

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Topline Report of Findings from Ten Focus Groups to Assess TV Commercial Ideas to Support the 2015 *Click It or Ticket* Campaign and Subsequent Social Norming Advertising

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INTRODUCTION

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is developing advertising ideas to support its 2015 *Click It or Ticket* campaign, as well as subsequent social norming efforts. This campaign will endeavor to influence men ages 18-34 who are part-time and never- belt users to use their seat belts all the time.

For this phase of campaign development, four TV commercial ideas were assessed during focus groups in four cities. In each city, at least one group was comprised of the core group of part-time or never- belt users, and who additionally reflected perceptions of low regard towards local police officers. (These participants/groups are referenced in this report as “law enforcement sensitive”). For the law enforcement sensitive recruitment, higher than normal quotas of African-Americans and/or Latinos were sought.

In total, 88 people participated. Of the total, 35 were in the four law enforcement sensitive groups, and 53 were in six non-law enforcement sensitive groups, i.e. “core groups.”

In summary, below are the cities, dates and group descriptions:

- Richmond: January 27, 2015 --- one law enforcement sensitive group and one core group
- Phoenix: February 2, 2015 --- one law enforcement sensitive group and one core group
- Houston: February 3, 2015 --- one law enforcement sensitive group and one core group
- Atlanta: February 4 and 5, 2015 --- one law enforcement sensitive group and three core groups

For all groups, respondents were pre-screened to ensure they met these characteristics:

- Licensed drivers whose primary vehicle is an automobile, SUV, mini-van, pick-up truck or van
- Ages 18-34
- Self-reported that they wear their seat belts just sometimes or never
- As noted above, selected groups included people who self-reported that they have perceptions of low regard towards local police

For the commercial ideas, animatics-formats of four TV commercials were presented. Although called simply “A,” “B,” “C,” and “D” during the group discussions, these are the titles of the scripts as they are known by NHTSA and its contractor for this project:

- “Not Just You” (commercial “A” in the groups)
- “The Reason Why” (commercial “B” in the groups)
- “Second Chance” (commercial “C” in the groups)
- “You’re Not Alone on the Road” (commercial “D” in the groups)

Taglines and commercials were presented to groups in differing orders to neutralize potential bias.

For some portions of this topline report, numbers of respondents and “grade point averages” are referenced. However, these are reported only to help illustrate the relative degrees of similarities and/or differences for particular findings when noteworthy; they are not intended to be statistical validations, for focus group research (due to small sample sizes and other factors) is qualitative – rather than quantitative/statistical – in nature.

TOPLINE FINDINGS

Disdain of cops:

Prior to the topline findings about each particular commercial, it is significant to note the finding of a prevailing attitude of disdain towards police officers. This finding, not surprisingly, was more pronounced in the law enforcement sensitive groups, but it surfaced in the core groups as well. Participants were critical of the commercials’ attempts (1) to cast officers as “good guys” and/or (2) to portray the issuance of seat belt tickets as “something for my own good.” Participants in nearly every group were of the mindset that seat belt enforcement is nothing more than “a way to generate revenue” or a way of “meeting quotas.”

Further, the appearances of police in the commercials were frequent points of criticism, and in some cases targets of ridicule or vulgar comments.

The attitude of disdain cut across all ethnicities, and also was clearly apparent among African-Americans and Latinos who said or implied they felt that police profiled them regularly.

TV commercials in order of most- to least-favorably assessed:

#1: Second Chance

Despite issues some participants had with this commercial, it generally was supported with more positive feedback and understanding of the overall message, compared to the other three commercials. Participants perceived the commercial as being easy to understand, interesting and provocative (due to the special effects). The portrayal of the ejection through the windshield was an effective visual cue that the commercial was about seat belts. People were quick to pick up on the meaning of the “you don’t get a second chance” theme. Because of the power of the special effects, the main thing remembered about the commercial was particularly focused on these effects and the “you don’t get a second chance” message.

Criticism mostly centered on questions or doubts that the windshield ejection scene’s violence would be allowed to be aired. There were also questions and comments related to the realism of the physics of the ejection, considering that the driver was not going fast enough to be thrust through his windshield.

In a grading exercise, **Second Chance** was rated as being “A” or “B” in terms of effectiveness by 71 of the 88 participants. It was the only commercial that did not receive a grade of “F.” Its overall grade point average of 3.11 on a 4.0 scale was significantly higher than any of the other commercials.

#2: You’re Not Alone on the Road

Participants who thought this commercial could be effective liked the notion that even good drivers face dangers when driving.

However, only 28 of the 88 participants rated the commercial “A” or “B” in terms of effectiveness. It was rated “D” or “F” by 35 participants. The overall grade point average was 1.84 on a 4.0 scale, significantly less than the GPA for **Second Chance**.

The most frequent criticisms related to ---

- “This looks like a ‘don’t text and drive’ commercial.”
- “The girl was texting and crashed, but the guy was the one who got a ticket. That doesn’t make sense.”
- “It’s too confusing and requires too much thought after seeing it.”
- Many participants thought the guy was the victim of the crash, and they could not understand how he didn’t get hurt, nor could they understand why he was cited.

#3: Not Just You

Participants who thought this commercial could be effective spoke about the relevance of its theme that others are hurt by a loved-one's injury or death.

Yet, only 27 of the 88 participants rated the commercial "A" or "B" in terms of effectiveness. It was rated "D" or "F" by 35 participants, of which 17 were "F." The overall grade point average was 1.84 on a 4.0 scale, significantly less than the GPA for **Second Chance**.

The most frequent criticisms and issues related to some issues similar to **You're Not Alone on the Road**, such as ---

- "Confusing and disconnected...It's too hard making the connection between the woman and the man."
- "Too abstract...Requires too much thought to figure it out."
- Across multiple groups, the commercial garnered consistent suggestions on ways to make it more understandable, such as ---
 - "Show both scenes as a split screen" (i.e., occurring concurrently)
 - "Show the crash first, then show how it impacts the woman"
 - "Switch back and forth between the two scenes"
- More participants had far more reactions and recollections of the experience of the woman (and various details of that scene) than they did of the crash scene and the intended message linked to wearing seat belts. In fact, the seat belt aspect of the commercial's depiction was almost universally ignored.

#4: The Reason Why

Relatively few participants thought this commercial could be effective. Many struggled to find anything positive to say about it. Non-verbal cues and body language conveyed reactions of adversity and disliking.

Just 24 of the 88 participants rated the commercial "A" or "B" in terms of effectiveness. It was rated "D" or "F" by 43 participants, of which 17 were "F." The overall grade point average was 1.65 on a 4.0 scale. It scored particularly poor in the law enforcement sensitive groups (GPA of 1.23; and two-thirds of those groups' participants grading it a "D" or "F").

Among the most frequent and consistent issues and criticisms ---

- "Too sad and depressing." (Interestingly, in five groups, at least one participant said it reminded him of the depressed-looking dogs on commercials sponsored by the ASPCA).
- "It makes cops look whimpy."

- It was the focus on a variety of derisive comments ranging from “was the cop hitting on the dead guy’s wife?” to “he looks like a (*expletive*)” to “it looks like the cop is being interrogated.”
- It led to numerous tangential comments that “the only thing cops care about are meeting their quotas” and “cops really don’t care.”
- In many groups, people suggested depictions (while the cop tells his story) of either the crash or the reaction of the widow to cop’s visit.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

For the campaign creative approach, use **Second Chance**.

For the TV execution of **Second Chance**, look at ways to better “sell” the ejection, in light of comments that it is not believable if the driver is not going very fast.

Explore possible means to not show a police officer. OK to show tickets, however.

Consider V/O copy that states something like, “We are stepping up enforcement...” or “Seat belt laws are being enforced more than ever...” as opposed to “Cops are writing more...” or “Cops are cracking down...”