

Emotional appeal key to success

Seat belt media blitz a trial balloon

By MICHAEL MATUSZEWSKI

There you are tooting down the John Lodge or I-75. Or maybe you're caught in the massive moving parking lots of rush hour traffic on I-94 or the Southfield expressway.

The blare and babble of AM radio drive-time disc jockeys and traffic reports is interrupted: "... buckle up, if not for you—for them. Somebody needs you."

It's the eight or ninth time you've heard it and you grope feverishly for the buttons of the channel selector, but the message is there across the dial.

MOTORISTS INFORMATION INC. (MI), a newly-formed, non-profit organization, is spending \$1 million across the state on a massive media blitz to get drivers to wear their seat belts.

It isn't the first campaign, and it probably will not be the last. But, according to MI spokesmen, it is the first to change people's attitudes. They say you have to change attitudes before you can change behavior.

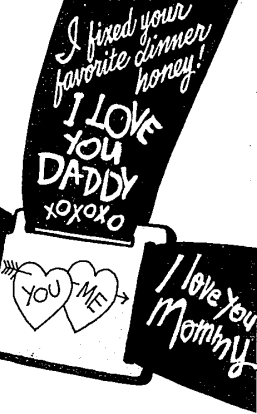
MI is planning to hit everyone in the Detroit metropolitan area with its message—not once, not twice, but an average of 90 times before the campaign winds down to a close at the end of October.

"We think many people who won't wear seat belts for themselves will do so for somebody else. We want to make wearing seat belts more socially acceptable. We want people to feel guilty if they don't wear them," said Robert Hanson, MI's executive director.

"We don't want to nag. But we want to get our message through," he added.

WITH THE message filling the air waves and freeway billboards, flashing across electric message boards and pecking out from newspaper and magazine pages, the "Somebody Needs You" slogan is getting across, if not through.

Somebody needs you.



Motorists Information Inc.

People pushing the buckle-up campaign hope guilt will do the job for them, as this advertisement reflects.

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), however, has contended that MI's trial "Somebody Needs You" program in Grand Rapids really didn't get people to buckle up.

The contentions of IIHS thicken the plot. IIHS is funded by the insurance companies, which have been spearheading the drive for air bags in automobiles.

MI, on the other hand, received its initial funding from the four major auto makers. The auto companies have been strongly opposed to mandatory requirements for the automatic passive restraint system.

According to published reports, IIHS said 87 per cent of the drivers surveyed in Grand Rapids still did not fasten their seat belts or shoulder harnesses. The survey, however, was a random sampling of moving cars.

Hanson called the survey "shoddy" and rattled off statistics showing that drivers who said they wore seat belts "always" or "most of the time" rose from 29 to 41 per cent.

Hanson said he was not interested in fighting air bags, "just saving lives."

He said it was unlikely that the auto makers would begin installing air bags until the early 1980's and that, it would take at least 15 years before the entire American fleet of cars would be equipped with air bags.

Between now and then "you're going to save a hell of a lot of lives" with safety belts, he said.

EDUCATION AND emotion have been the key elements in the MI effort.

Hanson said a 1976 Yankelovich, Scully & White survey had revealed that drivers had some startling misconceptions about safety belts.

"Drivers felt it was safer to be thrown clear of the car in an accident. They felt the belts were confining and that they might burn if the car caught fire. They also said they didn't need them to drive to the market or around town," Hanson said.

MI materials, however, refute all the usual alibis. And, they point to one hard-to-overcome statistic: "Based on projections, if everyone wore current safety belts, there would be more than 16,000 lives and 90,000 injuries avoided annually in the U.S."

He continued, "I listen to conversations. I talk to people in grocery stores and shopping centers and I've come across only two people who had negative reactions."

One was a big woman, he explained, and she said she would buckle up, but she couldn't. The other said he was "philosophically opposed" to it because people should be able to decide to buckle up for themselves.

The true effectiveness of the campaign will not be known until November when Lincoln Research, Inc. of Southfield completes its survey.

Only then will MI decide if it will carry the campaign to other states or undertake a nationwide crusade.

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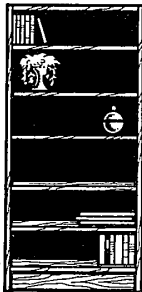
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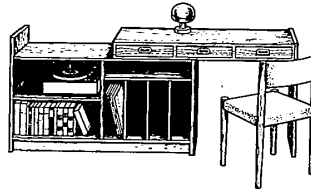
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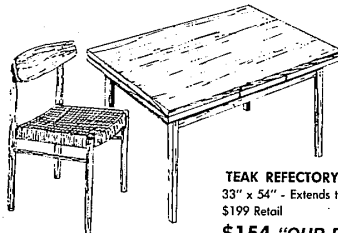
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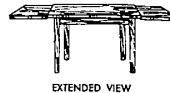


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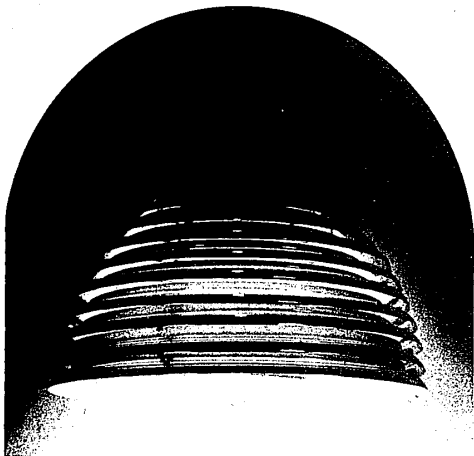
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