

Mocking Death to Millennials: A Case Study of “Dumb Ways to Die”

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In this day in age, the generation dubbed “millennials,” those born from around the 80s to the 2000s, have a tendency to be glued to their phone. In doing so, they are completely unaware of their surroundings and can put themselves in real danger. Metro Trains, a railway system in Melbourne, Australia, decided to do something about this problem in 2012. They had the idea to appeal to the public, especially the millennials, and show them how they could put themselves in serious danger just by looking at their phones, and how to prevent it. Metro Trains collaborated with the Melbourne location of McCann, an international ad agency, to work on Metro’s community relations. They did this by putting out a public service announcement that would appeal to those millennials that were tired of the same old PSAs.

Metro Trains Melbourne was established in 2009. It the franchise operator of the Melbourne railway system, and is a part of three other organizations (Metro Trains, 2013). The MTR Corporation, an international corporation based in Hong Kong, is a 60 percent shareholder of Metro Trains. MTR runs the Mass Transit Railways in Hong Kong, but also invests in other railways around the world. John Holland, a private company focused in construction, is a 20 percent shareholder in Metro Trains. UGL Rail, an Australian rail company, is also a 20 percent shareholder in Metro Trains.

Metro Trains researched the amount of “near-miss” accidents from November 2011 to January 2012. According to Metro's manager of corporate relations, Leah Waymark, there were 13.29 near-misses per million kilometers traveled by the trains in Melbourne (Cauchi, 2013). This research was the reason Metro Trains decided to partner with McCann Melbourne to create their safety announcement. In their Customer Charter, Metro Trains states that “Safety is our highest priority...We recognise that safety, in all its forms, is a key issue for our customers” (Metro Trains, 2013).

In holding up this standard of safety, Metro Train decided to target the main public involved in the near-miss accidents - young adults. Young adults are more likely to be on their phones and not aware of their surroundings, which leads to more “near-miss” accidents. The main concept of the campaign was to have a song named “Dumb Ways to Die,” with cute cartoons showing in non-graphic detail what are some dumb ways to die, including not paying attention while at a train station. However, Metro Trains wanted to appeal to all people that use the trains, not just those who would be reached through a YouTube video. That is why they decided to use so many mediums and different media channels to advertise their campaigns, such as print ads, social media and smartphone apps. By placing the ads online, they were able to reach those customers that use Metro Trains, but also many other people around the globe, some who don’t even use trains in their day to day life. However, the video isn’t solely about train use, and has been applicable to safety in any automobile use.

The main goal of the campaign was to make people more aware of their surroundings in order to prevent “near-miss” accidents. As previously stated, there were 13.29 near-misses per million kilometers traveled by Metro Trains in Melbourne. Metro Trains took action by working with the ad agency McCann Melbourne. McCann decided to follow a content model rather than an advertising model for the campaign, according to John Mescall, Executive Creative Director at McCann Melbourne. They focused on the video at first, and so the first step was to record the song, “Dumb Ways to Die.” They then released the video to a single reporter - the transport topic reporter for Melbourne’s main newspaper. Mescall stated, “We thought that he could contextualise the campaign well for us, because he understood the issue of rail safety. We knew that there was a novelty value to the campaign so we wanted the first report on the campaign to be on the issue we tackle. He did that!” (Roper, 2015). From there, the video quickly went viral,

gaining more than 20 million views in a week. They also released visual ads and played karaoke versions of the song at the train stations, published a book for children based on the video, and released a smartphone game. However, the campaign wasn't just about getting a viral video. At the end of the video, on the print ads, in the app and on the last page of the book, they asked the viewers to pledge to be safer around trains by logging on to their website.

Metro Trains and McCann Melbourne closely kept up with the campaign after the initial release of the video. They were quick to realize the success of the video, which is why the book and app soon followed after the video release. By asking the viewers to pledge train safety, they allowed viewers a hands-on way to interact with the company. They also had a large outdoor ad that encouraged social media picture posts, which also encouraged communication. They worked well with social media by creating a fun and simple video that is funny for all ages, displaying real-life ads that viewers can interact and post about, and encouraging viewers to make covers and parodies of the "Dumb Ways to Die" song (Roper, 2015). Something that could have been done differently was the link to the pledge. There is nothing in the video that mentions the pledge to safety; viewers had to look in the description box of the YouTube video to find the link to the pledge. And even then, viewers had to scroll down on the website to find the button to sign the pledge (Brand News, 2013). By clearly stating the hope that viewers would sign the pledge, and by making it the top priority on the website, Metro Trains could have gotten a lot more result on the safety pledge, and could have led to more of a reduction in accidents and deaths in train-related incidents. Their release of new content helped the campaign grow, but they could have been more one-on-one with viewers, rather than simply releasing new videos, apps and a book. Even so, they still found their main success in their silly song, released with the first video.

The quirky song that goes along with the video can be seen as the first tactic Metro Train used in their campaign. The song is a delightfully catchy tune that is easily stuck in the head of anyone who listens to it. The upbeat tone appealed to their customers' emotions. While the song is "morbidly adorable," the tune made customers feel happy which made them become interested in the campaign and made them want to share the campaign with their friends. "It got people talking, and evidently singing about railway safety," said Mescall (Moses, 2012). Metro Trains also utilized several other tactics to help support their different strategies. Since their strategy was to specifically target young adults, Metro Trains used various social media platforms to help spread the word of their campaign. Perhaps their most successful social media platform was the Tumblr page that was created for the campaign. Tumblr allows users to "reblog" posts that they find interesting or that they enjoy. This gave users direct access to interact with the campaign and allowed them to create their own experience with the campaign. Metro Trains next released a children's book which depicted various scenes of their adorable cartoon characters dying in dumb ways. The book had roughly the same concept of the Tumblr page, which was to provide a way for the audience to interact with the campaign. This allowed for a much younger but equally as important audience to become involved with the campaign. To go along with appealing to an even younger audience, plush toys were also made available for children. This was another tactic that appealed to their customers' emotions. Children often have a strong emotional connection associated with plush toys, and this allowed them to become more involved and invested in the campaign as the older audiences were. The book also became a teaching tool for the children on how to be safe around trains. Metro's interactive platforms were most likely the reason for the massively successful campaign. Metro Trains had posters that featured the characters for customers to buy and ambient displays that served as fodder for Instagram and social media.

Metro Trains also set up various events that allowed the customers to become more active with the campaign. “Passers-by could shoot themselves alongside the campaign’s characters and press a giant button to take the pledge to be more cautious around trains,” (Diaz, 2013). The smart phone app game added to their interactive tactics. The game allowed customers to once again create their own personal experience with the campaign and gave them the opportunity to be active with the campaign. The tactics that were employed received successfully by the public. Metro Trains successfully executed their strategies through their interactive tactics in which the public successfully took part. Metro Trains covered all possible areas in this campaign. They used every possible tactic to ensure that this announcement was reached by the masses. They used their mediums so well that they made the campaign even more successful than intended - with all of the millions of views, they were able to push the campaign farther than they originally planned. Apps, books and plushes were all created and made revenue when the original idea was to just have the video and print ads. They successfully reached their goals of wanting to get the public to interact with and become involved in the campaign.

After the news of the success of the “Dumb Ways to Die” campaign got out, Metro Trains received mainly positive news coverage and feedback. Because the campaign was now being covered worldwide, it resulted in even more success for Metro Trains. The campaign earned \$60 million in media impressions and reached 46% of their target audience within a month (Diaz, 2013). The campaign also generated over million pledges from people around the world to be safer around trains. However, the feedback wasn’t all positive. Suicide is one of the most influential causes of railway trauma. People criticized the campaign of reinforcing railways as a possible suicide method. Since the video and song also speak of other dumb ways to die, people said that they were giving people ideas on various ways to commit suicide. The video was

probably least successful in Russia. The Russian government blocked the video from being shown with concerns that children will watch it and commit suicide. The Russian government said that saying things such as, taking drugs past their expiration date and eating superglue, were not appropriate and posed a threat. Despite the censorship online, the video appeared on an ABC channel in more than 50 cities across Russia. Metro Trains did not respond to the ban, and continued to let the video and message spread. The campaign went on to win seven Webby awards for 'Best Animation Film' and 'Best Public Service and Activism,' and was the most awarded campaign in the history of Cannes with 28 Lions, including five Grands Prix (McCann, 2014). Once the original campaign was over, in 2014 Metro Trains began working on a sequel to the campaign. In November 2014, "Dumb Ways to Die 2: The Games" was released. This installment of the campaign took on a more athletic theme. The installment was as successful as the initial campaign and went on to receive success on the app store and in the media. Those next steps that were taken by Metro Trains were deemed successful because of the strategies and tactics that they implemented. Metro Trains is planning to continue their campaign and their games. "Our plans are to continue developing our game assets and branch out into other entertainment platforms over the course of the coming years," said Mescall. "What we have is a franchise, rather than just an advertising platform," (Diaz, 2013). Because of the steps that Metro Trains is taking, they are still in the evaluation/ continuation phase. If Metro Trains implements the same strategies and tactics that they used previously, their campaign should once again be successful.

Metro Trains "Dumb Ways to Die" campaign proved to be an overall success with almost no dilemmas. The only real complaint about the campaign was that the song gave people various ways to commit suicide. Because of the song and how the campaign was set up, this issue could

not be avoided. Metro Trains handled the complaints well by not making a huge deal of what was happening. Despite this minor dilemma, the campaign was successful and looks like it will continue to be successful with their future continuations of the campaign. The success of the campaign can be linked to the company's successful strategies and how they implemented them. A successful campaign allows the intended target audience to become actively involved in the campaign itself. Metro Train's use of different mediums, such as asking people to take a pledge, allowed their target audience to become involved which in turn allowed for the campaign to spread far and wide across the world.

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