

Lombardo

SAFETY SELLS CARS, BUT IT NEEDS MARKETING, TOO

➤ Worldwide, several thousand motorists die each day of crash injuries; many more are seriously injured. And in the next decade, automobile use is expected to double. No wonder the UN has declared a decade of action to save lives from crash injuries.

The reality is that people need safety, want safety, and are willing to pay for it. In the USA, Consumer Reports recently noted that safety “remains the number one factor for consumers” when choosing a new car.

Meanwhile, NHTSA recently reported that the number of crash deaths in the first three months of 2012 surged by 13%. At this rate, the USA can expect crash deaths to rise again to about 100 per day in 2012.

DOT policy places a value on a statistical life saved at US\$6.2 million. People do not place a dollar value on their own lives or the lives of loved ones. But the DOT value serves as one measure of the importance of safety. It includes values for economic costs and values for pain and suffering avoided.

The USA has spent billions of dollars on auto and highway safety. One measure of the result is that about 500,000 lives have been saved by NHTSA standards and programs. Applying the DOT value of US\$6.2 million per life saved, DOT interventions saved about US\$3 trillion. As cars become safer, NHTSA estimates that the number of lives saved due to safety technologies is growing each year.

Although there has been progress, let’s remember how much further and faster we

must go. More than two million lives have been lost in America alone since NHTSA was formed. Just during President Obama’s administration, more than 100,000 Americans died of crash injuries – more than in the Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan wars combined.

Crash testing is win, win, win – for consumers, companies (auto makers, suppliers, insurers), and governments.

Crash testing can save consumers’ lives and livelihoods. It saves the reputations and money of companies. And for governments, it saves tax revenues and expenditures.

But the degree to which safety is actually delivered – to whom, by whom, when, and where – is dependent on the degree to which safety is marketed.

Volvo publicly adopted a goal of zero deaths in a Volvo by 2020, but has limited marketing capability to monetize this advantage. In fact, advertising budget aside, Volvo’s marketing has often missed the chance to reinforce its earned reputation for safety in its advertising.

As the legendary art director George Lois wrote in *Damn Good Advice (for people with talent)*, “A big idea can change world culture.” Imagine what a major marketing effort can do using the big idea: safety sells.

Think of some of the organizations working to get crash test results to the people: NHTSA and the proliferating other NCAP programs around the world; IIHS in its excellent crash testing for the media,

including more than 1,000 crash test videos on YouTube; Consumer Reports for its millions of readers; The Center for Auto Safety in its annual *Car Book*; and the media, which spreads make and model crash test information in words, pictures, and videos worldwide.

Think of the big marketing budgets of auto companies ranging up to US\$3 billion in 2011. Then think of the small marketing content that often misses by miles the big idea that safety sells. In July this year, *Automotive News* reported that the marketing spend on the Smart amounted to US\$2,711 per vehicle sold, while spending on a MINI amounted to US\$385 per vehicle sold. How many consumers get the message to buy these vehicles because safety sells?

Now ask yourself: Can’t we do better than this by using the big idea to help us all?

Crash testing leads to safer vehicles, safer vehicles save lives, and people buy safer vehicles. A virtuous cycle in which we all can win – if we use the marketing power of the big idea. ◀

When Louis V. Lombardo joined NHTSA in 1978, he became an advocate for adopting airbags and other crashworthy measures, and played a key role in the airbag’s adoption. He has since spent time at the IIHS, more time at NHTSA, and is now campaigning for better emergency response to car crashes. After 40 years of dedicated work, Lombardo continues to have constructive dialog with his auto-safety colleagues and government officials, and he insists there’s much more to be done. Lou’s website is www.careforcrashvictims.com

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