

Attention is the currency of today. We all pay it, and someone is always trying to cash in. It could be an influencer, an ad from a major corporation, or even your uncle Joe who wants you to like a photo of his cat. No matter where you go or what you do, there is always someone or something trying to get your attention.

As government agencies, we often find ourselves in the middle of this fight for attention as we promote our services. Cutting through the clutter can be a daunting task – especially with the budget and policy constraints that come with government work. It doesn't have to be.

Here are three lessons I've learned promoting traffic safety in Idaho that might help your communications get the attention they deserve:

Keep it conversational.

This is really about how you talk to the public you serve and the tone of your messages. It is easy as a government agency to sound stuffy and authoritative. We love our acronyms and jargon and it makes sense with all the state and federal rules and regulations, but it can be off-putting to members of the public. Whether the message is about a simple subject or a complex issue, ask yourself "how would I say this to (insert name of spouse/best friend/person of choice)?"

When we started looking at ways to prevent distracted driving crashes, we took this conversational approach. That choice to focus on people and community turned into our award-winning engaged driving program Shift Idaho. We may work for the government, but we are also members of the public – we are talking to our friends and neighbors. This is an important perspective to keep in mind for any messaging you create.

Create platform-specific content.

The days of saying the same message the same way across all platforms are gone. As the way we communicate has evolved, we have to understand and adapt to the communication ecosystem. We have to understand that people use different platforms for different reasons and that needs to be at the forefront of our content development. In today's world, *how* we say something is just as important as *what* we actually say.

It's important to note that the message across all platforms needs to be consistent. We don't need to say something on one platform that we wouldn't say on another. I remind people to buckle their seat belts across all platforms. The visuals and words I use on Instagram talking to young adults will look different than what I would post on LinkedIn. But the message is the same – seat belts save lives. Understanding the users of a specific platform and the culture they have built around it is an important part of being conversational and relatable.

Deliver timely messages.

We can have the best content and messaging but if we don't deliver them on a useful timeline, we are missing an opportunity. How that looks might change based on your agency and your campaign goals. It can be tricky; it's possible to message too soon or too late. While I can't tell you the perfect time to deliver your message, I can tell you what works for us - we try to deliver messages as closely to the act of driving or key decision-making points as we can get.

For example, when it comes to drinking and driving, we partner with supermarkets and convenience stores to put messages near beer coolers and ice chests – this is where we try to get them thinking about planning a sober ride. We work with bars and restaurants to direct people to local cab companies or ride share services – this is for people who didn't plan ahead to get a sober ride. We keep these messages conversational, we make them appropriate for the different venues, and we try our best to deliver them in a timely manner.

The communication landscape is constantly evolving and we have to keep up as we continue to promote the vital goods and services our agencies provide. People are paying attention – hopefully these three ideas will help you make sure they're paying attention to you.