

THE BEHAVIORAL IMPACT OF AN ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN TO PROMOTE SAFETY BELT USE

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Safety belt use was observed at one restaurant during McDonald's "Make It Click" promotional campaign. Following baseline, the program was monitored without intervention. During the final 2 weeks of the campaign an incentive strategy was added providing a large soft drink contingent on safety belt use. Safety belt use did not change from baseline levels before the incentive phase. The rate of belt use increased under contingent reward and declined during follow-up. The effects of a verbal prompt could not be assessed because of the almost nonexistent use of the "Make It Click" stickers throughout the study.

DESCRIPTORS: safety, incentives, safety belts

Estimates from the *North Carolina Traffic Accident Facts* (State of North Carolina Division of Motor Vehicles, 1982) indicate that, if used, safety belts can save 60 to 70 of every 100 unbelted occupants who die in vehicle crashes. Yet, many people failed to wear a safety belt consistently.

Over the last 3 years, the "Make It Click" program of the McDonald's restaurant chain has focused public awareness on safety belts through the distribution of a series of dashboard stickers and a large-scale television and radio campaign prompting patrons to buckle up. The campaign provides a marketing strategy that boosts public recognition and provides a valuable public service by attempting to encourage the use of automobile safety belts.

It is notable that the campaign tactics used by McDonald's approximate many of the conditions conducive to success listed by Geller, Winett, and Everett (1982) for prompting strategies. The prompt ("Make It Click") was polite and specific and was administered to persons within or in close proximity to their vehicles. Subject exposure to the prompts was facilitated by the fact that the "Make It Click" campaign involved nationwide radio and television advertising and sticker distributions occurring intermittently for 4 months.

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A campaign that depends entirely on prompts may not always be successful in promoting belt use. Earlier research, for example, has suggested that better results can be obtained using incentives for belt use. Such incentives have included small donated gifts (Geller, Davis, & Spicer, 1983), cash (Cope, Smith, & Grossnickle, 1986), and a new car (Horne & Terry, 1983).

The purposes of the present study were to make behavioral observations of safety belt use during McDonald's "Make It Click" campaign and to examine the additional use of a simple incentive contingent on belt use. We also studied the impact of the campaign and determined whether response-contingent technology could be put into place within the confines of an established marketing/advertisement campaign to increase safety belt use.

METHOD

Subjects and Setting

The drivers of 8,635 vehicles observed from the drive-through station of a McDonald's restaurant served as subjects. The restaurant, located in a well-developed commercial district in Greenville, North Carolina, mainly served families rather than college students.

Observation, Record Keeping, and Interobserver Agreement

Safety belt use by McDonald's patrons was monitored by two observers (without restaurant uni-

forms) standing inside the drive-through station. Observations were recorded from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. on weekdays and from 11:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. on Saturdays for a total of 103 observation days. No research week contained fewer than 3 observation days.

Each observer recorded the vehicle's license plate number, status of safety belt use by the driver (belts not available, belts available but not worn, belts worn), and whether a "Make It Click" sticker was present on the vehicle dashboard. The observers were allowed to confer on the license plate number but were instructed to record all other information separately to assess reliability. Observers were knowledgeable about the purpose and timing of the various project phases.

Interobserver agreement was determined by comparing data collected on the same vehicles by two different observers. Of the 8,635 total observations, 19.7% (i.e., 1,704) were taken by each of two different observers. Agreement was calculated by dividing the number of times the two observers agreed on a particular response category by the total number of observations and multiplying by 100. The following percentages were obtained: (a) 93.8% agreement for the use of safety belts by the driver, (b) 97.7% agreement for observations of safety belts not worn, and (c) 59.5% agreement for observations of no safety belts available.

Experimental Procedures

Baseline. One week of baseline observations were made before the actual start of the advertisement program, and 5 weeks of follow-up data were collected after the last day of the campaign; hence, the entire data collection period ran from May 8 to October 7, 1984.

Make It Click. The "Make It Click" advertisement campaign was begun on May 14, 1984, and was divided into five phases (first advertising period, first sticker distribution phase, second advertising period, second sticker distribution phase, and third advertising period) that continued until September 2, 1984. The five campaign phases involved various promotional strategies, including dif-

ferent combinations of sticker giveaways and radio and television advertising. The campaign was designed to encourage safety belt use by increasing awareness of the function of safety belts and by giving away the "Make It Click" sticker sheets, which were distributed to customers by store employees. Although the stickers contained explicit instructions regarding their use as dashboard cues to buckle safety belts, no incentives were made contingent on sticker display or on the use of safety belts.

Following baseline, McDonald's conducted an initial 10-day advertisement program that promoted safety belt use. The first sticker distribution phase (which was carried out for 2 weeks) immediately followed and was also highly publicized. The back of each sticker sheet handed out during this phase was imprinted with a registration blank for a car seat that was given away by the local McDonald's franchise. This incentive was not contingent on the use of safety belts, nor did restaurant employees provide any type of verbal prompt along with the distribution of the sticker.

Following this phase McDonald's ran a second advertising campaign for 1 week simply promoting the use of seat belts without the use of a sticker giveaway campaign. This period was followed by the second sticker distribution phase, which provided stickers without any verbal prompts or written messages on the back. This second sticker phase was conducted for 2 weeks followed by a return to the third advertising period which lasted until September 2, 1984 (approximately 3 weeks), at which time all advertising was stopped.

Addition of incentives. During the last 2 weeks of the third advertisement phase incentives were dispensed at the pick-up window of the restaurant. Two days before the incentive contest two posters (0.7 by 0.6 m) were displayed, one inside the restaurant and one in the drive-through window facing the oncoming traffic. The signs announced that drivers wearing safety belts would receive a large soft drink free with their meals if meals were ordered during certain time periods.

In addition (and at the request of local man-

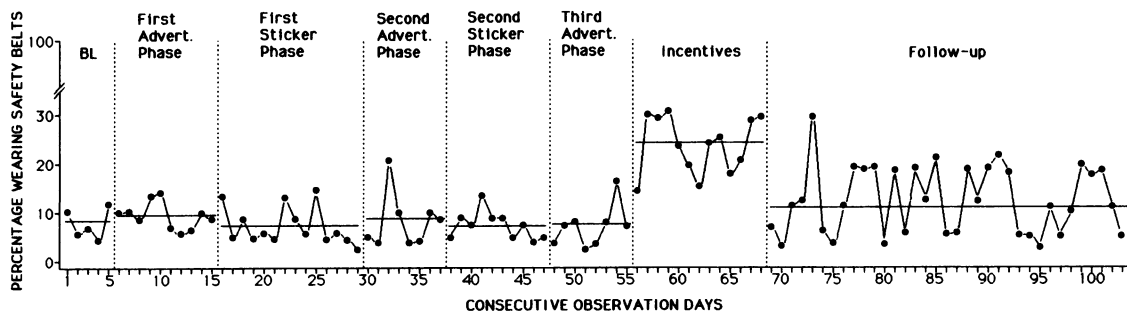


Figure 1. Percentage of drivers wearing safety belts for each day of the study.

agement), during all hours of restaurant operation, employees were instructed to request drive-through patrons to place a "Make It Click" sticker on their dashboards. A written version of this verbal prompt was taped in a prominent location inside the drive-through booth. The prompt was necessarily brief: "Please place this sticker on your dashboard to remind you to buckle up your seat belts."

RESULTS

As shown in Figure 1, the mean level of safety belt use during baseline was 8.1%. Belt use did not change during the subsequent five phases of the "Make It Click" campaign. For example, belt use reached the highest level (with the exception of the incentive period) during the first advertising phase, when 9.5% of the drivers were observed using seat belts. During the next phase (i.e., the first sticker distribution period) the rate of safety belt use decreased to 7.7%. Belt use reached 8.6% during the second advertising period and 7.4% during the second sticker distribution phase. The level of use during the final advertising phase prior to the introduction of the contingent rewards was 7.6%. The average rate of belt use tripled (compared to baseline) during the incentive period to 24.0% and declined to 12.8% during the final 5 weeks of follow-up. The verbal and written prompts used to promote sticker use during the incentive phase were not effective; less than 10 "Make It Click" stickers were observed on vehicle dashboards during the entire study and none of these were added during the incentive period.

DISCUSSION

Safety belt use during the "Make It Click" advertisement phases, prior to adding an incentive, showed little change when compared to baseline levels. The level of belt use throughout baseline and the advertisement phases was quite low when compared to the national average of 15% (Tarrant, 1984). Yet, these levels may not be atypical for this geographical area in that similar baseline levels (11.3%) were recorded in an industrial study of safety belt use in the same city (Cope, Grossnickle, & Geller, 1986).

Verbal prompts were not effective in increasing the use of the "Make It Click" stickers, and very few of the reminder stickers were spotted in use. Perhaps it would be helpful if McDonald's returned to a sticker distribution program similar to that used by Johnson and Geller (1984), in which flyers were used in an incentive lottery. McDonald's has used this type of campaign on other occasions. Stickers given away in the past were imprinted with a safety belt record card for parents to note four instances of safety belt use by their children. The children could then turn in the completed card for a free box of cookies.

When a soft drink was provided contingent upon safety belt use, the rate of belt use among drivers increased to approximately three times the level recorded during baseline. McDonald's has accomplished what local, state, and federal agencies have had difficulty doing; providing a large-scale public awareness campaign couched in language that is positive and unlikely to produce public objection

(Brehm, 1966). The addition of a successful positive reinforcement strategy to this type of program has the potential to promote safety belt use without the public backlash often associated with legal mandates and other punishment-oriented approaches.

Results of this study are limited in that only one restaurant was examined over a fairly short time (McDonald's ran the campaign only during the summer). The length of the program prohibited replication of the incentive phase and many of the controls necessary to evaluate adequately the effect of the advertisement campaign. The duration of exposure to the advertising campaign on individual patrons could not be examined, nor was it possible to provide a group of nonexposed customers to act as a no-advertisement control. However, the study does provide preliminary evidence that the addition of incentives made contingent on belt use can strengthen the effect of a large-scale promotion campaign.

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