Case study: how Operation Lifesaver saved itself in the digital age

A Communicatto case study

Since 1981, Operation Lifesaver (OL) has been the backbone of railway safety education in Canada. Railway incidents kill or seriously injure more than 100 Canadians annually; Operation Lifesaver is dedicated to preventing these needless tragedies through awareness and education. However, there once was a time when Operation Lifesaver needed saving, too, digitally speaking, that is.

In 2009, Operation Lifesaver received a major wake-up call: their brand new, freshly launched website caused them to completely disappear from Google. Yikes! They were suddenly facing a major traffic loss.

“Operation Lifesaver didn’t have much of a digital strategy in 2009,” says Maryse Betournay, Operation Lifesaver’s senior administrative assistant. “Communicatto was really responsible for bringing our organization into the digital age.”

Gradually Communicatto introduced Operation Lifesaver to social media and then blogging, increasing the program’s reach and digital presence every year. Doing so allowed for better measurement of the reach and the effectiveness of content, and gave Operation Lifesaver the data to continuously improve and expand its rail safety efforts.
outreach. In other words, Operation Lifesaver could now prove they were speaking to Canadians about rail safety, and that Canadians were listening and responding.

“Communicatto constantly strives to improve and adapt, quarter after quarter,” says Sarah Mayes, Operation Lifesaver’s interim national director. “With the reports and health checks they provide, we always know what’s working and what’s not.”

In 2014, Operation Lifesaver further revamped its digital strategy, this time, focusing on the most at-risk demographic for railway incidents: adventure-seeking men aged 16-35. As a result, Operation Lifesaver became edgier and more multimedia focused. From creating educational videos for YouTube to starting “The Misadventures of Bob” cartoon series, they’ve harnessed their ability to reach and impact their audience like never before.

“Social media is undoubtedly the best way to reach our target audiences, and it also allows us to track our outreach in a really detailed way,” Mayes reflects. “Operation Lifesaver is definitely a more recognizable brand now because of its social media presence.”

By 2016, Communicatto and OL’s efforts culminated in victory – specifically winning gold in the Marcom Awards Integrated Marketing category for that year’s Rail Safety Week campaign.

After being dedicated to public-rail safety for 35 years, it’s no wonder Operation Lifesaver had to evolve with the times. By implementing a digital strategy together with Communicatto, Operation Lifesaver lives on to help many other at-risk Canadians do the same.

“Communicatto constantly strives to improve and adapt, quarter after quarter” - Sarah Mayes

“Communicatto has pitched in so much over the years – out of the goodness of their hearts, and their commitment to helping us reduce preventable injuries and deaths,” Betournay remarks. “They always find a way to make it work for us. As a non-profit, that’s a commitment we really appreciate from our agency.”