



VSA consumer awareness advertising

Outstanding media co-operation

A pilot project which began last fall in *The Vancouver Sun* and *The Province* has now spread province-wide and will also soon be heard on several radio stations. This is an important step toward fulfilling the VSA mandate to both inform and educate consumers.

A healthy marketplace puts responsibilities upon both buyers and vendors. No matter how good a job the reputable people in the industry do in professional development and in the encouragement of

optimal business practices, the consumer needs to be sharp as well.

Mass media consumer education advertising, aimed at behaviour modification, such as we see concerning tobacco, various other health issues, impaired driving and seat belt utilization, represents multiple millions of dollars worth of media time and space, funds that have principally come from governments.

Without this kind of financial support, VSA consumer information efforts until late 2007 had been restricted to the web site, various public events, news releases, free public service advertising occasionally provided by media and a consumer help line.

A strategic alliance between the B.C. motor vehicle sales industry and the search firm CarProof, commencing in 2006, generated the seed money the VSA needed to commence public advertising. (CarProof makes a donation to VSA's consumer services based upon a small percentage of every B.C. retail search conducted.)

Deal only with licensed dealers and salespeople. Before you buy a motor vehicle, read and understand the entire contract. Make sure it states whether or not the deposit is refundable, and includes any promises made by the seller. And don't forget to obtain your copy plus all receipts before you drive away.

 Motor Vehicle Sales Authority of British Columbia
vehiclesalesauthority.com

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Core messaging: targeting curbbers and illegal practices

The consumer advice within the print and radio advertisements is clear and simple, encouraging consumers to respect licensing and industry professionalism:

- Deal only with licensed dealers and salespeople
- Read and understand all contracts and obtain copies of them
- Get promises in writing, particularly whether or not deposits are refundable
- Obtain receipts for all payments
- Research used vehicle histories through a reputable service such as CarProof
- Visit the VSA web site for comprehensive consumer and industry information

Media Co-operation *(continued...)*

In the past, the VSA received some free space in *The Sun*, *The Province*, *AutoTrader* and other journals. The province-wide *Black Press* group has consistently offered public service advertising at no cost. Unfortunately, the "space available" basis for such advertising - and the inevitable ad hoc nature of managing the process - made this generosity ineffective.

With the help of veteran Vancouver advertising executive, Stephen Vrlak, Chairman of the province's Advertising Standards Council for a generation, the VSA was able to approach media with a different proposition:

- auto manufacturers and dealers represent one of the most lucrative revenue streams for all media
- some consumers get victimized as a by-product of some of this advertising content
- industry and media must be partners in the encouragement of best practices
- consumer awareness advertising must be contracted, scheduled and consistent, not left to chance that someone at the VSA or at a newspaper might find free space in a specific publication
- VSA would provide a contracted sum each month to each media partner, an "honorarium" based upon the delivery of a specific advertising program
- the media partner would provide significantly more time and space than this sum would ordinarily be able to purchase.

"The result has been that we have leveraged the dollars available many times," said Judy McRae, VSA's Manager of Corporate Services and Communication. "The launch has been so successful that we hope to be able to significantly expand the program during the year to come."

Vrlak reported that the media co-operation has been both generous and enthusiastic. "The easy acceptance by media of their social responsibility in this matter has been refreshing. The VSA has shown its respect for the costs media face in facilitating public service announcements by putting money on the table, and media have responded

Media partners - the pilot project

VSA is particularly grateful to the following companies and individuals who have been instrumental in this consumer education project. An "informed, confident consumer" will make it more difficult for anyone to engage in unacceptable business practices, particularly the minority of predators who tarnish the image of the entire industry. Lessons learned from these tentative first steps with mass media advertising will pay large dividends in the future when resources are available to partner with all media, school programs and other information technologies.

Publicis Vancouver

(advertising agency)

Stephen Vrlak, Account Executive
Brett McIntosh, Vice-President/Managing Partner
Bill Downie, Creative Director

Pacific Newspaper Group

The Vancouver Sun & The Province

Tom Shipman, Manager, Automotive Advertising

CHUM Radio Group Vancouver

CHQM-FM, CFUN, 1040-AM Sports

Barry O'Donnell, General Sales Manager
Terry Reid and Tara McGuire (*TERRY & TARA, QM 103.5 morning hosts*)

Black Press

70 newspapers and publications, province-wide

Randy Blair, President, Lower Mainland Division
Candy Hodson, Senior Vice President, Marketing

Trader Corporation

Six Auto Trader publications

Darcy Dueck, Assistant Sales Manager

in an overwhelmingly positive way."

The plan is to carefully monitor experience and grow the program as more funds become available. At some point, a strategy will be necessary to ensure that consumers contribute to the cost of the services provided to them.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of the program can only be judged by improvements in consumer behaviour. In due course, surveys and other methodology will have to be employed in order to assess results.