

# Beyond The Cab

The only safety management newsletter dedicated exclusively to addressing injury prevention and workers' compensation cost control for trucking companies.



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## Giving Safety "Top of Mind Awareness"

Trucking industry safety directors typically play a variety of roles. In addition to the reality that many of these safety directors are intimately involved in recruiting, selection and hiring, most can also be described as an administrator, manager, compliance specialist, trainer, investigator, counselor and auditor.

However, there's one more role that these safety directors should add to the list, "marketing specialist." Yes, the role of a safety director includes (or at least should include) marketing. Not necessarily marketing the attributes of the company to outside interests. But rather, marketing "safety" to the internal interests (the drivers and other employees).

Because drivers work far from the eyes of company management, trucking industry safety directors don't have the benefit of "close supervision" as a management tool to help influence safe work behaviors. Instead, they must rely upon drivers to keep "safe behavior" foremost in their minds. When drivers are getting out of a truck, we want them to be thinking about taking their time, maintaining 3 points of contact and being aware of the ground beneath them. When they're opening a trailer door, we want them to be thinking about the possibility that the load has shifted and is pressed against the trailer door; that a load-lock came undone and may fall out when the trailer door is opened; or that a gust of wind may rip the trailer door from their hands. When they're on a dock, we want them to be thinking about the slip/trip hazards and the possibility that the forklift operator doesn't see them.

Although we want "safe behavior" to be foremost in their thoughts, the reality is that safety is competing with an immeasurable number of thoughts every minute of every day within every driver. A driver may be dealing with the frustration of not being unloaded in a timely manner, unrealistic expectations of a dispatcher, money problems, family issues, or may merely be contemplating discussion from the latest talk radio show. Regardless of what the "other" thoughts of the driver may be, if

they're not furthering the objective of preventing injuries, they're competing for something that marketing professionals call "top of mind awareness."

In marketing circles, "top of mind awareness" is achieved when the name of particular company is the first thing to come to an individual's mind when a desire for a specific product or service exists. The concept is not too different when the product being marketed is "safety." The twist is that the triggering event is no longer a *desire for a product or service*, but is a *physical action*. For example, when a driver begins to exist his truck (a *physical action*) his first (and predominant) thoughts should be maintain 3 points of contact, face the cab, don't jump, etc.

How many fewer injuries would your company have if each driver had specific "safe behaviors" as their foremost thought when getting out of a truck, pulling a fifth-wheel pin, sliding tandems, securing a load, unloading freight, etc?

What company comes to your mind when I mention fried chicken? (*I'll wait while you come-up with your answer*) There are several national chains, but one came to your mind first. Do you know why it came to your mind before any of the others? The answer to that question (seeming unrelated to trucking industry safety) could impact your safety program dramatically. For most of us, frequency of exposure to a particular fried chicken restaurant was the reason it came to our mind so readily. Quite simply, we've seen their commercials, billboards, signs and restaurants more than we've seen the other fried chicken restaurant marketing efforts.

If frequency of the message is the key to "top of mind awareness" for products and services marketed to consumers, it stands to reason that frequency of message is also the key to "top of mind awareness" for safety marketed to drivers and other employees. In fact, instilling safe work behaviors in the minds of drivers through repetition may be key to transforming the knowledge of the driver into consistent application of that knowledge.

Some companies latch onto this concept of marketing safety and use catchy phrases such as "Think Safety," "Safety First" or other such slogans. In my humble opinion, such slogans do as little to influence employee behavior as does a mother saying, "Be careful." has on her son as he heads out the door to race dirt bikes with his friends.

Instead, of catchy phrases that promote "safety" as a general concept, your effort to gain "top of mind awareness" among employees should focus upon a manageable number (3 to 5) *specific safe work behaviors*. To identify the specific safe work behaviors that should be marketed in your company, review the past losses and assess the hazards to which employees are exposed. They may be different than those of another trucking company.

Lastly, marketing professionals who achieve "top of mind awareness" for their clients don't limit their efforts to a single type of media. Instead they use every available type form of media (and means of delivering it) that they can. Consider your favorite national pizza chain. They very likely use radio, television and the Internet. They place their logo and slogan on napkins, pizza boxes, shirts, hats, car signs, refrigerator magnets, billboards, and store floor mats, and have employees hold signs along side of busy streets.... and that's just to sell pizza.

Within reasonable budgetary limitations, safety directors should be equally as aggressive, diverse and creative in marketing safety. Commit that there will never again be a newsletter, paycheck stub, electronic message, or other written correspondence given to a driver that doesn't advance the goal of achieving "top of mind presence" of safe behavior. Commit that every verbal communication with a driver, from this point forward, will include reinforcing a key safe work behavior.

As all effective marketing professionals do, think outside of the box. In what creative and innovative ways can you remind drivers of the key safe work behaviors that (if implemented consistently by all drivers) will have a noticeable impact upon your company's loss history?