

## **Motorcycle safety campaigns in Australia – would a national approach in the digital age achieve better results?**

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### **Abstract**

This presentation looks at the current state of motorcycle safety marketing in Australia, and makes suggestions more might be achieved with greater cooperation between the jurisdictions.

As the number of riders in Australia has grown at around 7% per year over the past decade, riders were targeted with campaigns aimed in part at discouraging the use of motorcycles rather than addressing issues such as shared responsibility on the roads.

The 2008 Motorcycle and Scooter Safety Summit held in Canberra should have been the trigger to change things, but did it?

The expansion of social media has changed the way messages are received and shared too. This is part of an increased challenge now facing the marketing of motorcycle safety in Australia. National print magazines each have an online presence; and thousands of riders are regularly participating in a range of forums on the web. At the same time, we continue with jurisdiction-based road safety marketing campaigns. This can result in a flood of sometimes-contradictory campaigns. Are the mixed messages drowning each other out? Would it make more sense to coordinate this effort across Australia?

### **Keywords**

Motorcycle, Marketing, Social media, Road safety

### **Introduction**

This is not a research paper. Instead it presents a summary of some of the challenges in marketing motorcycle safety in Australia from the perspective of riders – a key target audience. This paper was prepared for the Road Safety Discussion taking place at the 2013 ACRS conference.

### **Methodology**

On behalf of the Australian Motorcycle Council (AMC), I have reviewed a number of state-based motorcycle safety campaigns in the context of recommendations from the 2008 Motorcycle and Scooter Safety Summit, held in Canberra.

I have also noted the increased use of social media since 2008, as well as a key recommendation from the 2011-12 Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Motorcycle Safety.

### **Results**

Education was one of the key areas considered and discussed at the Australian Government’s Motorcycle and Scooter Safety Summit in Canberra in 2008. It was one of the seven key recommendation areas from the summit, with the key action, “Ensure that public education strategies for motorcycle and scooter safety include key messages for both riders and other

road users.” (Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, 2009) Under the heading of “future directions” the summit report provided a list of specific ideas:

- *Identify specific motorcycle safety issues for each jurisdiction that can be addressed through education and implement appropriate targeted actions.*
- *Share motorcycle public education materials nationally where appropriate.*
- *Establish key partnerships between riders, road safety authorities and other stakeholders (e.g. insurers) in each jurisdiction to help in development and delivery of motorcycle safety messages.*
- *Explore new ways to communicate motorcycle safety messages – viral marketing (via internet forums, blogs, emails), national motorcycle awareness day.*
- *Conduct attitudinal and behavioural research on riders and drivers’ attitudes to riders.*
- *Establish and maintain an effective consultative framework for road safety authorities and rider representatives to develop motorcycle and scooter safety messages.*
- *Evaluate existing messages including engagement, recognition and behaviour change amongst the target audience.*

So there was the start of a national framework, five years ago. Yet it seems everyone has just kept doing the much the same thing as before. If anything, there is less national coordination now than we had then, following the withdrawal of support in 2011 by the former government for the Motorcycle Safety Consultative Committee (MSCC).

Just two months after the Canberra summit, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) transport arm, the International Transport Forum, held a similar workshop in Lillehammer, Norway. This examined the OECD perspective on motorcycle safety, in view of increases in motorcycle usage similar to that being experienced in Australia.

The forum produced a detailed report (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2008) including three general principles for the management of motorcycle safety. The first of these was:

*Co-operation between the various stakeholders*

*Improving safety for motorcyclists implies to set up a continuing dialogue and co-operation between the various stakeholders, including the motorcyclists themselves, policy makers, researchers, and motorcycle manufacturers.*

The workshop also developed a suite of practical measures. These included:

*Getting safety messages to the riders and portrayal of responsible riding*

*Safety messages to riders should be developed in partnership with rider groups, in order to use the effectiveness of peer advice in communicating key issues to riders on issues that will impact their communities.*

*Codes of practice should be developed in order to promote and market motorcycling responsibly; the motorcycling press and rider organisations should also promote responsible behaviour codes.*

*Integrated awareness campaigns.*

*There should be regular, targeted, campaigns addressing both motorcyclists and other road users. These should be supported where necessary by other actions, e.g. enforcement, on safety-related subjects that include: mutual respect, protective equipment, speed, alcohol and drug issues.*

*To develop an awareness of motorcyclists and mutual respect between road users, education activities and campaigns should be set up from childhood, to emphasise that “road safety means road sharing”.*

Just as with the Canberra summit, there has been little in the way of coordinated action by OECD members to implement the outcomes of the Lillehammer workshop. A working group has now been established to address this, so we look forward to hearing news of its progress.

At both the Canberra and Lillehammer forums, there was discussion around the myriad of motorcycle safety messages that appear not only on local television, but in print magazines and online.

The significant growth in social media use in recent years has added a new dimension. Over 11 million Australians now use Facebook and YouTube, and there are 2.2 million Twitter users in Australia (David Cowling, 2013).

Video advertisements that were once almost the sole domain of geographically-based television networks are now shared across the country, and around the world. Wouldn't it make sense to take another look at how we deliver road safety campaigns in Australia?

Here are some examples of campaigns that have received a negative response from riders. Did they achieve their intended road safety aims?

From Tasmania, we had the campaign “When you're on your bike, you're on your own”, featuring blind-folded car drivers failing to see motorcyclists (Road Safety Task Force, 2009). While the message was well-intentioned, many rides in Tasmania and around the country asked “What happened to a ‘sharing the road’ theme in this campaign, where it's apparently OK for drivers to be blind to motorcycles?”

The most controversial campaign was from Queensland – a few years ago now. It was a mail-out campaign with a letter sent personally-addressed to each rider in Queensland. But the feature of the mail-out was a picture of a headstone featuring the name of the addressee. Now the aim may have been to shock, but this was not at all well-received in the riding community. And what impact did it actually have? Was this really an “anti-motorcycling” message dressed up as road safety?

The most controversial of recent campaigns was the Transport Accident Commission's “Reconstruction” advertisement (TAC, 2012). It spurned a Facebook page lampooning the TAC, which has around a third as many followers as the TAC's own official page. The point that upset riders so much about this advertisement was that all the blame was put on the rider and his speed – none on the car driver who failed to stop for a motorcyclist at a stop sign. Figures show that car drivers are most often at fault in fail-to-give-way crashes, yet the ad campaign focused on rider speed, rather than the need for all road users to be cautious.

On the other hand, the South Australian Motor Accident Commission (MAC) produced perhaps the best-received motorcycle safety campaign in the country, when it engaged former world motorcycle champion Mick Doohan to be the face of its 2009 “The Road’s No Place To Race” campaign (Mick Doohan, 2009).

The most thorough analysis of all aspects of motorcycle safety ever undertaken in Australia was conducted an Inquiry by the Road Safety Committee of the Victorian Parliament in 2011 and 2012 (Parliament of Victoria, 2012). Whilst the committee’s focus was motorcycle safety in Victoria, the Australian Motorcycle Council is of the view that many of the recommendations could and should be applied on a national basis.

Recommendations 22 referred to marketing campaigns in particular:

*That the Transport Accident Commission focus its motorcycle safety advertising on redressing the attitude that responsibility for rider safety is solely attributable to the rider, by ensuring that campaigns dealing with motorcycles raise driver awareness and do not create negative stereotypes, perceptions or attitudes among drivers.*

## **Discussion**

This situation of multiple messages in a national market is not new. State-based campaigns have been promoted in national print magazines for at least a decade. It hasn’t been unusual to see an advertisement from New South Wales on one page, and another taking a completely different approach from Victoria a few pages later.

From a marketing perspective, it might be normal to have competing businesses taking different approaches, but with motorcycle safety, aren’t we trying to “sell” the same brand?

The significant increase in social media use has exaggerated this. Each different campaign is posted on numerous social media sites, and the critiques begin. There’s no such thing as a state-based marketing campaign any longer, yet that’s still the way we operate.

## **Conclusion**

There are many areas where state and territory governments and agencies share information and ideas around road safety, but marketing is one area where this does not seem to happen very often. It was suggested at the Canberra summit in 2008 that marketing could be shared, but there are few if any examples of this happening. The expansion in social media usage since 2008 suggests a refocus on national marketing messages would make sense.

## **Recommendations**

The new federal government has a policy to develop a national approach on motorcycle safety. It’s time to revisit the recommendations from 2008 and work together to develop common marketing messages for motorcycle riders and other road users across the country.

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