

# CONTENT CREATION STEERS SUCCESSFUL COURSE

THE CREATION OF PRIME TIME TELEVISION PROGRAMMING DROVE THE VICTORIAN TRANSPORT ACCIDENT COMMISSION'S LONG-TERM CAMPAIGN TO CHANGE COMMUNITY ATTITUDES AND CUT ROAD ACCIDENTS. NIKKI MACLENNAN REPORTS.

## OBJECTIVES

There were 332 deaths on Victorian roads in 2007, including 174 in regional areas. To reduce these numbers the Victorian Transport Accident Commission (TAC) needed to raise awareness of the widespread effects of road accidents by providing the public with a more in-depth understanding of trauma.

With a higher incidence of road fatalities in regional Victoria, pro rata to the population, the TAC was especially keen to make an impact on this audience.

However, the TAC is faced with unique circumstances when it comes to marketing.

"What I'm trying to 'sell' isn't time-critical," TAC marketing manager John Thompson says. "We've always got the issue of trying to reduce the level of trauma on our roads."

The TAC must address these long-term goals while making an immediate impact on societal thinking and behaviour when it comes to road safety.

The organisation has aggressive long-term goals, gunning for a 30% reduction in road accidents between now and 2017.

## STRATEGY

Most teenagers and young adults don't believe that road accidents will ever impact them directly, and

lack understanding of the long-term effects of surviving an accident. The TAC and Mitchell & Partners identified a need to tap into the fears harboured by this age group, such as losing a close friend, and to show the full effect of the debilitating injuries caused by road accidents.

The TAC has built a reputation for strong TV-led public education advertising, says Thompson. However, road safety and the effects of road trauma, are complex issues. "You can't always explain them in 30 seconds," he says.

The strategic solution? Develop and produce a compelling reality television series, using a blend of reality and documentary television styles to put viewers in the shoes of those involved in road accidents – the victims, their families, emergency services and witnesses.

"It was a real challenge to get it up to begin with, but the organisation saw the merits of such a program," says Thompson. "The TAC is keen to take innovative approaches to get the road safety issue out."

## IMPLEMENTATION

TAC worked directly with production company WTFN Entertainment to produce the *Sudden Impact* series, as a blend of reality, documentary and re-creation. The reality component showed "first response" situations, with cameras rolling 24 hours a day to attend major collisions.

The documentary part of the show examined accidents from news files, engaging the victims struggling to recover physically, emotionally and often financially from road accidents. Re-creation segments saw people who made their way through the recovery process after a major accident, about to reach a critical milestone in their lives.

"Our job was partly to educate WTFN on the issues and get it up to speed with current road safety thinking," says Thompson. "To get to the issues, we had to provide a lot of data and research."

"It was a case of sharing that information and turning those things into stories," says Thompson. "It was a story-telling exercise in a way that could be consumed in a half-hour TV show."

Mitchell & Partners developed a media strategy which involved negotiating with the Nine Network to broadcast *Sudden Impact*.

TAC paid for the production of the TV series. In return Nine Network promised prime time scheduling, backed with promo spots and support on programs such as *A Current Affair*.

Eight half-hour episodes of the program would screen nationally on Nine and regionally through



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TAC funded production of the TV series *Sudden Impact*, which was broadcast nationally by the Nine Network in prime time.

WIN/NBN, during prime time from December 2008 to February 2009.

Advertising support for the show appeared in ACP magazine titles such as *Australian Women's Weekly*, *Ralph* and *Take Five*.

Mitchell Communication Group's digital arm emitch ensured heavy online exposure with 90-second teasers running on Ninemsn pushing people to watch *Sudden Impact* on Tuesdays at 8pm on Nine. At 8:30pm, a synopsis of the week's episode was uploaded online, and a blog went live for viewers to "chat" to a person from *Sudden Impact* such as an accident survivor or first response team member. The site also featured a three-minute cutdown of the week's episode.

Extensive PR-driven coverage played a strong support role, while advertorial content in magazines backed up advertising.

## RESULTS

Assessing the "success" of a social marketing campaign, as opposed to

a commercial marketing campaign, is fraught, says Thompson. "Social marketing is about generational change. The impact of TAC's work is felt today, but will also be felt in 15 years' time."

However, *Sudden Impact's* ratings are a concrete illustration of the impact the campaign had.

*Sudden Impact* launched on Tuesday 9 December 2008 with a five capital city audience of 1.2 million viewers, winning its timeslot. Across the eight weeks it screened, the program won its time slot in five capital cities on three occasions.

The show achieved its strongest results in its primary market of Victoria, winning its time slot four times in Melbourne and six times in regional Victoria, where fatalities are highest, a particularly pleasing result for the TAC.

Mitchell & Partners group account director Ron Phillips says the value of the campaign's exposure has been estimated at 11 times what it cost to produce the series.

Thompson adds though that ROI on social marketing is "not as cut and dried as commercial marketing". He says: "In social marketing, you're looking at monitoring behaviours and measuring trends in behaviour. The TAC runs a weekly tracker to monitor levels of speeding, drink driving and elements such as police enforcement and breath testing. The TAC also tracks advertising recall and message take-out, and says awareness of the dangers of drink driving, speeding and fatigue increased 'dramatically' post-*Sudden Impact* screening."

Victorian roads claimed 28 fewer lives in 2008 in the lead up to the campaign. "It's hard to celebrate success," he says. "It's still a terrible statistic. It's still people's lives."

The TAC is in talks regarding a second series of *Sudden Impact*, which illustrates the success of the first outing. "The experience we've had has confirmed our hypothesis of what we could achieve with a TV show like this," says Thompson. <

