
It sounds counterintuitive, but can mobile phones be used to reduce driver distraction?

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Abstract
Being on the phone while driving is highly distracting. Drivers are four times more likely to crash while talking on a phone, and over 20 times more likely if texting. Mobile phones remain an integral part of life for most adult Australians. In Victoria, the use of hand-held mobile phones while driving is illegal, and the dangers have been well publicised over recent years [8]. However, around three-quarters of 18 to 24 year olds still admit to regularly using their mobile phones while driving [9].

Traditional methods of targeting young drivers about the dangers of mobile phone use while driving did not appear to be getting through to them. VicRoads was looking for a way to cut through and engage with young drivers about this safety problem.

To educate this age group about the dangers of using a phone while driving an iPhone application called CityGT, was developed. The primary goal of CityGT was to reach young drivers aged 18-25 years and communicate the dangers of using a mobile phone while driving in a way that was more likely to resonate with this group.

To achieve this goal, three specific objectives were set. These were for CityGT to:
1. make users think about the dangers of using their mobile phone while driving
2. achieve at least 20,000 downloads
3. be listed in the ‘Top 25’ free Apps list on the iTunes store.
Method
In 2006, the Victorian Parliamentary Road Safety Committee conducted an Inquiry into driver distraction. One of the recommendations from the Committee was for the relevant state government agencies to implement targeted publicity campaigns warning drivers of the dangers of mobile phone distraction [8].

The first step in developing a communications strategy to target the use of mobile phones was to conduct various forms of research to help:
- define the problem
- identify the target audience for the campaign
- test the communications concept with the target audience.

This was achieved by:
- reviewing existing literature outlining the problem and prevalence of mobile phone use by 18-25 year olds
- commissioning audience research
- conducting end user and acceptance testing of the communications concept.

Target audience
The target audience identified for this campaign was young drivers aged 18 to 25 years. Background research showed that not only are young drivers over-represented in road crashes, but they also have grown up with mobile phone technology and have become more reliant on it [10, 11]. Therefore, to break the habit of using a phone while driving would be difficult for this group.

There are many effective methods used to communicate road safety messages to road users. However, traditional channels were becoming less effective in communicating with younger audiences. These audiences are consuming less traditional media such as commercial television, radio and newspapers, and relying more on digital channels to filter and access information [12-14]. The research identified that to implement a successful campaign, VicRoads needed to take a new approach to communicate with its target audience, one that was new, alternative and relevant. It was considered highly relevant to explore ways to use a mobile phone itself to communicate the dangers of their use while driving.

The take up of iPhone technology, in particular, is growing rapidly. Approximately 50 per cent of all new SmartPhone handsets currently bought in Australia are iPhones [15]. Market research commissioned by VicRoads also confirmed that there is a level of excitement and buzz around iPhones generally. All iPhone owners in the research sample said they exchanged, recommended and showed Apps to their friends or family [16].

To maximise the delivery of the message, it was important that advantage was taken of this ‘social nature’ of iPhone use. In doing so, a communications initiative could be more successful, because more people could be exposed to a campaign message than just those who downloaded the App. VicRoads decided to use the mobile phone itself to deliver the safe driving message.

CityGT
Critical for its success, CityGT was developed to look, play, and be promoted as if it were an actual driving game. Furthermore, the CityGT application needed to be void of any VicRoads or government branding (Figure 1).

To play CityGT, players used the iPhone’s in-built motion sensor. Players moved the iPhone like a steering wheel. The car in the game responded accordingly, allowing it to be steered around the track.

From a user’s perspective, CityGT was just another driving game, until the user was presented with a surprise twist - a hidden safe driving message. Under the guise of the iPhone’s functionality as a phone, the game is interrupted by an unexpected phone call which is programmed as part of the game software. If the player answers the call while driving the virtual car, the player receives a voice message explaining the hazards of driving while using a phone. While the player is engaged in this phone call, the virtual car crashes. If the player refuses to answer the call, he or she is rewarded with a congratulatory message from VicRoads at the end of the game. The player can also enter his or her score into the leader board and challenge friends.

Figure 1. Image of the start screen on CityGT iPhone App

Communications strategy
Prior to the game’s launch, gaming and social media websites were used to seed information about CityGT’s release. Outdoor billposters (Figure 2) and SmartCars (Figure 3) were deployed around Melbourne to promote its launch, and CityGT branded key tags (Figure 4) were left in cafes and social hubs around the city. The key tags included the game’s website address and carried the message ‘If found please return to Federation Square on 6 September 2009’.
CityGT was released on the Apple iTunes store and launched on 6 September 2009 at Melbourne's Federation Square. At this high profile event, people could wirelessly download CityGT straight to their iPhones. They could then connect and ‘drive’ using their iPhone handsets as a wireless steering wheel on the many CityGT screens (Figure 5).

In a world first, players could also use their phones to connect wirelessly and play CityGT on the big screen at Federation Square as shown in Figure 6.

In regional areas of Victoria, specially equipped SmartCars could be found at local youth hotspots where players could experience the game on larger screens. Prior to the launch, a CityGT game website (www.cityGT.com) went live giving audiences a ‘sneak-peek’ of the game and promoting its launch. Following the launch, the CityGT game website published a video of the launch and provided visitors with information about where the SmartCars would be parked so they could go and play CityGT wirelessly on their mobile screens. This website did not carry any VicRoads branding.
A VicRoads branded CityGT website (www.cityGT.vicroads.vic.gov.au) went live post-launch. It included a case study of the campaign and information about the dangers of using a mobile phone while driving. (Figure 7).

Another challenge with CityGT was that the message was being delivered to an unsuspecting audience. There was a risk that this may cause a negative response. The independent market research of the concept undertaken before the launch explored this possibility. Results showed that the intended audience was positive towards CityGT and while a small minority did express some annoyance, they agreed it was a worthy message, and it was acceptable to deliver the message in this way.

Results

To evaluate the CityGT campaign, independent qualitative consumer research, iPhone App usage and web statistics, and independent media analysis of television, print, web and blog items, were used.

Consumer research

Qualitative consumer research was undertaken to test the CityGT concept and prototype. A series of paired interviews was undertaken. The members of each pair of participants were friends and were licensed drivers. One member of each pair was an iPhone owner while the other was not. The purpose of the research was to obtain reactions to CityGT from its target audience to assist with developing messages for the campaign.

The primary objectives of this research were to identify and explore:

- reactions to the game, including positives and improvement suggestions
- unprompted message take-out and prompted reactions to the message
- reactions to VicRoads as the sponsor of the game
- reactions to using an iPhone App as a way of talking to a younger audience
- the extent to which the App would motivate users to share it with peers.

Reactions to playing CityGT were positive and the majority enjoyed the game. The research results showed that respondents (18-25 year olds) felt:

- The message was serious and important.
- The game was a good way of showing the consequences of talking on the phone while driving.
- It would be fun to use the game to ‘trick’ their friends, thus creating a campaign that was viral in nature. This was positive as users of the game would effectively be spreading our safety messages amongst their peers.
- Communicating in this way to young people was valid and a positive initiative for VicRoads.
- Most importantly, CityGT would bring the safety issue to mind while they were driving, and may make them think about safer ways of using a phone.
Usage statistics

Statistics about how many times CityGT was downloaded and other statistics which helped to measure the success of CityGT as an App, relative to other Apps on the iTunes Store, were available to VicRoads through Apple.

Usage and download statistics showed CityGT was:
- downloaded more than 30,000 times
- ranked in the top three hottest Apps on iTunes
- featured for six weeks on iTunes as one of the hottest Apps
- ranked as the second top free racing App
- rated by over 2,200 users.

CityGT was labelled as one of 2009's most popular free Apps on the Australian iTunes store.

Media analysis

Media monitoring was undertaken to keep track of how often and where CityGT was reported in the various forms of media. CityGT made headlines on major television networks, online newspapers (nationally and internationally) and thousands of social media sites.

The coverage had an estimated circulation of over 22.5 million people, far exceeding what would have been expected using traditional media with a similar budget. Further independent media analysis showed that CityGT did not receive any negative coverage. The initiative attracted wholly favourable comment. This independent analysis also showed that the VicRoads spokesperson had a very strong presence, promoting the benefits of the new technology, as well as emphasising the dangers of mobile phone use while driving.

Discussion

One of VicRoads strategic directions is to improve road safety. This is done by undertaking initiatives to improve the safety of roads, improve the safety of vehicles and to improve the safety of road users through a host of measures including communications campaigns.

Public education regarding the dangers of mobile phone use, in combination with other initiatives such as police enforcement and the development of technologies to minimise phone use, are expected to reduce the number of people injured and killed in certain types of crashes. However, road safety initiatives can take several years before their effect on road trauma can be measured. In the meantime social marketing and communications campaigns which support road safety policies and programs will maximise the effects of these initiatives.

Unless road users are aware of their obligations, obey road laws and moderate their behaviours, these other road safety initiatives may not be as effective as they could be. It is the role of effective communications and marketing campaigns to make sure road users are aware and are motivated to change their behaviours. For these reasons the success of social marketing and communications campaigns are not measured by their effect on road trauma. Instead metrics such as message take-out and recall, levels of engagement, self-reported effects on behaviour, and how widely the messages are communicated, are among many methods used to measure the success of these campaigns.

As outlined in the introduction, there were three objectives set for the CityGT campaign which were subsequently evaluated. The first objective was for CityGT to make users think about the dangers of using their mobile phone while driving. Through self-reported responses, the consumer research undertaken showed that this objective was achieved. The second objective was for CityGT to be downloaded more than 20,000 times. This objective was met, and exceeded, with download statistics showing more than 30,000 downloads were achieved.

The third objective was for CityGT to be listed in the ‘Top 25’ free Apps list on the iTunes store. The reason this was so critical to the campaign was that with so many Apps on the market, the respondents to our research said they went to the ‘Top 25’ games section first when looking for new games. Therefore, to maximise the success of this communications project CityGT needed to be ranked highly, to ensure more people would download it. This objective was achieved and exceeded. CityGT was ranked in the top three hottest Apps on iTunes and was ranked as the second top free racing App.

Conclusion

The primary goal of CityGT was to reach a young audience (18-25 year olds) and communicate the dangers of using a mobile phone while driving in a way that is more likely to resonate with this group. CityGT was successful in delivering this important safe driving message to the target audience in a new way and through a medium that research showed the audience understood and enjoyed. VicRoads capitalised on this and used the iPhone technology to deliver a message, in an unexpected way, to an audience which is increasingly resistant to road safety messages and one which is hard to reach through traditional communications channels.

In answer to the question posed in the title of this paper: yes, VicRoads was successful in using gaming and SmartPhone technology to target the driver distraction issue of mobile phone use while driving.

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The importance of fear reduction in fear-based road safety advertising appeals
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Abstract
Road safety advertisers need to include fear reduction in fear-based advertisements to improve road safety behavioural outcomes. When designing advertisements containing relief components to reinforce safe driving attitudes and practices, there should be greater emphasis on formative research, such as pre-testing advertising concepts to ensure the correct advertising execution is achieved. Defining and selecting target audiences on current attitudes and behaviours, such as offenders (brand loyals), conformers (other brand loyals) and vacillators (switchers), is recommended. Finally, moving beyond the simplistic categorization of fear-based advertising according to ‘levels’ of fear to a new focus on ‘patterns’ of fear, which requires the inclusion of a ‘fear reduction’ mechanism, should increase the effectiveness of road safety advertising.

Keywords
Fear-based appeals, Fear pattern, Fear reduction, Road safety advertising, Road safety campaigns

Introduction
This article moves away from the traditional notion of ‘levels’ of fear and instead advocates a focus on ‘patterns’ of fear within fear-based advertising appeals. A pattern of fear is the sequence of fear arousal and ‘fear reduction’, if any, that is felt by the viewing audience when exposed to a fear-based advertisement. This new focus allows the importance of fear reduction when designing fear-based road safety advertising appeals to be emphasised.

There is contention in both academic and practitioner fields on the appropriate way to design fear-based appeals to dissuade drivers from dangerous driving behaviours such as speeding, drink-driving and driving while fatigued. Academic literature, which is not limited to the area of road safety but includes other social or health behaviours, has mainly discussed research on levels of fear or threat [3-5]. There has also been a tendency to simplistically categorise fear-based advertising appeals into either fear (shock) or non-fear based appeals. These could be major reasons for the lack of advancement in theories in this field.

A comprehensive review of previous research in this domain has been undertaken by Lewis, Watson, Tay and White and the main conclusion drawn from this evaluation was that ‘further research is required to determine the optimum way to utilise fear in road safety advertising’ [6]. This observation is used as the starting point of the discussion presented in this article. A new way of thinking when designing an effective fear-based road safety advertising appeal is now put forward.