



# Operation Red Nose: Providing a Safe Holiday Ride and Raising Money for Charity Through Social Marketing

# 10

University of Lethbridge Pronghorns’  
Operation Red Nose Campaign

Katherine C. Lafreniere and Katharine Howie

## Chapter Overview

One of the most important steps in developing a successful social marketing campaign is to identify and address the barriers of the targeted behavior (McKenzie-Mohr, 2000). In other words, marketers need to know what prevents the public from engaging in the activity they hope to promote. Most often, multiple barriers exist—both internal and external to the individual—for any given activity, and these barriers are specific to the activity (e.g., McKenzie-Mohr et al., 1995). For example, what prevents someone from donating blood may differ from what prevents him or her from recycling. Unfortunately, research suggests that there is a significant pressure for social marketers to skip this step, leading to failed campaigns that do not change behavior (McKenzie-Mohr, 2000). This case study demonstrates how the University of Lethbridge Athletics Department reduced impaired driving in their community by reducing the barriers and increasing the benefits of hiring a chauffeur service. In doing so, they created a win-win social marketing campaign that not only helps the community but also raises funds for their athletics program.

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K. C. Lafreniere (✉)

Alberta School of Business, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada  
e-mail: [klafreni@ualberta.ca](mailto:klafreni@ualberta.ca)

K. Howie

Dhillon School of Business, University of Lethbridge, Calgary, Canada  
e-mail: [Katherine.howie@uleth.ca](mailto:Katherine.howie@uleth.ca)

## Campaign Background and Environment

The University of Lethbridge Pronghorns Athletics Department has found tremendous success pursuing sports excellence in basketball, soccer, rugby, hockey, swimming, and track. Yet in 1995, the department was facing budget cuts. Their directors were faced with the arduous tasks of increasing their ticket sales and finding new sources of income. It became clear that the ideal solution would be a single program that could generate revenue while simultaneously strengthening the Pronghorns brand in the community.

At the same time, Operation Red Nose, a national road safety campaign (hereinafter referred to as ORN) was looking to enter into new partnerships and expand its service to new parts of the country. The benefits of ORN are threefold:

1. ORN organizes volunteers to provide safe and sober rides to the community. The program operates by sending two drivers to each call, so they can pick up the individual and drive that individual's car home, along with a following car. This allows people in the community to have a designated driver and the convenience of having their car at home.
2. Since the drivers of the program are volunteers from a specific organization (in this case the Pronghorns Athletic Department), the volunteer organization receives both increased visibility and positive sentiment from the community for their charitable actions.
3. Although the service is free, the organization receives revenue from donations made by users of the ride service.

ORN had recently partnered with swim clubs and a couple of universities but believed that a variety of nonprofit organizations and sports programs could benefit from the fundraiser. In 1995, ORN had yet to offer their services in Southern Alberta. Each year ORN generates over \$1,200,000 CAD in revenue to nonprofit organizations who participate in the program (Operation Red Nose, 2018). This case study explores how the University of Lethbridge Athletics Department partnered with ORN to offer a vital community service, raise money for the Pronghorns sports teams, and generate positive visibility for the Pronghorns in the community. The program used social marketing messages that included both a promotion and a prevention focus. This theory is explained in more detail later in the case.

### ORN Mission

The mission of ORN is to encourage responsible behavior (in a non-judgmental manner) regarding impaired driving by enabling communities to provide a free and confidential chauffeur service to their members, and the financial benefits of which are redistributed to local organizations dedicated to youth or amateur sports.

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## **SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)**

### **Strengths**

All Pronghorns athletes and staff represent a strong pool of potential volunteers. The Athletics Department staff can manage the campaign.

The University of Lethbridge Pronghorns is a well-known brand in the community.

The University of Lethbridge Athletics Department has available infrastructure and resources to handle such a program.

The University of Lethbridge has a good relationship with local media outlets.

### **Weaknesses**

Pronghorns athletes may be reluctant to dedicate their free time, particularly on the weekends, to the campaign.

The size of each Pronghorns team is limited, so they may need to recruit additional volunteers.

The program runs over the holiday season, which is when many students, including Pronghorns athletes, leave the city to return home.

### **Opportunities**

Community members want to meet the athletes.

Potential revenue as donations from an ORN campaign would go directly to the Pronghorns.

ORN programs are a valuable public relations tool. The program could help the Pronghorns give back to the community and be role models.

Lethbridge is a small city with light traffic and close city limits.

### **Threats**

Many people do not like to admit they drank too much and need a ride home. There may be a perception of inconvenience in using a ride service.

Underage drinkers may be concerned they will get in trouble for drinking illegally.

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## Past and Similar Efforts

Before the athletics department partnered with ORN, its directors researched other ORN campaigns across Alberta. They found a swim team in Calgary, a city near Lethbridge that was operating an ORN program with a similar model. The swim team hired an employee to manage the campaign rather than recruit volunteers to manage the program. Likewise, the athletic department planned on assigning managerial responsibilities to their current employees. The advantage of the swim club's model is that the campaign would not have to rely on volunteers to organize such a complicated event in their spare time. The U of L directors met with the swim team's ORN manager to learn more about the logistics, challenges, and expectations of the fundraiser.

The swim team's ORN manager indicated that their two greatest challenges were recruiting sufficient volunteers and servicing the entire city. Regarding volunteer recruitment, the manager found that the swim team's parents preferred to donate their money to the campaign rather than their time because many of their parents were financially well off. Furthermore, the swimmers were too young to volunteer as drivers. As well, the sheer size of Calgary caused additional problems. Efficiency was greatly impacted by the distance between pickup and drop-off locations. Driving clients across the city significantly reduced the number of rides that could be completed each night and increased fuel costs. The manager tried to mitigate these problems by dividing the work with another sports team, wherein the swim team would service one side of Calgary and their partnering team would service the other. While this partnership increased the number of volunteers, it did not adequately reduce the average time and distance it took to complete a ride. Clients continued to ask drivers for a ride across the city. In the end, the swim team moved away from the traditional ORN service and began to exclusively contract their services to Christmas parties.

The athletics department knew that an ORN service in Lethbridge would face many of the same challenges and potential new ones. However, unlike the swim team, Pronghorns athletes and staff are old enough to volunteer for the campaign, which provides a solid base of volunteers (although the campaign will require additional volunteers as the client base expands). Furthermore, Lethbridge is one-tenth the size of Calgary, and therefore more manageable in terms of estimating the time required to complete a ride. Over time, though, this advantage may diminish as the city grows larger and expands its city limits.

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## Target Audience

The program's primary target audience consists of motorists living in Lethbridge who are not fit to drive. The target audience is not exclusive to motorists who have been drinking; it also includes those who do not feel fit to drive because of fatigue or

medication, for example. Furthermore, the target audience does not exclude those who should not be drinking, such as residents under the legal drinking age of 18 years.

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## **Campaign Objectives**

### **Behavior Objectives**

For the target audience, the program's overarching behavior goal was to reduce the number of impaired drivers during the holiday season. The specific behavior objective was to have target audience members call ORN when they are unfit to drive to secure a safe ride to their next destination. Given the significant increase of impaired drivers during winter holidays, the time frame for achieving this goal was limited to the month of December each year.

### **Knowledge Objectives**

The knowledge objective for the target audience was to promote access-related facts and information about the service, including when and how clients can access the safe ride service. One key point the target audience should know is that the service is free but donations are accepted and encouraged. One hundred percent of all client donations are given to Pronghorns sports teams. This objective was important for motivating prospective clients to use the safe ride service while also making the program beneficial to the Pronghorns.

### **Belief Objectives**

The athletics department in conjunction with ORN wanted their target audience to believe the following:

The service is confidential and free of judgment. Anyone who is not fit, or is unable, to drive can use this service.

One can call ORN more than once during the course of an evening, either to get from one location to another or simply to get home safely.

Driving while impaired is a very real risk to oneself and to others.

### **Other Important Objectives**

As stated in ORN's mission statement, another important objective is that the program generates revenue for the nonprofit organization. However, this objective

cannot be allowed to hinder ORN's main objective of providing a community service. That is why there is no charge for the service, but donations are accepted.

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## **Factors Influencing Behavior**

### **Motivators**

Perceived benefits for using the safe ride service include the following:

Clients do not have to leave their vehicle behind.

The service is potentially cheaper than calling a taxi. Those who choose to donate over \$30 will receive a tax receipt.

Pronghorns fans get to meet the athletes.

Clients do not have to risk the safety of themselves or others by driving while impaired.

### **Barriers**

Formative research was conducted to identify potential barriers to using the service. Through interviewing prospective clients, the program identified the following barriers among the target audience:

Concern that the ORN Pronghorns drivers might feel their drinking is inappropriate (e.g., underage or pregnancy), and they may be negatively judged if they call for a ride home.

Some people may feel uncomfortable with someone else driving their vehicle. Likewise, some clients do not like the escort driver having 100% control of the vehicle and will insist that they shift gears instead of the driver.

Some people value having a high alcohol tolerance and therefore do not want to admit when alcohol has impaired their judgment.

Some people will not wait for the service if volunteers cannot pick them up immediately.

Some people value risk seeking and therefore see impaired driving as a thrill or badge of honor.

Some people are just reluctant to use the service because impaired driving was a social norm. Interestingly, older target beneficiaries were more reluctant to use the service than younger beneficiaries. Such a discrepancy may be attributed to the emerging road safety curriculums in high schools and universities.

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## Competing Behaviors

The chief competing behavior for the program is impaired driving. This dangerous behavior can result in several negative financial, mental, and health-related consequences. However, impaired driving is the most convenient behavior option. People do not have to wait for a driver or feel obligated to pay for the service.

From a fundraising perspective, other competing behaviors include the target audience using a taxi service, designated driver, or public transportation. However, ORN and their partners do not view these behaviors as true competing behaviors because they still allow the unfit motorist to safely arrive at their next location, which is the program's primary concern. Interestingly, taxi drivers in Lethbridge embraced ORN's service because (1) taxi companies within the city had trouble responding to all service requests during the winter holidays, (2) ORN made the roads safer for taxi drivers by reducing the number of drunk drivers on the road, (3) if someone without a vehicle phoned ORN, then ORN would call a taxi for them, and (4) ORN also responded to potentially difficult clients (e.g., drunks), alleviating some of the risk for taxi drivers.

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## Campaign Strategies

### Product Strategies

ORN is a unique holiday program that allows individuals who have been drinking, or who otherwise do not feel fit or are unable to drive their own vehicle home, to summon a team of volunteers who will pick them up and drive their vehicle to their homes. A no-fee service, ORN accepts donations in support of Pronghorn Athletics. The program is designed to reduce the inconvenience of getting a ride home because motorists do not have to leave their vehicle somewhere and worry about picking it up in the morning.

Given that people tend to consume more alcohol during the winter holidays, the program starts on the last week of November and ends on the morning of New Year's Day. To meet demand, the athletics department runs the program primarily on the weekend starting at 9:30 p.m. but notes that other programs across the country will run every night in December. The athletics department will often have different volunteers each night, so, before the service begins, coordinators will provide a brief orientation and go over a script to clients' frequently asked questions. For example, if someone inquires about the cost, volunteers are taught to say, "ORN is a free service, but we do accept donations in support of Pronghorns Athletics. Our average tip is \$20." To ensure smooth operations, the department will have at least four operators in the office; two operators will answer incoming calls and the other two will dispatch the road teams. The remaining volunteers will be assigned to a road team.

Each road team consists of three volunteers, including the escort driver, the volunteer driver, and the navigator. The escort driver uses his or her personal vehicle to drive the team to the location where the client is waiting. Upon arrival, the volunteer driver will drive the client in the client's vehicle. The navigator rides along with the volunteer driver and the client to make sure that everything goes well. He or she will also act as the team secretary by filling out the transportation form and preparing a receipt for any donation received. The escort driver will follow the volunteer driver to the client's destination to pick up his or her teammates at the end of the transaction. Once the client has reached his or her destination, the navigator will give the client a receipt and hang a flyer on the client's rearview mirror, encouraging the client to fill out a short online survey for a chance to win a trip. The escort driver will then phone dispatch to receive instructions about the next ride or head back to the headquarters. At the end of the night, the navigator is responsible for handing in all the paperwork, donations, and uniforms (which are vests).

### **Pricing Strategies**

ORN's pricing strategy is to decrease the monetary and non-monetary costs for the desired behavior. Before ORN, the non-monetary costs for people who need a safe ride home were inconvenience and worry, particularly about leaving their car overnight or picking it up the next day. Alternatively, the price for those choosing to drive impaired was the risk of being in an accident or receiving an impaired driving ticket, possibly resulting in the loss of their driver's license. The monetary cost was typically the cost of a taxi. ORN's safe ride service reduced these costs by offering a free ride home for the client and their vehicle.

Using ORN does present several costs to riders. Although the service is free, tips are generally given. Clients must call for a ride, then wait for the ORN team to arrive, which represents a time cost. Additionally, there may be an emotional cost, if clients are worried about having an ORN team member drive their vehicle. Finally, there may be apprehension about riding with a stranger.

### **Place Strategies**

The place strategy is to make it as convenient and pleasant as possible to receive the safe ride service by reducing access-related and time-related barriers. Given that the target audience is geographically spread across Lethbridge's city limits, road teams cannot be at every possible pickup location. Furthermore, it is not efficient to merely wait outside of businesses for prospective clients, particularly if that business is not centrally located. Instead, the athletics department set up a single telephone number for clients to call when they need a ride, similar to that of a taxi service. Clients call the number and the operator dispatches a road team on their behalf. Although this phone service is not as convenient as having a road team

already waiting outside (e.g., taxis waiting at the airport), it is more convenient than having clients wait outside to flag down a road team that may or may not drive by.

To reduce time-related barriers, the athletics department offers the safe ride service when clients are most likely in need of safe transportation. Most businesses in Lethbridge have their Christmas party in the evening on a weekend. As such, the service is available from 9:30 pm to 3:00 am on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. The program starts on the last weekend of November and runs until New Year's Eve. The service is available on New Year's Eve even if that holiday does not fall on a weekend.

## Promotion Strategies

Promotional material is designed by ORN's national office with additional space for the charity to add any pertinent information (Fig. 10.1). However, organizations that want to add additional messages need approval from the national office. The primary message that ORN and the athletics department want to communicate to their target audience is to use the safe ride service when you feel unfit to drive. This message is typically presented in a tagline. In the past, ORN applied a rhyming technique to make the message easy to remember. The tagline read, "Planning some holiday cheer? Call a reindeer." They have since revised their tagline to read "This season, hand the reins over to us." This tagline better communicates the campaign's objectives by connecting the service to the entire season rather than a specific event. It also removes the idea that the service is only for motorists who have been drinking. Communication channels that can only support a brief message, such as posters or small print ads, typically include the tagline, ORN logo, and the nonprofit organization's service information (e.g., phone number and hours of operation). For communication channels that permit additional information, such as radio ads or

**Fig. 10.1** 2017 advertising campaign. Photograph <http://operationrednose.com/advertisements>



press releases, the creative strategy will also include what the service entails and statistics on how the service benefits the community. These statistics usually include how many people used the service, how many people volunteered, and how much money was raised for the organization, Pronghorns athletics in this case.

The athletics department attributes much of the campaign's success to word-of-mouth communications. Clients are so pleased with the convenience of the service that they are eager to recommend it to friends. Local media personalities embraced the campaign as a feel-good story about the community. In fact, audience feedback was so positive that radio stations which were not identified as a main sponsor eventually started covering the event and requesting interviews. Accordingly, the athletics department issued a public service announcement to the media each Monday while the campaign was running to offer updates on how many people used the service or volunteered the previous weekend.

The communication for the program used a mixture of promotion- and prevention-framed messages. Within the marketing literature, there is a wealth of research on how messages are framed and the implications of these differences. Individuals differ regarding whether they focus more on the positive aspects of a behavior or the negative aspects (Higgins, 2002). Messages that are framed positively, a promotion focus, can work well for people who are motivated to pursue good outcomes. For example, marketing ORN as supporting Pronghorn Athletes would resonate with this group of people. Conversely, other individuals are more concerned with avoiding negative outcomes, a prevention focus. For this group of people marketing messages about avoiding drunken driving crashes or tickets would be more effective. Both approaches were used in order to appeal to both promotion and prevention orientations within the target audience.

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## **Other Important Strategies**

### **Corporate Sponsors**

The athletics department recognized that corporate sponsors were essential to gain reliable volunteers and reduce operating expenses. Businesses perceived the campaign as an interesting community service activity for their staff. Some businesses would even give their staff the afternoon off with pay so they could rest before their volunteer shift. Businesses have also been very generous covering various operational costs. Gas King, for example, provided gas gift cards to volunteers driving their own car. The City of Lethbridge provided a facility for volunteers and a telephone system to handle incoming calls. Other businesses covered other operational costs, such as food, beverages, or additional cellphones. The support has been so tremendous that the athletics department has never incurred more than \$5000 in expenses.

## **Athlete Volunteers**

The majority of the campaign's volunteers are Pronghorns athletes. Each athlete is required to work at least one shift each season, but many athletes volunteer multiple times. The amount of money donated to each Pronghorns team depends on how many volunteers the team provided that season, creating an incentive to volunteer more often. The athletics department noted two added bonuses to using athlete volunteers. First, they found that many clients were really interested in meeting the athletes and this connection encouraged clients to later attend Pronghorns games. Second, the campaign also seemed to encourage their athletes, most of them between 18 and 24 years of age, to make responsible decisions. The Department found that a lot of athletes took pride in being the responsible driver and were more willing to use the program themselves.

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## **Concluding Remarks**

Operation Red Nose is the quintessential win-win scenario, providing much-needed financial support for the university's sports program, along with a valuable community service that helps cut down on potentially impaired drivers. By taking the time to identify and address the barriers of a chauffeur service, the safe ride service offered by Pronghorns Athletics is one of the most successful ORN campaigns to date. Locally, more than \$550,000 has been raised in support of Pronghorn Athletics over the past 19 years. Last season, the campaign provided almost 1300 safe rides with the help of 640 volunteers and raised over \$40,000 in 12 days. Despite these impressive figures, the Department coordinators maintain that if a nonprofit organization was to only consider the safe ride service as a source of income, then the campaign would have little value. A nonprofit could probably make the same amount of money from a casino fundraiser or some other event in two days. The real value of the safe ride service is its effect on the Pronghorns brand. The campaign suggests that Pronghorns Athletics is dedicated to exceeding community expectations by developing not only athletes but also community leaders. It also reinforces the idea that Pronghorns Athletics is a vital program that deserves community support.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. It is possible that this service does not reduce the number of impaired drivers if they are only attracting clients who would have otherwise called a taxi or designated driver. The service could merely be another alternative for people who are already making safe choices. How can campaign managers measure ORN's success in reducing the number of drunk drivers?
2. How valuable is publicity in this case? How valuable is publicity for social marketing in general?

3. The organization Operation Red Nose has the challenge of getting numerous stakeholders involved to grow their organization. Imagine that you are a marketing manager for the Operation Red Nose and are trying to enter a new community. What stakeholders do you need buy-in from for this expansion to be successful? What barriers is each stakeholder potentially facing?
4. This case study explained the differences between promotion- and prevention-focused messages. Find an example of social marketers using each type of framing, and explain why it fits into that category.
5. Many liquor companies donate money to programs that encourage the responsible use of their products. Do you think this is an ethical obligation of the company? Why or why not?

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