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## Quebec 'Buckle Up' campaign

### INTRODUCTION

Behavior modification is always a thorny issue among advertisers. Some - notably beer, alcohol and cigarette manufacturers - claim they are not trying to influence behavior (that is, induce people to acquire a habit of usage), rather they are merely trying to influence brand choice and preference.

But for others, influencing and changing behaviour is clearly the objective of the exercise. And when this is the case, it is one of the toughest challenges of advertising. People don't change easily. And if and when they do, it's not necessarily a permanent thing. An even more formidable obstacle for advertisers, is the fact that they are usually trying to change the behaviour of a mass of people. The only way to do this is by tapping into the collective psyche of a whole target group and searching for the magic button that motivates everyone. Will rational arguments provide such a button? Or, what about finding an emotional hot-spot?

Governments are major practitioners of advertising which aims to change public attitudes and behaviour. It could be an appeal to quit smoking or an argument to encourage condom use. Or, as in this case, an attempt by la Société de l'assurance automobile du Québec and PALM publicité marketing to encourage seat belt usage in Quebec.

The case spans a period between 1987 and 1991. The campaign was so successful it raised usage rates in Quebec from one of the lowest levels in Canada to over 93 per cent, a world record. What made the accomplishment even more outstanding was the nature of the target group that needed to be reached. It was the so-called 'recalcitrant' category of young male drivers who seemed wilfully opposed to 'buckling up.' By using a potent blend of reason, emotion and creative inspiration, the campaign succeeded in persuading a target group that had seemed virtually unpersuadable before the last phase of the campaign.

The creative approach deserves attention. Equating a 40 kilometre an hour car crash with a fall from a three-storey building was more than an inspired visual metaphor - it tapped into our psyche and left no room for diminishing the results of such an accident. While many people might pretend that a relatively low-speed collision is not serious, no one could say or think the same about a fall from a building. There was no room to 'argue' with the commercial, hence there was a good reason to 'buy' the proposition that wearing a seat belt was a good idea.

The persistence and longevity of the *Buckle Up* campaign must also be credited with its success. All too often, advocacy advertising starts with a flurry of activity. When the flight of ads or the budget for full-page print advertising runs out, so does the memory and impact of the campaign. That didn't happen here. In this case, the campaign evolved over five years with two distinct phases. First, it employed key public relations and promotional components to reinforce the media message. Second, it involved the co-operation of private sector sponsors and the Quebec police departments. While TV advertising was the key component in changing the seat belt attitudes of Quebecers, that 'air' attack had sustained ground support in other media which helped broaden and enhance the core message.

### JUDGES' COMMENTS

*This case demonstrates not only the effectiveness of advertising (by helping increase seat belt usage) but also its ability to persuade an extremely hard-to-reach group (young adult males). It was a case of the uniquely persuasive qualities of advertising versus any other form of marketing communications.*

*What impressed us was not only the incredibly high response rate of people buckling up, but the demonstrable savings in dollars and lives that resulted from this campaign.*

*In summary, the case demonstrated: advertising's unique ability to reach and persuade small, difficult-to-reach groups; advertising's ability to provide a high return on the investment, and advertising's positive role in an important social context. A winner in all senses.*

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

After 10 years of mandatory front seat belt use in Quebec and numerous legal/police reinforcement programs, the all-time high rate of seat belt use for the province reached 67.7% in 1986. During that period, legal sanctions and police interventions generated only short-term behaviour modification.

In 1987, the Société de l'assurance automobile du Québec (SAAQ) asked PALM publicité marketing inc. to develop an advertising campaign to increase the use of seat belts in Quebec. The objective was very ambitious: to reach and maintain a user-rate of 80%.

Following a high-awareness, high-impact advertising campaign in 1987 to support a number of SAAQ seat belt-related activities, the use rate increased by 18.1% to reach 85.8%.

In 1990, a second high-awareness advertising campaign was launched, targeting 'recalcitrant' drivers - those who would not use their seat belt at any cost. The campaign capitalized on a social consensus that everybody should wear seatbelts and suggested how ridiculous it is not wearing one when the majority does. As a result, a usage rate of 93.5% was reached in 1990. This made Quebec number one in Canada and North America for seat belt use. It also placed the province among the leaders of the world in seat belt use. Furthermore, a 1991 Transport Canada survey showed that the rate of seat belt use is still over 90 per cent, indicating a fundamental behaviour modification in the Quebec population.

Consumer surveys demonstrated that advertising played a major role in changing attitudes and modifying behaviour.

As a matter of interest, the 1987 and 1990 advertising campaigns were executed in both French and English, with limited production and media budgets. The television commercials won international awards and were used by another Canadian province.

Post-campaign SAAQ research indicated that increasing the rate of seat belt use from 81.6% in 1989 to 89% after the 1990 campaign resulted in saving 24 additional lives as well as avoiding 1,510 additional injuries in road accidents per year in Quebec. This represents savings of \$15 million per year in SAAQ compensation to victims.

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## **SITUATION ANALYSIS**

### **MISSION OF THE SOCIÉTÉ DE L'ASSURANCE AUTOMOBILE DE QUÉBEC**

The SAAQ, a Government of Quebec agency, is responsible for reducing the risks inherent in using provincial roads. This mission translates first into programs for the prevention of road accidents and injuries and second, the reduction of consequences to the injured victims (that is, a universal no-fault insurance system covering bodily injury).

### **History of Seat Belt Usage in Quebec**

Seat belt use for front seat occupants of passenger cars has been mandatory in Quebec since 1976.

Starting at a 40% Rate of seat belt use with the introduction of the law, the Quebec seat belt use rate has fluctuated ever since, peaking at 67.5% in 1982 and dropping to 53.4% in 1985.<sup>2</sup> These results reflect the sporadic enforcement of seat belt safety measures.

In order to increase the rate of seat belt use in the province, the SAAQ and the province's police forces introduced Selective Traffic Enforcement Programs (STEP) in 1986. These police operations increased the rate of seat belt use to 67.7 per cent by the end of 1986.<sup>2</sup> In 1987, the SAAQ was more determined than ever to increase the rate of Quebec driver and passenger seat belt use. A major advertising campaign was launched in conjunction with STEP. It aimed at reaching an 80% rate of seat belt use. This offensive resulted in setting a Quebec and Canadian record rate for seat belt use of 85.8 per cent.

Even though no advertising activity was scheduled in 1988 and 1989, over 80 per cent of front seat occupants of passenger cars used their seat belt at all times, indicating that it had become a social standard to buckle up.

In January 1990, seat belt use for back seat passengers became mandatory. Furthermore, the new Highway Safety Code came into effect, legislating tougher fines.

In 1990, the SAAQ decided to follow the 1987 offensive with a new advertising campaign and STEP operation. The objective was ambitious: to reach a 90% rate of seat belt usage and make Quebec number one in seat belt use across Canada and North America. The budget allowed for only four weeks of electronic media presence.

## **STRATEGY AND EXECUTION**

### **THE 1987 ADVERTISING OBJECTIVE: 80%**

In 1987, a survey conducted by the SAAQ revealed that seat belt usage was higher on main roads and highways than in urban areas. It also showed that the majority of accidents with victims occurred in zones of 50 kilometres or less from the home. This helped focus the campaign's creative message.

The objective of the campaign was to increase the rate of seat belt use to 80 per cent from 67.7 per cent and to maintain that rate.

### **The 1987 Campaign Strategy and Execution**

Targeting the French and English adult population 18 years and older, the 1987 campaign was developed to demonstrate the risks in a low-speed, close-to-home collision and to reinforce the idea that seat belts should be used at all times.

Television was used to demonstrate the risks involved while other media such as radio and magazines were used to inform our target group of the consequences of not wearing seat belts, that is, fines, demerit points, road blocks, statistical likelihood of death or injury.

The TV execution presented a rational argument to the consumer and used a vivid metaphor: a collision at 40 km/h is equivalent to a fall from a three-storey building.

The 'falling' aspect of the commercial was chosen over a more obvious car crash scenario. Consumers could clearly relate to a terrifying fall from a three-story building. A collision, particularly one at a relatively low speed, is often imagined to be minor and, particularly among the target audience, could be dismissed as less than life threatening. The idea of falling from a building leaves no room to rationalize or diminish the consequences.

To convey the aspect of 'close-to-home', we used a man running on a roof of a building holding a loaf of bread. That's because a car is very often used to make a trip to the local 'dépanneur' or convenience store to pick up bread and milk.

## **OTHER MEDIA**

Radio, magazine inserts and busboards were used to support the television advertising. The print ads used the idea of falling from a building. The radio spots created situational vignettes that discussed circumstances such as short drives and quick errands in which people typically didn't use seat belts. A typical spot showed someone going out to the local store for a loaf of bread, thus indirectly reinforcing the TV creative.

### **Timing**

TV, radio, magazine: September 15 to November 15, 1987

### **Budget**

Media & Production: \$1.0 million

## **RESULTS**

### **1987 ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN AWARENESS RESEARCH**

A survey sponsored by the SAAQ, conducted from 16 to 20 February 1988, (more than three months after the advertising campaign) showed that 68% of the Quebec population still recalled the advertising campaign. (see [Figure 1](#)). The TV message had the greatest impact (83% awareness level) among those who recalled the campaign. (see [Figure 2](#)).

The key fact to emerge from this survey was that 37% of those polled said they buckled up more often after having been exposed to the campaign. According to the survey, 47% of these people named the advertising as the factor most responsible for this change in behaviour.

### **Impact on Usage**

As stated, the results of this first campaign phase met the target objective. During the campaign, seat belt usage rose to 85.8% from the pre-campaign level of 67.7%. More importantly, the rate of seat belt use remained over 80% in the subsequent years, 1988 and 1989. Thus, long-term behaviour was clearly affected in a positive way.

### **THE 1990 ADVERTISING OBJECTIVE: 90%**

The 1989 rate of seat belt use for front seat occupants of passenger cars was at 81.6%, confirming that buckling up was now a socially accepted and respected behaviour. To continue the pressure to quantitatively increase usage, seat belt use for back seat passengers became mandatory on 1 January 1990.

The 1990 advertising objective was divided into two parts:

- To increase the rate of seat belt use of front seat occupants of passenger cars to 90 per cent;
- To convince passengers to buckle up in the back seat.

These two objectives were to be addressed within the same umbrella campaign.

The biggest challenge of the 1990 advertising campaign lay in the type of non-seat belt users we had to convert. For the back seat, our target group was the adult population, 18 years and over. For front seat occupants, our target group was what we called 'recalcitrants'. A study issued by the SAAQ described our recalcitrant target group as typically being:

Young, single, male, 30-years-old, little education, aggressive, impulsive, high alcohol consumer, drug user, smoker, with high frequency of accidents, drinking and driving infractions and loss of driver's license.

## **THE IMPOSSIBLE MARKETING OBJECTIVE**

To reach a 90% rate of seat belt use meant converting an additional 8.4% of the total population (from 81.6% to 90%). Since our recalcitrant segment represented 18.4% of total Quebec drivers, converting 8.4% would mean converting over 46% of the total recalcitrant group.

## **THE 1990 CAMPAIGN STRATEGY**

A number of inter-related elements formed the strategy of the next phase of the campaign:

To strongly reinforce the belief of regular and occasional users in the effectiveness of using seat belts, especially in urban areas and at low speeds.

To inform the public of the legal consequences related to not using seat belts, such as the fines for the infraction and the loss of demerit points.

To heighten public awareness that back seat passengers who did not wear seat belts were risking their safety as well as the safety of front seat passengers.

To reinforce the social consensus that everybody should wear seat belts at all times by suggesting how ridiculous it is not to wear one.

## **THE 1990 CAMPAIGN EXECUTION**

### **Television**

Television was used to demonstrate the risks involved in not buckling up. Other media such as radio, busboards and magazines were used to inform our target group of the consequences of not wearing seat belts, that is, fines and demerit points. The 1987 commercial (Bread/Pain) of the man falling from the building was put back on air to reinforce user behaviour.

Two new TV commercials were aired under the theme 'Only fools drive without their seat belts / Pas attache, de quoi t'as l'air.' Both commercials featured a well-known Quebec actor, Jean Parent, who personified our hard-headed, recalcitrant driver.

The first commercial focused on the actual behaviour of our target audience and tackled one of their major arguments for not wearing their seat belt: 'I can hold myself back in a collision, I don't need to use my seat belt.' This TV execution clearly demonstrated that no one can hold themselves back in a collision.

The second commercial focused more on the risks of not using seatbelts for the back seat passenger as well as the front seat driver. This TV execution used a strong rational argument: in a collision at 40 km/hr, the back seat passenger has the force of a flying object 35 times their weight. To increase the emotional charge of this second TV execution, a child was used as the back seat passenger.

## **OTHER MEDIA**

As before, print, radio and busboards were used. Jean Parent was used in the busboard campaign and on the radio voice-overs as well as both 30-second TV spots. Busboards and magazines helped to reinforce and remind drivers of the fines and penalties related to non-use of seat belts.

### **Media Timing**

TV: 21 May to 16 June 1990

Radio: 14 May to 30 June 1990

Busboards/magazines: 14 May to 7 July 1990

## **Budget**

Media and production (Fr/Eng) \$1.2-million

An approximate breakdown of the media spending was as follows:

- TV\* 60 per cent
- Radio 29 per cent
- Busboard 8 per cent
- Magazine 3 per cent

\* It should also be noted that for the 1990 campaign, a special movie edition of the TV commercial was created for drive-thrus across the province.

## **Markets**

All regions of Quebec

## **Other Campaign Components (1987 and 1990)**

The campaign relied heavily on key sponsors who were prepared to partially underwrite the cost of the campaign in return for promotional consideration. Contra-deals allowed a sponsor to participate in our promotional efforts in exchange for on-air mention in the radio ads or placement of their logo on the busboards.

## **Public Relations**

The ad and promotion campaigns were launched with press conferences in Montreal and throughout Quebec.

## **Promotion**

An additional promotional concept was based on the idea that the police force had to be part of a good behaviour reinforcement program. The SAAQ secured the participation of all police forces throughout the province. Police stopped cars and rewarded people wearing seat belts with a scratch-and-win ticket for instant prizes provided by sponsors, plus a detachable part for a Grand Prize draw. Occupants not wearing seat belts were issued fees.

## **Timing**

1987: Month of October

1991: 28 May to 4 and 11 June

## **Co-Sponsors**

1987: Ultramar, Coca-Cola, Metro, Goodyear, CAA

1991: Ultramar, Mikes Restaurants, CAA, Subaru

## **RESULTS**

### **1990 ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN AWARENESS RESEARCH**

A survey sponsored by the SAAQ, conducted from 16 to 30 July 1990 (one month after the airing of the TV campaign) showed that 89% of the Quebec population recalled the advertising campaign. The TV commercials had the greatest impact: 85% of respondents considered the new TV spots to have a positive impact on non seat belt users.

Even though the press conference generated extensive press coverage on TV, radio and in print, the advertising campaign generated the highest level of awareness:

- Advertising 89 per cent
- Promotion 60 per cent
- Press coverage 40 per cent

### Rate of Seat Belt Use

The estimates of shoulder seat belt use from annual surveys 1980-1991 issued by Transport Canada (Table 1) as well as the rapport d'évaluation sommaire issued by the SAAQ reveal that:

The rate of seat belt use following the 1987 advertising campaign was 85.8%, an increase of 18.1% over 1986.

The rate of seat belt use remained above 80% for 1988 and 1989 indicating the lasting effect of the 1987 campaign.

The rate of seat belt use following the 1990 advertising campaign set a Canadian record of 93.5%. This made Quebec number one for seat belt use in Canada and North America. It also placed the province among the leaders of the world in seat belt use.

A survey conducted by the SAAQ between 3 July 3 and 12 July 1990 revealed that 63% of back-seat passengers were buckling up. This represented an increase of 6 per cent over the previous 57% rate for back-seat passengers before the campaign.

Without any further advertising activity, the rate of seat belt use for 1991 remained at 92.4%, further emphasizing the lasting effect of the 1990 campaign.

### SOCIAL IMPACT

As stated in the rapport d'évaluation sommaire issued by the SAAQ, increasing seat belt use from 81.6% to 89% resulted in saving 24 additional lives as well as avoiding 1,510 additional injuries in road accidents per year in Quebec. This represents savings of \$15 million per year in SAAQ compensation to victims.

**TABLE 1: ESTIMATE OF SHOULDER SEAT BELT USE FROM ANNUAL SURVEYS  
1980 - 1991**

	% of Car Drivers Wearing Shoulder Belts, Where Available*											
Province	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Nfld	2.8	8.6	67.8	75.9	69.7	65.5	61.4	64.6	72.4	64.6	84.2	91.6
PEI	6.2	3.4	7.2	5.6	9.3	17.9	13.7	50.0	82.0	72.7	65.2	74.7
NS	9.3	11.4	8.7	12.1	20.2	80.8	79.8	68.6	73.4	79.1	83.4	83.9
NB	5.6	8.1	4.2	66.5	60.2	63.4	66.5	65.0	67.6	64.4	76.9	81.9
Que	39.0	40.7	67.5	60.4	54.3	53.4	67.7	85.8	81.5	81.6	93.5	92.4
Ont	43.7	52.5	48.9	60.1	61.9	66.4	65.9	67.6	70.3	70.8	71.6	79.7
Man	6.0	6.4	7.0	11.1	61.6	53.6	61.3	64.6	66.0	79.3	73.4	79.4
Sask	60.7	50.5	48.4	54.0	49.6	51.1	59.7	71.9	81.0	87.7	91.5	91.5
Alta	12.7	11.0	17.1	18.2	19.8	24.4	27.8	74.3	82.5	44.6	88.1	84.4
BC	49.3	42.4	53.0	67.4	72.7	73.8	78.3	80.3	79.8	85.2	88.3	87.0
Canada	36.4	38.1	45.6	52.0	54.9	58.4	63.2	74.0	75.8	73.9	81.9	85.1

**\*Shoulder belt fitting:**

1980 - 95.0%	1981 - 97.4%	1982 - 96.8%	1983 - 96.8%
1984 - 98.0%	1985 - 97.9%	1986 - 98.7%	1987 - 98.7%
1988 - 98.6%	1989 - 99.1%	1990 - 99.6%	1991 - 99.2%

**Source: Transport Canada**

## **ADVERTISING AWARDS**

'Communication Strategy Award' in 1988 from the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators for the North-East of America (including Quebec, Ontario, the Atlantic provinces, New England, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and New York). First prize awarded out of four finalists.

Mobius Award 1988 for 'The Best Advocacy TV Commercial' at the American Advertising Festival, Chicago.

First Prize for 'Communications' at the International Road Security Festival in Carcassonne (France) in 1989. More than 31 countries participated.

Nominated in 1990 by the Publicité-Club de Montréal in Advocacy Advertising category.

One of five finalists for the Grand Prize of the Mondial de la publicité 1990.

## **USAGE OF TV COMMERCIALS IN OTHER CANADIAN PROVINCES**

From 1 November 1991 to 1 February 1992 and from 25 May 1992 to 23 August 1992, the Traffic Services of the Saskatchewan Government Insurance used the 'Simon' 30 second commercial as a Public Service Announcement on 11 TV stations across the province.

We have recently been contacted by the Communications Services of Alberta Transportation and Utilities. They wish to use the 'Simon' TV commercial for a 13-week period in Edmonton and Calgary. We are in the process of evaluating costs.

## **SOURCES**

1. *Dussault Claude (1990) Effectiveness of a Selective Traffic Enforcement Program Combined with Incentives for Seat Belt Use in Quebec, Nealth Education Research, Theory and Practice, volume 5 no. 21990, pages 217-223.*

2. *Transport Canada (1991) Estimates of Shoulder Seat Belt Use From Annual Surveys: 1980-1991. Table 1. Leaflet No. CL9104(E) August 1991, Ottawa, Ontario.*

### **CLIENT**

Société de l'assurance automobile de Québec  
Louise Meunier                      Communication Service Chief

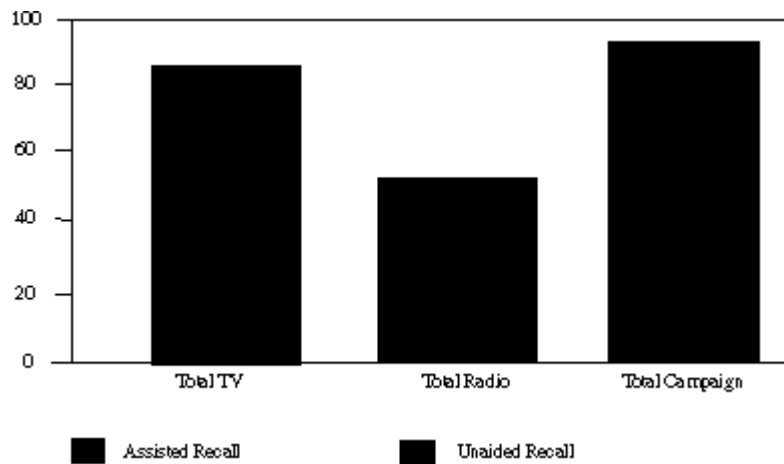
### **AGENCY**

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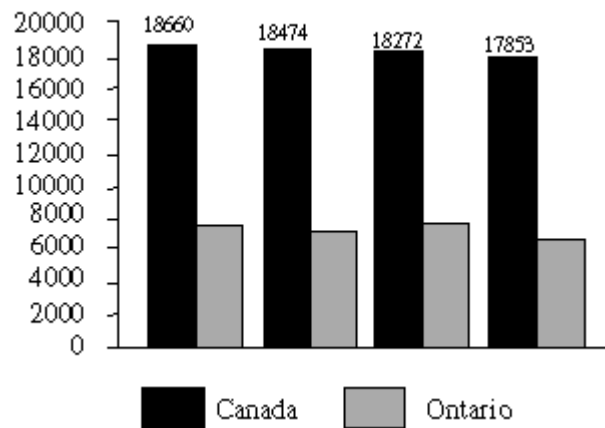
## NOTES & EXHIBITS

### FIGURE 1: RECALL OF THE ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN



### FIGURE 2: AWARENESS OF ADVERTISING

Ontario and National Trends - 1988 to 1991



Type of recall among those remembering the campaign