

Textataxi campaign (Xmas 2008)

Background

Drunk pedestrian fatalities have featured highly in Hertfordshire road safety statistics for a number of years and are of growing concern. On average 2-3 Hertfordshire pedestrians per year are killed as a result of being drunk and many more are seriously injured. In 2007 there were 48 drunk pedestrian casualties in Hertfordshire. For the past three years, the road safety unit has been trying to raise awareness of this issue and encourage Hertfordshire residents to find a safe way home.

A text messaging service was set up for two months in the run up to Christmas. People could text the words 'watford' or 'stalbans' (these were the areas with the highest drunk pedestrian casualty statistics and subsequently where the campaign was trialed) to 88020 and get licensed taxi numbers texted back to their phones.

Aims of campaign

- To raise awareness of the issue of drunk pedestrians as a serious problem in Hertfordshire
- To provide practical advice/solutions
- To reduce drunk pedestrian casualties in Hertfordshire

Methodology

To publicise the number temporary tattoos were given away at special events and adverts were broadcast on Mercury FM. To incentivise use of the number sponsored prizes were sourced. In addition, bar staff in pubs in both towns wore T-shirts with the number on them.

The campaign was aided enormously by the partnership work of Watford Borough Council and St Albans district council, Watford and St Albans Pubwatch, Watford Football Club, Saracens Rugby Club, St Michael's Manor Hotel, Mercury FM and Hertfordshire Constabulary.

The total spend of the campaign was £2838. Department for Transport figures demonstrate that one pedestrian fatality costs the taxpayer £1,489,450.

Results

Over 500 people were spoken to by road safety officers at the following venues:

St Albans and Watford town centres (textataxi launch events, where there was also an 'ad van' publicising the campaign to passers by)
St Albans District Council Health Fair
Oaklands College Know Your Limits fairs (St Albans, Smallford and Welwyn Garden city)

West Herts College Christmas Fair
HCC Fit for Work event
Welwyn Garden City Christmas Fair

50 texts were received, a number of which were at pub closing times, suggesting that the campaign may have helped a number of drunk pedestrians get home safely when arrangements had fallen through etc.

Media coverage was achieved on both Hertbeat and Mercury FM as well as in the Local Government Chronicle.

Unfortunately during the campaign there was an alleged incident involving a licensed taxi driver in St Albans. Press releases were not distributed as it was felt that, although this was a one-off and rare incident, local press may link the two stories or put a negative spin on the textataxi campaign.

To evaluate the impact and recall of the main messages and telephone evaluation was carried out. This involved a very small sample (7 people) from the Fit for Work (HCC) event at Apsley.

100% of people recalled speaking to us over a month after the event and in some cases two months after. One person recalled the campaign was called textataxi without being asked. The rest of the comments were as follows:

Do you remember what we were talking to people about?

“Taxi safety”

“Alcohol and pedestrians. Keeping safe and avoiding lolloping around on the road when drunk.”

“Personal Safety. Getting home safely after going out drinking.”

“Getting home safely and using licensed cabs”

“It was aimed at drunk pedestrians and encouraged them to get a taxi rather than walk.”

“Pedestrian safety.”

“To do with their being as much of a risk with drinking and walking as there is with drinking and driving.”

Do you recall the Textataxi campaign?

“Yes.”

“Yes but don’t live in the area so didn’t use it.”

“Remember hearing about textataxi but wouldn’t use it as I live in Buckinghamshire”

“Yes.”

“Yes – a licensed taxi number scheme aimed at people in Watford.”

“Vaguely. It was to do with taxi numbers but I have forgotten the details.”

“Yes. Remember getting card.”

Do you remember what the Textataxi campaign was publicising?

“Women being at risk when drunk (or sober).”

“Think it was about booking a taxi ahead of a night out.”

“Can’t remember specifics. Probably didn’t register as don’t live in the area so wouldn’t use.”

“Not getting into random cars when drunk.”

(Two respondents had already answered this question above).

“Not drink driving and getting safer taxis if you store the number in your phone.”

Any other comments?

“Very good idea. Haven’t used it personally but think it was a worthwhile service.”

“Good idea. Would be interested to know how it went.”

“Didn’t use it myself but would do. All my friends had heard about it and spoken about it and I am the only one that works at HCC.” Asked where friends had heard about it and she said she was unsure but “probably word of mouth or online.”

During the period the campaign ran, total drunk pedestrians casualties decreased from 14 to nine, compared to the same period the previous year. The previous year there were three relevant casualties in Watford over the Christmas period but during the Textataxi campaign there was only one.

However in St Albans, drunk pedestrian casualties increased from one to three. During the campaign there was a backlash against licensed taxis in St Albans due to an alleged incident. It is highly likely that because people were discouraged (via the press, word of mouth and online social networks) from getting licensed taxis, this worked against the campaign, leading to an increase in drunk pedestrian casualties.

There was a drunk pedestrian fatality over the Christmas period in 2005. The road safety unit began running campaigns in 2006 and there have since been no fatalities during this period. It may be that this is co-incidental, but also possibly an effect of the campaigns.

In conclusion, the campaign advice was recalled and received well and also provided a practical means for people wanting to get home safely. However, the emphasis on taxi safety may have made it appear as if it was a personal safety, rather than road safety, campaign. There is nothing wrong with this if people are still encouraged to get home safely but there may be a simpler way to raise awareness of the drunk pedestrian problem.