

**The 180 SAFE Ride – A Best Practice in Traffic Safety Marketing and
Community Partnerships**

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ABSTRACT

The 180 SAFE RIDE is a 12-day, 1200 mile bicycle tour around Florida to increase awareness regarding impaired driving, seatbelt safety, and the SAFE (Stay Alive From Education) Street Smart Program. The 180 SAFE Ride demonstrates that through a collaborative effort, public safety, citizens, businesses, and educational institutions can construct and execute a significant crime prevention campaign. Specifically, the 180 SAFE Ride fielded eight cyclists and several support crews to complete a journey around the state, stopping in major cities to draw media attention in a competitive market. The ride seized upon the element of human drama and determination to capture interest, thereby allowing a means to convey the central traffic safety message. The long term impact of the ride was increased through partnership with SAFE. Florida SAFE, Inc., is a non-profit developed by firefighter-paramedics to bring traffic safety messages regarding DUI and safety belts into schools, colleges, and military bases. Focus on exposure of SAFE ensured the message did not stop with the finish of the ride.

Introduction of the Organization

The Florida State University Police Department is a fully sworn, accredited law enforcement agency of the State of Florida. Currently, the department has a maximum compliment of 63 law enforcement officers, who patrol the campus 365 days a year. Officers at the FSU Police Department are required to be certified through the Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission of Florida, and in fact, FSU Police Officers train at a rate far exceeding the minimum standards as required by the state. The department services a daily population of some 60,000 students, faculty, and staff on a daily basis, with some weekends having these numbers swell to well over 100,000 persons.

The FSU Police Department places traffic safety as a maximum priority. Nearly 1700 college students lose their lives in alcohol related incidents every year, with the majority of these numbers being related to traffic crashes. The FSU Police Department contends that these traffic deaths are preventable. Moreover, the FSU Police Department places great emphasis on DUI and seatbelt enforcement and education. Lowering the instances of drunk driving and increasing voluntary compliance with seatbelt use are major drives of the department.

The FSUPD has greatly benefited through its pivotal role in the development and execution of the 180 SAFE Ride by acting as an example to communities and other law

enforcement agencies concerning the need to remain focused and dedicated to stopping drunk driving and getting motorists to buckle-up.

Statement of the Problem

The market to gain and hold media attention and that of college students and college-aged persons is extremely competitive to say the least. DUI and seatbelt education for the FSU Police Department is nothing new, but therein is the problem. A message delivered in similar fashion over and over dulls over time, and busy students and community members may be quick to find other more interesting things to do. Public safety educators may only have one opportunity to reinforce a concept, and too often, these opportunities are very difficult to come by. FSU Police Department crime prevention officers have many accounts of programs that are created only to have no participants come. Truly, any program must have an element or elements that capture the attention of the audience, if even briefly to deliver a message. The world of sports marketing has seized upon this for some time, as made obvious by advertisers fighting to have their logos placed on race cars, at stadiums, and within television events, like the Super Bowl. The day of the safety lecture is over. Public safety must market its message as aggressively as any other entity trying to spread information. The problem then succinctly, is finding a way to deliver a critical safety message in a highly competitive market in order to save lives.

Design

In order to organize a campaign of this size and magnitude, it was essential to garner community support through partnerships and sponsorships. At stake was the health and safety of the riders, and ultimately, the success of the ride. A worst case scenario would be the ride beginning, only to have the team abandon due to lack of rest, food, water, or associated injuries. The founders of the ride were determined that riders would have the means to complete their mission.

First, the concept of the ride had to be presented to potential sponsors who, as community stakeholders, would want to partner with the ride founders and Florida SAFE to ensure the success of the ride. At its heart, the ride consisted of a small group of riders, all of whom had a connection to, or stake in, traffic safety. This group or “team” rode a pre-determined route around the state traveling from city to city with the intent at arriving at pre-arranged media events. Interest for the ride was gained through the sheer difficulty of the task, coupled with the passion of the riders. The element of human drama that was created, captured the interest of news organizations who scheduled reporters to cover team activities. Once in the presence of media, team members would explain why they were undertaking the journey and educate listeners about the mission of reducing drunk driving, encouraging seatbelt use, and introducing the SAFE Street Smart program. The ultimate goal was to motivate an audience to 1) make smart and responsible traffic safety choices, and 2) support the SAFE Street Smart program.

A business plan and prospectus was created for presentation to potential partners. In August 2005, the ride concept was presented to executives from Anheuser-Busch, including a detailed spreadsheet of projected costs. The ride's concept was detailed and explained as well. Upon the completion of the presentation, Anheuser-Busch offered to fund full sponsorship and support of the ride. The partnership included the company using corporate contacts to assist with gaining additional sponsors, who included AAA Auto-Club South, Publix Supermarkets, Florida Highway Patrol, The Florida Students Association, and others. The ride founders also established key support from Florida State University and the Florida Environmental Health Association. These partners provided key funding, support, and endorsements to ensure the ride would be a success.

Once adequate funding was secured, the business of organization was put into full swing. Anheuser-Busch as the title sponsor provided their 180 Energy Drink name as a non-alcoholic representative of their company. Further, they went above and beyond and working with Florida SAFE, helped with logistics such as gaining hotel reservations in key cities, acquiring support vehicles, and hiring a public relations firm.

Various ride development team members were given specific tasks to tackle in forming the event. First, Major Jim Russell, Co-Founder, was responsible for identifying team members and selecting those with the mental and physical fitness to complete the ride. Also, the team dynamic was important, as each rider had to possess credibility when discussing the subject. Thus, a cross section of fire, police, and medical professionals, as well as concerned community members formed the team. Russell was also responsible

for the identification and development of routes spanning the state. This was accomplished through the use of satellite images, map-making programs, and on site analysis of routes.

Co-Founder Terri Aldridge-Russell worked closely with sponsors to ensure team needs were met, including proper food acquisition, lodging, and also making sure the ride concept and message stayed on target,

A website was set up with rider profiles, important links to SAFE's website, messages concerning the mission of the ride, and a means for site visitors to donate if desired. University, municipal, and county authorities were contacted at key stopping points around the state and asked for their support and participation in the ride. With the message of the team being so clear, many entities were quick to respond in a positive way. The team often enjoyed full police escort through the most congested areas and major media events were held in such places as FSU, The University of South Florida, University of Florida, Sea World, Miami-Dade Fire Rescue Headquarters, Florida Atlantic University, University of North Florida, the Orlando Fire Department, and more. Often, dignitaries from these entities would speak, to include Director of the Florida Highway Patrol Chris Knight, and President of the Florida State University, T.K. Wetherell.

As members of SAFE were, to a person, members of fire rescue agencies, with their employers' blessing, Tampa Fire Rescue, Orlando Fire, and Miami-Dade Fire Rescue

provided constant emergency vehicle escort for the ride around the state. The not only made the riders safer, but helped convey a strong message of public safety.

Members of SAFE volunteered as crew members, meaning, every 20 or so miles, these important persons would set up a rest area ahead of the cyclists to allow for water and food to be taken on board. At times, these rest stations were literally life saving, as more than once, an exhausted rider would need to be given an I.V. for severe dehydration. SAFE members providing escort were important as medical emergency support as well. If a crash occurred, they were quick to render aid.

Coordinating sponsors, riders, and supporting agencies through the development team, a manageable ride formed. Each day the riders under escort would leave toward their next media event, usually about 100 miles away. Ahead, the media relations firm Ziffer-Stansberry, would have prepped the arrival area by notifying press and officials. Riders would arrive at an area with press filming and often, observers gathered in the area. The riders would then speak about what drives them to undertake such a monumental endeavor – the desire to get a life saving message out. The unifying message was delivered as such – *You don't have to do something big like this to make a difference when it comes to drunk driving and buckling up. All you have to do is not drink and drive, use a designated driver, buckle up, and support great educational programs like SAFE Street Smart.*

Benefits

The means to deliver the message worked. Coverage by media not only occurred in every major Florida city, but even internationally, the word was spread. In fact, the 2007 ride was posted on Australian websites. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration recognized the 180 SAFE RIDE (Known in 2006 as the Ride for Survival) as a best traffic safety marketing practice. Miami-Dade County declared every April 24th, “Ride for Survival Day”. Indeed, media markets touched by the ride offered its important message to easily millions of Floridians in a 12 day period.

Most importantly, the message delivered to the entire state was at no cost to the riders, crew, or participating public safety agencies, or SAFE. Through sponsor support, approximately \$100,000 was raised to execute the campaign at no cost to taxpayers. The partnership with critical private and corporate helpers greatly enhanced the reach of public safety that would not have been anywhere near possible had agencies, such as the FSU Police Department, decided to execute such a campaign unilaterally. Also, with the nexus of the ride to SAFE, Inc., the ability for the ride’s message to be carried on through their excellent program taught by paramedics was cemented. The ride in the end, reached well beyond 12 days of public attention.

Retrospect

The 180 SAFE Ride launched the idea of community crime prevention partnerships to a level never attempted before in law enforcement. Development and implementation of a statewide traffic awareness campaign at no cost to the central spearheading law

enforcement agency is nearly a full time job in itself. However, when the message is so critical, clear, and impacting upon every person and entity involved, enthusiasm gives rise to important partnerships, funding, and effort. The 180 SAFE Ride was and is an example of the perfect synergy of public, private, and non-profit agencies working together as a community coalition to pull off the seemingly impossible. But, we did it, and because of it, countless people in Florida were afforded life saving information both during the event and beyond. Was it a success? Having been completed with gusto in 2006 and 2007, the 2008 Ride is already in development. What's more, soon, the 180 SAFE Ride will be launching in other states, establishing itself solidly at the national level. The 180 SAFE Ride is marked to be the gold standard for a traffic safety marketing campaign. See you on the road...