PART 1: Framing the issues, creating a strategy

The importance of education

A key function of communications is education — sharing the information that will not only raise awareness about Vision Zero but spur individuals and institutions to change their behavior on the streets. In some ways, though, education is the overlooked of the traditional “E’s”. Afterall, engineering is the mandate of the transportation department and enforcement is the charge of the police department. But no single department is responsible for education; rather, it’s embedded in every aspect of the Vision Zero initiative.

“NYC DOT is fortunate to have an in-house safety education team, but traditionally education isn’t something that agencies are tasked with operationally on a day-to-day basis,” says Michelle Kaucic, Director of Strategic Communications at New York City Department of Transportation. “Education is critical and we’re adapting strategies and learning new ways to make that successful.”

How communications change behavior

Coming up with a catchy slogan and engaging visuals can be relatively easy. But crafting an effective communications campaign that leads to real behavior change is far more complicated. That’s why New York City and San Francisco build their strategy on a deep understanding of what steps people and communities take in shifting their perceptions — and actions.

First, the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency found it helpful to understand the Spectrum of Prevention (see graphic below), a framework developed by the Prevention Institute. It emphasizes that the culture — community norms and behaviors — isn’t driven by individual decisions alone. It’s the result of a web of influences from policy to organizational practices to community education.

“In order to affect a culture, we need to be speaking to all of these levels,” says John Knox White, Transportation Planner for the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency. “So as we’re developing our campaigns, we’re discussing how to use our messaging to support the city’s interest in changing state law to allow for automated speed enforcement; we’re figuring out how we can target individual community members, direct service providers and using education with our coalition partners to help them push for changes to social norms when it comes to traffic safety.”

Next, it’s important to recognize that, on both an individual and collective levels, moving toward culture change requires different stages of communications. For instance, at the outset of the initiative’s launch in 2014, New York City focused on awareness: building the umbrella message that traffic safety is heavily influenced by driver decisions. Next, the messaging moved into the familiarity stage, adding the layer of hard data to reinforce dangerous driving as a priority issue. Only
now — nearly two years since the launch of Vision Zero — is the city transitioning into the consideration and action phases, that urging residents to change their behavior in very specific ways. "In Spring 2016, we’re keeping to the same umbrella in imaging and branding; our campaign has built up overall awareness and familiarity, and is now affecting action among our audiences," Kaucic says.

San Francisco has adopted a similar, tiered approach to its messaging. Thanks to the deep engagement and partnership of the S.F. Department of Public Health, the Vision Zero communications effort has been framed using public health models that recognize that an individual’s readiness to act on a new, healthier behavior is a step by step process (see graphic above right), from "pre-contemplation" (beginning to recognize street safety as an issue) to "maintenance" (changing their behavior to eliminate dangerous habits — and sustaining that shift).

"If you ask people, they think safety is important," Knox White says, "but we’ve not gotten to that place where we’ve convinced people that there’s a better way out there, what that better way is and get them to buy into it."

"We’re really trying to ensure our communications are meaningful and not just speaking to the converted," he explains. "People live in all five of these stages, and we need to be talking to each person in the stage they’re in. For us, we’re really focusing on the contemplation stage, this idea that it doesn’t have to be this way — that we can choose to have safe streets. In the Fall, we’ll move more into the preparation stage, identifying solutions and building support and engagement on those issues."

**NEW YORK CITY: Consumer Stages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FALL 2014</th>
<th>SPRING 2015</th>
<th>SPRING 2016</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AWARENESS</td>
<td>FAMILIARITY</td>
<td>CONSIDERATION</td>
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<tr>
<td>BRAND AWARENESS built for umbrella message, placing responsibility on individual choices</td>
<td>HARD DATA reinforces dangerous driving as the priority issue</td>
<td>BUILD ON EARLY CONSIDERATION and affect actions for behavior modification</td>
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**SAN FRANCISCO: Public Health Frame**

- Precontemplation
- Contemplation
- Preparation
- Action
- Maintenance

Learning from past — and targeting for local priorities

Vision Zero doesn’t have to entirely reinvent the wheel in traffic safety messaging. In New York City, the Vision Zero initiative took lessons from past campaigns that have made streets safer.

"We’ve seen very significant successes in the realm of traffic crash prevention," Kaucic says. "Looking to federal and state partners over the years, there’s the recognizable 'Click it or ticket' and DWI [Driving While Intoxicated] slogans. That messaging is persistent in our society and it’s been helpful in driving down crash numbers."

In NYC, though, that background was just the beginning. To make their Vision Zero messaging effective they knew it needed to be targeted to specific people and focus on specific actions.

"We need to communicate with everyone, but there are key audiences that can make the most impact," Kaucic explains. "In New York City, our primary audience is adult male drivers, because they are overwhelmingly involved in pedestrian injury and fatality crashes. We’re focusing our media dollars and education on this particular audience to make the most impact."

Next, NYC dove deeper into what specific ideas and actions they should convey to those motorists to increase street safety. "There are so many factors in any one of these incidents, so as a marketing working group in the [Vision Zero] Task Force we charged ourselves with going through exercises to identify the most critical topics," Kaucic says. "That helped us prioritize where to spend time and funding to make the biggest difference with our target audiences. We decided that drivers’ choices, especially failure to yield and speeding, are those critical topics for us to communicate around."
The city convened focus groups and evaluated qualitative research that revealed self-empowering messages motivate New York City residents. “That’s how we came to ‘Your Choices Matter’ as our overall messaging,” Kaucic says. “We found that New York City audiences want the power of decision-making in their hands. They don’t want to be told what to do, but we did have the ability to appeal to their concept of doing the right thing.”

Not surprisingly, they also found that getting people’s attention in the visual overload of the Big Apple would require a dramatic, eye-catching approach. To do that, they worked with a full-service ad agency employing professional graphic designers — a strategy Kaucic strongly suggests, if possible. “Talking about the threats on New York City streets is important, but we really needed to be overt enough to get people’s attention,” Kaucic says. “We needed to cut through the clutter and get to the heart of a very serious topic.”

The resulting campaign imagery is arresting in its graphic depiction of death and serious injury — but the city had done its due diligence to be confident that approach would succeed. “Any marketing you decide to invest in should be the result of research into the messaging and visuals that resonate with your audiences,” Kaucic suggests. “Without that you can’t be guaranteed that folks will receive that message. Data is incredibly important in this work.”

San Francisco is also investing upfront to make sure its campaign resonates with local residents. “We’re really bringing research to the table at, what we think, is an unprecedented level for this topic,” Knox White says. The SFMTA is working with the Berkeley Media Studies Group and EMC Research to analyze local media content and identify the motivational messaging that will not only inform San Franciscans but inspire them to take action, whether as streets users or, even better, as Vision Zero advocates.

“We want to get away from campaigns that are directive, that say ‘Slow down,’” Knox White says. “We’re trying to connect the action to something people can really identify with, like ‘Driving 30 [miles per hour] means people die [if they’re struck by a car], so drive 25.’ That concept takes a lot of work with focus groups on the messaging to make sure people hear it, but we’ve really bought in. We want to talk to people where they are and in a way they hear us and listen.”

Building the brand

No matter the specific message, building a powerful communications campaign relies on a strong brand — a look and feel that is consistent and recognizable. For its Vision Zero initiative, New York City put time and intention behind its branding so the messages being shared by different departments all aligned and consistent. The City even developed an internal document that provides clear guidelines so staff are all on the same page in how they promote Vision Zero, including general points about language and terminology; frequently asked questions and answers; graphic guidelines, and more.

The brand is only as strong as the people promoting it, so staff are kept in the loop and lauded for their contributions. “We have a well-updated website and intranet site. We share information about events and press releases with our employees through those channels,” Kaucic says. “We often share imagery and reports through, and also use email blasts to agency staff and newsletters to highlight how employees have contributed to successes. We want everyone to feel they’re contributing to the initiative in a positive way and internal communications within the agency are really important.”

Creating successful communications strategies requires buy-in from city leaders and agencies — and dollars to get things done. “We spent a good part of...
last year making the case for why communications is really important and the backbone of what we want to do,” SFMTA’s Knox White says. “We’re lucky that the Mayor’s office and Board of Supervisors committed to initial funding for the longer-term education program.”

Kaucic agrees: “Funding is imperative.” In New York City, the city itself has committed funds for communications and education. Even so, it’s challenging to sustain the resources to run a robust communications campaign.

“Without the all-hands-on-deck thinking about strategy and using resources at individual agencies, we wouldn’t be able to carry out any of these things,” Kaucic adds. “We’re spending much time coordinating our resources for this portion of the initiative — because we believe in it.”

Using data to decide where and when to deploy communications

Vision Zero is a data-driven initiative, and that quantitative approach doesn’t just apply to engineering and enforcement efforts. Data can also direct communications strategies. “We’ve got fantastic Pedestrian Safety Action Plans for each borough, and they help us define the areas of the city that show high injuries and fatalities,” Kaucic says. “Those plans have been the backbone of where we deploy our staff and education interventions — and where we purchase our media. In New York City, there are so many different places you can buy media, so being really selective about where media is placed is incredibly important to get the most out of any budget.”

In addition to where, crash data can also inform when communications are most critical. For instance, New York City sees an increase in pedestrian injury and fatality crashes in early spring and late fall. While Vision Zero is an everyday commitment, to be most effective with a limited budget, the city boosts traffic safety messages at particular times of the year. “We have two key seasons when we aim to have Vision Zero marketing out in the media, and then smaller campaigns help provide continuity throughout other times of year,” Kaucic says.

Understanding the media landscape

Another critical piece to advancing culture change is understanding how the news media — from major television outlets to ethnic, neighborhood newspapers — talk about traffic safety. In San Francisco, the city is working with Berkeley Media Studies Group (BMSG), a nonprofit that conducts research to learn how the media characterize health issues and to influence it.

Why is media so important? “The news sets the agenda and how we think about issues, framing how people accept and understand traffic safety, and what solutions are on the table,” says Pamela Mejia, a senior media researcher at BMSG. “The news reaches opinion leaders and policy makers, too, reinforcing not just what issues are of concern to their constituents but what solutions are part of that dialogue and what issues they’re held accountable for.”

Like many other health issues, Mejia says, the media tends to portray traffic safety as an issue of personal responsibility. “The way stories are framed often reinforces the idea that traffic collisions are about driving badly or pedestrians making unsafe choices,” Mejia says. “When that’s the case, it’s much harder to see the collective and policy actions that could make streets safer for everyone. To shift that balance, part of the work is identifying where that framing exists, and what the leverage points are to shift it.”

BMSG is working with the City of San Francisco to conduct a news analysis, to assess the strengths and weaknesses in how the media currently portrays traffic safety issues. In addition to English-speaking outlets, the researchers are also looking at media in Spanish and Cantonese. “We hope to spell out in concrete terms what the framing challenges and opportunities are for shifting that frame from individual responsibility to more collective action and accountability,” she says.
PART 2: Spreading the message, evaluating its impact

Strategies from New York City

In New York City, Vision Zero messages are conveyed through a number of different channels, from a small logo on parking meter receipts to massive billboards at major intersections. Michelle Kaucic, Director of Strategic Communications at New York City Department of Transportation, shared some of the main channels NYC is using to promote Vision Zero and change the safety culture on its streets.

**Earned media:**
Earned media refers to when a newspaper or TV station responds to a press release or publishes a story about your issue. Earned media offers a number of advantages, Kaucic says, including credibility and cost effectiveness. “We’ve been fortunate in our earned media exposure,” she says. “When we release a report or talk about our programs, we’ve been privy to exceptional coverage. But keep in mind that resources are needed to pitch [stories to media outlets], monitor that coverage and troubleshoot times when earned media goes away from your intended message. It’s a great tool but requires attention.”

**Owned media:**
Owned media describes any communication channel that is within the organization’s control and can bolster marketing efforts in cost-effective ways. According to Kaucic, owned media is “low-hanging fruit” — an often-overlooked opportunity to feed the public traffic safety information when they’re already at the table. Consider all the different ways a city interacts with its citizens, from telephone hold messages to agency mailings — and how, for a modest additional expense (if any at all), those communications can include a Vision Zero logo, website or tagline. In New York City, many DOT work crews now wear hazard vests emblazoned with the Vision Zero logo on the back and, as the city fleet rolls out new truck side guards, they’re also branded with Vision Zero decals.

**Social media:**
“Social media is absolute must-have in this work,” Kaucic says. Because a variety of agencies are involved with and leading the Vision Zero initiative, the brand itself doesn’t have an exclusive handle on Twitter or a page on Facebook. “We use social media on a daily basis to talk about Vision Zero but we use the established channels at the DOT, NYPD, and Mayor’s Office to share the work,” Kaucic explains. “We coordinate with the use of similar hashtags and sharing from account to account to amplify our messaging.”

Because of the conversational nature of social media, the city tailors its approach to connect with its residents with photos and videos rather than bureaucratic jargon. “We want to talk to street users about the benefits of these projects to their lives,” she says. “So rather than posting an engineering rendering, we like to share first-hand stories of how projects or enforcement are helping to make their lives safer.”
Paid media:
Paid media is advertising, and while it can involve significant expense, it’s still a top means to reach large or targeted audiences. Because tactics and strategies will differ widely from community to community, Kaucic says “it’s important to employ the expertise of media buyers to figure out the best value you can get for the money you have to spend.” In New York City, paid media efforts include:

- **Outdoor media** includes a combination of billboard, metro light posters, bus tail, bus shelter, phone kiosk, newsstand and urban panel advertisements across the five boroughs. Sponsorships in sports and event venues are also included in this plan. Media placements in the street environment reach drivers, often during the act of driving. With sophisticated mapping techniques, targeted messages can be placed along high-crash corridors and intersections.

- **Television** includes placements on broadcast television stations and local cable news networks. Thirty-second ads serve as the foundation with 15-second ads generating increased reach and frequency. For campaigns to be most effective, they need the high-visibility and reach of television, but also note that television can be a costly media purchase, so somewhat limited.

- **Online** includes a selection of interactive digital ads targeting the primary audience through news, local community, auto, and audio sites. These placements are among the most effective at reaching target audiences. The ability to direct messages to specific consumers based on their media habits and to geo-target ads to specific locations makes this method extremely valuable.

- **Radio** includes a series of four 30-second ads run on a variety of stations. Radio is a reasonably priced media choice that effectively reaches the target audience — especially because people often listen to the radio while driving. With a presence during both of New York’s major league baseball seasons, the message is delivered to the audience consistently, with the advantage of live reads by teams’ celebrity broadcasters.

Public engagement:
In New York City, public engagement includes both in-person workshops and online portals for residents to participate in the process remotely, on their own schedule. “In-person workshops are a hallmark of our agency’s approach,” Kaucic says. “Whenever we’re making changes to streets or suggesting street improvement projects, we’re giving folks the opportunity to weigh in on the changes and provide their commentary. It’s very useful to engineers and planners, but it’s also helpful because it extends our messaging. When you read an article in the newspaper or catch the glimmer of an ad, the communication stops there. Public engagement workshops extend that time spent with people in the public, getting critical feedback.”

Direct outreach:
Beyond soliciting public feedback on specific projects, the City has invested significant resources in getting staff on the streets spreading the word. The NYPD/DOT Street Teams distribute Vision Zero educational materials to people driving, walking and biking at high-volume locations across the city, distributing more than 820,000 educational flyers in 2015 alone. Last year, the teams visited 29 locations for week-long public engagement followed by targeted enforcement, accounting for more than 17,000 moving violations, 24,000 parking violations, and 128 traffic-related arrests. DOT’s Safety Education Unit also visits hundreds of schools and senior centers to share information on streets safety and Vision Zero.
Strategies from San Francisco

San Francisco has employed similar strategies as New York City around Vision Zero and its Safe Streets SF campaign, including radio and billboard ads. John Knox White, a transportation planner at the SF Municipal Transportation Agency, shared some additional tactics and ideas at play in the City by the Bay.

Safety videos:
The driver safety video program has been a significant component of San Francisco’s communications effort, targeting training to those clocking in significant time on the road. For instance, large trucks are involved in 20% of local traffic fatalities, so the city partnered with the Teamsters and the California Trucking Association to create a training video that educates truck drivers on the evolving street designs they encounter when they exit the freeway and enter more dense urban areas. In addition, the video covers specific urban scenarios and how to maneuver safely through bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. That’s just one video in a suite of educational videos that also target taxi drivers, individual motorists and (soon to be released) city fleet drivers.

Community based social marketing:
The City is engaging residents around Vision Zero through community based social marketing — an approach that emphasizes direct contact among community members to remove barriers to healthy or safe habits. That means not only talking to the public but helping them be part of the conversation. “We’re giving people the opportunity to make small decisions that lead them to being open to change,” Knox White says. “Whether that’s pledging to make streets safe by putting a sticker on their car, or, for folks who don’t drive, wearing a button to show their support for this, it’s really important to find those external ways for people to express their commitment. We’re also developing private partnerships where companies are making commitments to engage in safety training efforts and add their voices publicly.”

Speakers bureau:
Extending that community-based work, the City is also working to establish a Vision Zero Speakers’ bureau, training local leaders and residents to be ambassadors for the initiative in their organizations and neighborhoods. “We hope to engage community leaders and outside voices to carry the message,” Knox White says. “With the Speaker bureau training, we’ll hopefully have 90 group leaders and people who can go out and give presentations on Vision Zero and why it’s important — and build that idea that there’s a different vision for our streets and they agree that it’s important.”
The essential role of evaluation

Research is essential in crafting an effective message — but it’s also crucial in making sure that message works in the real world. Both San Francisco and New York City strongly emphasize evaluation in all their Vision Zero communications campaigns. "Before and after studies are immensely helpful in pushing the initiative forward," Kaucic says.

In New York City, that evaluation has taken different tracks, including online and phone surveys, as well as focus groups — each managed by a research firm to ensure the sample is representative of city and/or borough demographics. For the “Your Choices Matter” campaign, the results thus far are promising.

Visibility:
- 72% of drivers recall having seen the ads

Comprehension:
- 91% of drivers understand it’s their responsibility to yield to people in crosswalk
- 79% of drivers identify driver behavior as a cause in fatal crashes

Behavior:
- 87% of drivers report the ads persuaded them to avoid texting or making calls while driving
- 86% of drivers report the ads convinced them to pay more attention to pedestrians and cyclists while driving
- 75% of drivers report that they now expect more enforcement of traffic laws
- 75% of non-drivers said the ads made them a more careful pedestrian

San Francisco has also embraced before-and-after research in its communications effort, as well. “One commitment we’ve really tried to make in San Francisco is heavy evaluation,” Knox White says. In fact, they’ve even taken that evaluation to the streets. For instance, part of the Safe Streets SF communications effort has focused on reducing the number of drivers violating the pedestrians right of way.

But do the billboards telling drivers “It Stops Here: Pedestrians have the right of way” actually work? The city went to specific intersections to observe motorists behavior to find out.

“San Francisco evaluation

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“We’re not just looking at outcomes, in terms of whether people have seen and remember the messages — that it’s affecting what they know,” Knox White explains. "We’ve also had people on the streets for almost a year in eight locations looking at driver behavior related to violating the right-of-way. What we’ve found is that there was a small change [in behavior] on the focus corridors, with a 3% increase in the number of people who yield." For a relatively small-scale, focused campaign, this is encouraging progress to build upon.

Top Take-Aways

Sound, strategic communications are essential to a successful Vision Zero effort. The best results come from understanding how to move individuals and institutions toward culture change; taking a targeted, data-driven approach to how and where your messaging will be deployed; and testing and evaluating your approach to ensure its effectiveness.

Learn more and find additional case studies at www.visionzeronetwork.org