

# Ridesharing and the Consumer: A Tale of Two Marketing Strategies

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Transportation demand management strategies have traditionally been designed to reach commuters with the rideshare message where they work, particularly because of Regulation XV (a regional ordinance that requires employers with 100 or more employees per site to submit a trip-reduction plan annually). As an alternative to employer-site promotions, Commuter Transportation Services, Inc. (CTS) developed and evaluated two consumer-oriented studies to determine the effect of reaching commuters outside the workplace with a ridesharing message. The first is an evaluation of a series of corridor promotions conducted by CTS over a 12-month period. Corridor promotions were designed to target commuters at the home-end with a rideshare message to increase awareness of alternatives to driving alone to the workplace. The evaluation was conducted to determine how effective the promotions were in communicating this message. The second is an evaluation of California Rideshare Week (CRSW), a state-wide, employer-based promotion designed to educate the commuting public about alternatives to driving alone. During CRSW pledge cards were distributed to commuters in an effort to encourage them to use an alternative rideshare mode during the week-long campaign. A survey was designed and conducted by CTS to assess the impact of CRSW by measuring commuting behavior before, during, and after the campaign. Results indicate that the two techniques were successful in generating awareness and trial of alternative rideshare modes. However, they need to be conducted concurrently with employer promotions to have lasting impact. This will enable a more targeted message to reach commuters both at the workplace and at home.

Commuter Transportation Services, Inc. (CTS) developed and evaluated two studies to determine the effect of reaching commuters outside the workplace with a ridesharing message. The first is an evaluation of a series of corridor promotions.

## CORRIDOR PROMOTION EVALUATION COMPARISON

### Background

The marketing and advertising department of CTS designed and implemented seven corridor promotions as a means of marketing ridesharing to drive-alone commuters. A corridor is defined as a segment of a freeway that is used by commuters living in a specific geographic location who drive alone to the work site. To determine the effectiveness of each promotion, an evaluation survey was conducted. This paper compares

results of all seven evaluations to assess the effectiveness of this marketing strategy.

Corridor promotions are advertising campaigns that target commuters at home (rather than at work) with the rideshare message. The primary targets of the campaign are commuters who typically drove alone to the work site. The goal was to persuade them to try, and ultimately switch, to a rideshare mode (e.g., carpool, vanpool, transit, walking/bicycling, and telecommuting).

In theory, commuters residing in a geographic location near the targeted corridor are a homogeneous group who will be responsive to a certain message. Assumptions were made that specific benefits would motivate these groups of commuters to try a rideshare mode. Unlike marketing efforts that primarily target commuters through their employers [e.g., California Rideshare Week (CRSW), the state-wide employer-based promotion], these campaigns were designed to market ridesharing directly to commuters by using a combination of media, including brochures, telemarketing phone calls, billboards, and newspaper advertising.

### Objectives

There were two objectives for the campaign: to generate increased awareness of the benefits of ridesharing and to motivate commuters to try an alternative rideshare mode instead of driving alone to the work site.

### Method

To achieve these objectives, seven corridor promotions were executed over a period of 12 months. For each promotion, a specific geographic area was identified, assumptions were made regarding common characteristics of commuters in the region, and a message was designed to target them. Each succeeding promotion experimented with a specific message, allowing for a learning process whereby previous campaign messages could be improved. Table 1 summarizes the messages and other details of each of the seven promotions.

The effort was extensive. Depending on the corridor, any combination of media was used to promote ridesharing, including brochures, telemarketing phone calls, billboards, and newspaper advertising. The investment totaled more than \$450,000 for all seven corridor promotions, ranging from \$30,000 (Corridor 14) to \$116,000 (10/60 Corridor). The demographic target specifications of age and income were broad based but

TABLE 1 Corridor Promotion Comparison

	CORRIDOR 10/60 SPRING, 1991	SIMI VALLEY CORRIDOR SPRING, 1991	CORRIDOR 14 FALL, 1991	CORRIDOR 605 SPRING, 1992	CORRIDOR 110 SPRING, 1992	CORRIDOR 15 SPRING, 1992	CORRIDOR 101 SPRING, 1992
<b>CAMPAIGN DESCRIPTION</b>							
Budget	\$116,000	\$31,160	\$30,000	\$74,500	\$89,000	\$48,500	\$69,500
Target							
A. Size of Mailing	55,000	14,232	14,000	45,000	51,000	20,256	44,324
<b>B. Demographics</b>							
1. Age	20 - 45	20 - 45	20 - 45	20 - 50	20 - 50	20 - 55	20 - 55
2. Household Income	\$25,000 - \$80,000	\$25,000 - \$80,000	\$25,000 - \$80,000	\$20,000 - \$100,000	\$15,000- \$100,000	\$20,000 - \$100,000	\$20,000 or more
Promotion Message	Cash savings	Cash savings: vanpool	General rideshare	Rideshare - The American Way	Six different messages	"I saved money"	Time savings
Media Mix (brochure, telemarketing, billboards, newspaper)	BR,T,B,N	BR,T,N	BR,T	BR,T	BR,T,B	BR,T	BR,T
<b>COMMUTER CHARACTERISTICS</b>							
Average Distance Traveled (one way)	33.7 miles	28.0 miles	32.0 miles	13.3 miles	13.1 miles	23.4 miles	16.9 miles
% rideshare prior to campaign	22%	17%	NA	19%	18%	17%	21%
Awareness of Ridesharing (aided)	67%	77%	60%	54%	61%	63%	69%
<b>CAMPAIGN RESULTS</b>							
Advertising Awareness	57%	29%	51%	37%	45%	46%	44%
Media (Top 3)	1. work/employer 2. radio 3. television	1. work/employer 2. RIDE # 3. radio	1. work/employer 2. RIDE # 3. billboards	1. work/employer 2. blue fwy signs 3. TV	1. work/employer 2. billboards 3. blue fwy sign/TV	1. work/employer 2. blue fwy signs 3. TV	1. work/employer 2. blue fwy signs 3. radio
Message (Top 3)	1. one should rideshare 2. "MOM" campaign 3. RIDE #	1. RIDE # 2. one should rideshare 3. through employer	1. one should rideshare 2. "MOM" campaign 3. RIDE #	1. RIDE # 2. one should rideshare 3. through employer	1. one should rideshare 2. through employer 3. RIDE #	1. one should rideshare 2. through employer 3. RIDE #	1. one should rideshare 2. RIDE # 3. through employer
<b>Total Placements/Switched into Ridesharing</b>							
#	6,762	1,427	1,044	3,411	4,718	1,769	3,528
%	12.8	12.7	10.6	11.4	11.1	10.3	9.3
<b>Placements, Direct<sup>1</sup></b>							
#	2,747	348	522	1,077	1,445	670	1,252
%	5.2	3.1	5.3	3.6	3.4	3.9	3.3
<b>Placements, Indirect<sup>2</sup></b>							
#	4,015	1,079	522	2,334	3,273	1,099	2,276
%	7.6	9.6	5.3	7.8	7.7	6.4	6.0

<sup>1</sup> Switched from drive alone mode to rideshare mode and recalled advertising/promotion

<sup>2</sup> Switched from drive alone mode to rideshare mode and recalled advertising/promotion other than employer-based promotion

similar for all the corridors. For each corridor promotion, the advertising campaign encompassed a 6-week period.

The regions chosen for corridor promotions covered a variety of corridors throughout the Los Angeles area, and each was assumed to include populations with homogeneous commuting patterns. For example, the 10/60 corridor promotion targeted commuters who live in the San Bernardino/Riverside area and commute to work in Los Angeles County. Since these were long-distance commuters, the message designed for this campaign was "cost savings." In contrast, the 605 corridor targeted commuters who live in geographic areas along the corridor, but, since it was not possible to segment them by length of commute, the primary message was designed to be more general in nature ("Rideshare—The American Way").

Cost saving was also the primary message for commuters targeted in the Corridor 14 (North County) and Corridor 15 (Apple Valley) campaigns. In Corridor 118 (Simi Valley), potential vanpoolers were targeted in conjunction with the marketing of a vanpool subsidy program. For Corridor 110 (South Bay), different potential motivating benefits were tested: six versions of the brochure headline were used ("Smog is Thick Enough," "Work Days are Long Enough," "Traffic is Bad Enough," "Life is Stressful Enough," "Gas is Costly Enough," and "Car Repairs Cost Enough"), but the inside message to encourage ridesharing was the same. "Time savings" was the focus of the 101 (San Fernando Valley) corridor brochure.

The promotions were timed to ensure that they did not conflict with any other ridesharing promotions, such as CRSW. This decision was made so ridesharing messages could be communicated throughout the year instead of having all promotional activity during one time period.

A variety of media vehicles and varying dollar allocations to each medium were used for these promotions: the 10/60 campaign used all four media vehicles (brochure, telemarketing call, billboards, and newspaper); Simi Valley used brochures, telemarketing calls, and newspaper; and Corridor 110 used brochures, telemarketing calls, and billboards. The remaining corridors (14, 605, 15, and 101) used only brochures and telemarketing calls.

## Evaluation of Results

To measure the effect of each promotion, pre- and postcampaign telephone surveys were conducted by a market research firm and measured the following factors: commute travel mode, awareness of ridesharing, and changes, if any, in commute travel mode. The presurvey was conducted before the onset of the advertising campaign, and the postsurvey was conducted 6 weeks after the campaign ended. Consequently, a comparison of results between the two surveys identified any changes that occurred during the campaign period. (There was, however, one corridor promotion (Corridor 14) that did not use a presurvey but instead used a test survey and control survey to measure change in travel mode. Respondents from the test survey sample were reached with advertising support, whereas respondents from the control survey sample did not receive any advertising support.)

Sample sizes for the evaluations varied from 350 to 1,000 per survey. The sample was derived from the original list of direct mail respondents. For budget considerations, a choice was made to reduce the sample size in later evaluations, even though this would affect the margin of error. A sample size of 350 yields a 5.3 percent margin of error, whereas a sample size of 1,000 yields a 3.2 percent margin of error. It was believed that the results would still give a good indication of campaign effectiveness.

## Results

### Advertising Recall

One of the objectives of this campaign is to increase awareness of the rideshare message. The level of achievement was evaluated using two measurements typical of advertising evaluations: (a) unaided awareness (asking the respondent where message was seen/heard without any type of cues) and (b) aided awareness (providing respondent with cues to determine if advertising was seen/heard in any of the media used).

When asked, on an unaided basis, where they had seen or heard any type of rideshare messages, the top-rated response was consistently through work/employer. This top-of-mind response is twice that of any other top-of-mind response. This is encouraging, since apparently a relatively high level of awareness exists despite the fact that no special coordinated programs at employer sites were conducted concurrently with any of the promotions, other than ongoing employer-based trip reduction programs. (Regulation XV applies to employers with 100 or more employees per work site in the four-county region: Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino and Riverside.)

Unaided awareness of the benefits of ridesharing is high to begin with, so the corridor promotions were successful in reinforcing the attributes of these benefits to commuters. This is important since it helps to keep ridesharing as a top-of-mind message. Clearly, some level of regular advertising is required to sustain this awareness.

Virtually all commuters can cite numerous benefits of ridesharing ("reduces pollution/smog," "reduces traffic/congestion," "saves money and gas") on an unaided basis. However, there is a consistent pattern of recalling general messages that were not explicitly stated in the brochure, and not the specific messages that were stated in the brochure. For example, "good for the environment" was a general message recalled in the 110 promotion evaluation, instead of "life is stressful enough" (or one of the other five headlines), which was the specific message highlighted in the brochure.

Further, messages recalled have a pattern of being "social" concerns, which may not motivate commuters as individuals to change their travel commute mode. Before they are willing to change to ridesharing, commuters may be not satisfied with the answers to "What is in it for me?"

Aided advertising recall reveals results similar to those for unaided recall, with all campaigns showing little increase in levels of message recall between the pre- and postsurvey periods; despite specific campaign messages that highlighted different benefits of ridesharing (e.g., cost savings), commuters