notices for driver permitting part of body to be outside window, drive vehicle with unsecured load and driver not carry licence. Both passengers were issued penalty notices for having part of body outside window. The sheeting was apparently some sort of plastic roofing material. The driver is looking at \$830 in fines and losing six points from their licence. The passengers are looking at fines of \$311 each.

Figure 2: #Loadfail post of the roofing material being held on by hand



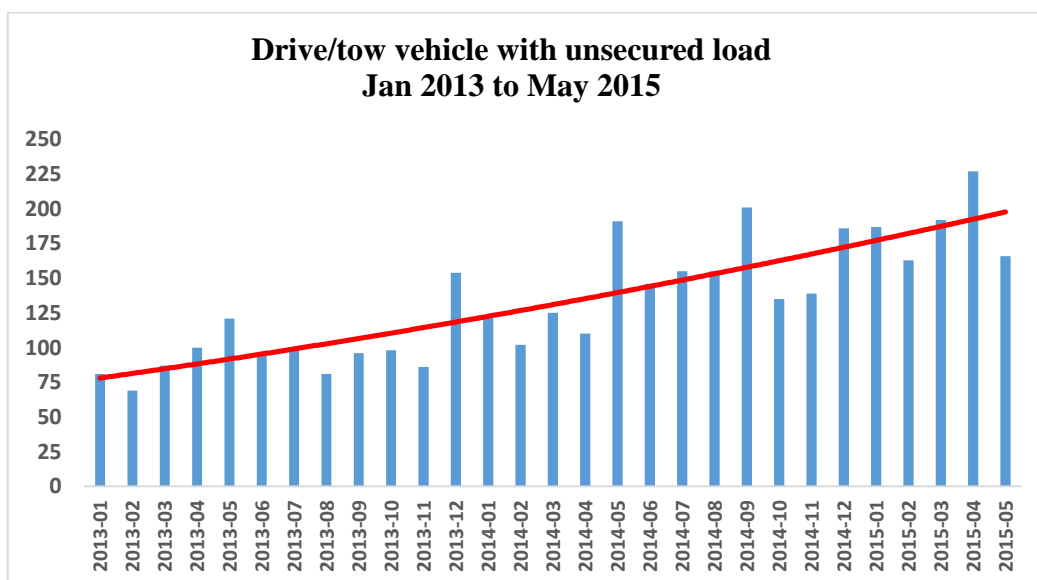
Source: THWP Facebook

Table 5: Analysis of Facebook Post on #loadfail (21 January 2015)

	Likes	Shares	Total Post Reach	Comments	Engagement Rate
THWPC	1944	613	371, 456	948	17%

The #loadfail messaging has not only been embraced by the public because of its grit and realism but potentially also by NSW Police themselves. This has been shown in an upward trend in legal actions taken for the offence of “Drive/Tow Vehicle with Unsecured Load” (Australian Road Rules 2014 Clause 292).

Table 6: Unsecured Load legal actions



Provisional Police Data

Where do they get such wonderful toys?

Police and civilian use of in car video technology ranging from the formal police systems through to Go-Pro and “dash-cam” devices are becoming more frequent narrators for road safety and road policing on the social media stage.

Two items of NSW Police Force Highway Patrol in car video footage (posted in 2010 and 2011) still remain in the Top 10 most viewed clips on the official NSW Police Force YouTube channel.

The civilian use of this technology is a rapidly growing sphere with many newsrooms regularly featuring dashcam footage in their bulletins. As the technology becomes cheaper, the use and prevalence of this footage can only increase. The immediacy of the incident in a real-time perspective is certainly a game changer for how the footage is used by media organisations.

These technologies, when coupled with social and mainstream media platforms, allow the world to see how quickly crashes can happen, what makes for acceptable on road behaviour and the need for constant vigilance when on the road.

The future is now

The future of telling the road policing story is shrouded in a little bit of mystery as the platforms and applications which will be used to do so, have probably not even been thought of yet.

The NSW Police Force has recently started using Periscope to live stream as many of its press conferences via Twitter as possible. This allows for not only greater community engagement but for media newsrooms the opportunity to source stories more readily at a time when newsrooms are shrinking in staff size but expanding in the geographical territory they cover.

By empowering commands such as the Traffic and Highway Patrol Command through the Eyewatch Program it creates a community where page followers with an interest in either the local area or the subject matter – in the case of specialist commands – can share their stories and in turn convey the core messages of the command.

Numerous journalists, producers and chiefs of staff follow the NSWPF and THWP Facebook pages creating something of an infinite loop where many stories and segments start its news life as a social media post from either a member of the public or the organisation itself.

As commuter traffic grows in major cities, one of the greatest challenges facing road policing in Australia is the inevitable delays caused as a crash site is resolved and the roadway is returned.

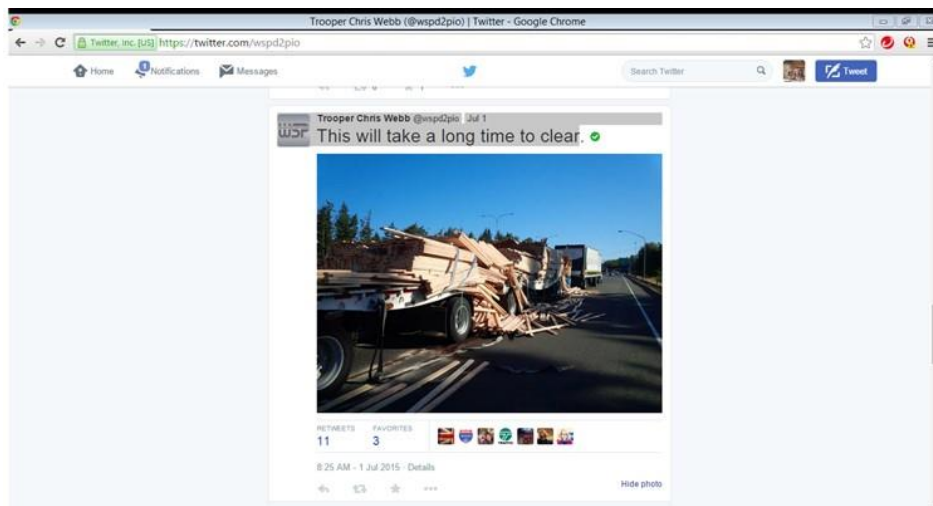
The biggest frustration of the public through forums such as talk back radio are the reasons behind any delay.

As demonstrated by Washington State Patrol and Massachusetts State Patrol, having authorised troopers live tweet from the scene can often ease the public mood through a

simple tweet and accompanying photo. This places the motorist at the crash site with emergency services and helps to manage the expectations of motorists.

This is particularly important in the case of heavy vehicle incidents where trucks and their loads can be overturned, blocking several lanes and large salvage equipment is required.

Figure 3: Incident start: Twitter feed of Trooper Chris Webb, Washington State Patrol



Screen shot taken 1 July 2015

Figure 4: End of Incident – Trooper Chris Webb, WSP



Screen shot taken 1 July 2015

Whilst news outlets and traffic helicopters do provide imagery, the relevant road authority/emergency service is denied the immediate opportunity to explain any complexities.

Conclusion

Social media has allowed the road policing story to go to where the people are – on their phone or tablet in the passenger seat of the vehicle. Through careful selection of the stories for each platform, the road policing story has never been in a better position to be told whether that is in the home, office or the passenger seat.

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