

CASSIES 2003

BAIT CARS



IF YOU WERE A CAR THIEF IN VANCOUVER, BUSINESS WAS GOOD. Theft in 2001 was up 9%, and all signs pointed to more growth. The Insurance Corporation of British Columbia (ICBC) had tried for years to deter this by telling owners to protect their cars with steering locks, car alarms, etc. This had some effect, but not enough. In early 2002, the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) started testing a program decidedly more devious. Bait Cars look innocent enough, but are packed with special equipment. Once inside, thieves can be audio and videotaped, and a silent alarm alerts the police. They track the car by GPS to a safe place, lock the doors by remote control, switch the engine off, and catch the thieves red-handed. The objective of the program was to reduce annual car thefts by 10%. But how to communicate the story?

Talking to the public seemed too passive. Then inspiration hit. Why not talk to the thieves? With police profiling, and input from the respected criminologist Dr. Pat Brantingham at Simon Fraser University, a vivid picture emerged of why thieves stole, where they spend their time, and the media they see. Police even noted the stations that thieves had tuned to in the cars that they stole, and these became part of the media buy.

The analysis led to a tough creative strategy: instill fear, doubt and paranoia, and the program was launched with a press conference on September 25, 2002. A 13-foot mousetrap stole the show and re-appeared all over the news. Thereafter, everything was done to reach thieves where they live. Car-sized “traps” were parked in tempting places—and the mousetrap was used as moving outdoor in malls and parking lots. Posters appeared in transit shelters and washrooms—and removable graffiti of “Steal a Bait Car. Go to Jail.” went up where drug users hang out. Hundreds of signs saying “Bait Car Program Is In Effect” graced parking lots. The Beat radio station even joined in. A morning team “stole” a Bait Car and drove it around the city. Listeners logged onto a website, where they could win an anti-theft device by locating them. Eventually, the vehicle was “caught,” and with much publicity the DJs were escorted away in handcuffs. All of this was supported by four unusual :30 second radio ads that crackled across the air-waves like the police talking directly to a thief.

The campaign paid for itself in two months, with a 30% reduction of car thefts in Q4 2002 versus year-ago. Thefts crept back up when advertising stopped for January and February 03, but declined again when advertising came back in March—proving the advertising effect. Easy Park (a big Vancouver parking company) had particularly impressive results. They were one of the campaign’s sponsors and saw auto crime decline by 57% for the six months through March 03. Based on this, Bait Cars is now a full-blown program with the Vancouver Police Department, and has been expanded to other markets in Canada. It is also recognized as a gold standard globally.

INSURANCE CORPORATION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Dennis St. Aubin,
Portfolio Manager

Laurie Baker, *Senior Manager,
Loss & Prevention*

Glen Pentland,
Marketing Manager

Clare Marwick, *Senior
Communications Specialist*

PALMER JARVIS DDB

Alan Russell,
VP Creative Director
Paul Little, *Writer*
Lara Palmer, *Assoc. Creative Director*
Scot Keith, *Account Director*
Maureen Atchison, *Account Supervisor*
Geoff Taylor, *Account Coordinator*
Sue Bell / Wendy Moriarity,
Production