

CREATIVE EFFECTIVENESS LIONS

Title: V/Line Guilt Trips

Client: V/Line

Product: Transport

1. What were the objectives for the creative work

Please distinguish between interim objectives (e.g. awareness, image, attitudes, and behaviour) and sales objectives (e.g. volume, revenue, market share). Be aware that having both will strengthen your entry

V/Line is Victoria's regional train operator, connecting commuters from country Victoria to the hustle and bustle of Melbourne's centre, and vice versa. In recent years, V/Line has seen a dramatic shift in the dynamics of the Victorian marketplace.

A volatile mix of high metropolitan housing prices, ever increasing traffic delays in Melbourne's outer suburbs and a range of Government incentives have seen a surge in people migrating out of the city suburbs to Victorian country towns.

Although this has had a positive impact on V/Line business in the form of peak travel sales, the shifting dynamics have not impacted the Visiting Friends and Family segment of their market. Effectively, V/Line had a two-speed business. During peak periods there were barely enough seats to meet the demand, but during off-peak periods such as midweek, during the day, carriages were almost deserted.

Ours was more than just a challenge to get people visiting the country. Car culture is so ingrained in the Australian psyche that off-peak users don't even think to use trains to visit the country. In this market, cars are not the smart decision, they're the non-decision.

With a relatively tiny budget (just under US\$500,000), V/Line was not just trying to get these people to visit their loved ones, but also ensuring they did not just jump in the car to get there. We had to find a compelling way to break this habitual behaviour and tempt people to think about getting the train when visiting the country.

The brief was not about awareness or advocacy, but about creating an integrated campaign to challenge existing behaviour and provide a new reason for off-peak customers to ride the trains without offering discounts. As such, success would be judged on:

- **1. Sales Objective:** A 5% increase in off-peak ticket sales over the campaign period of six months.
- **2. Revenue Objective.** Generate an additional \$1.5 Million in revenue.
- **3. Interim Objective** - Increase in consideration leading to purchase, (in the form of enquiries) by 10%.

2. What was the strategy behind the work?

Be clear about the connection between the objectives, the brief and the final creative work.

Who were we really targeting?

It's almost impossible to quantify the size of the population in Melbourne that may have a relative or a friend in the country. They range from unlicensed senior citizens through to destitute university students. So, rather than trying to isolate the largest demographic within the VFR segment, we looked to those who had a vested interest in returning home. In other words, who had emotional ties back to the country, or who were financially dependent on their country ties.

With these drivers in mind, it quickly became apparent that the people Metro needed to move were young Victorians. While families were flocking back to country areas, young Victorians were doing the opposite, continuing to flee rural towns for the big city lights to work, study or for the lifestyle.

The greatest off-peak opportunity then lay in enticing these young adults to go back home and visit friends and family.

To understand the target audience better, we conducted a series of one-on-one sessions with former country residents, aged 18 to 24, now living in Melbourne¹.

From this research, we quickly discovered that with this audience, the barriers to visiting home were big. They were just too busy, country life lacked the excitement of the city and the ability to keep up with people remotely on Facebook removed any impetus to return to the country towns in which they grew up. Ultimately, this group was too busy getting on with the rest of their lives to prioritise regular trips home.

With a limited budget, and such a large obstacle, we knew traditional advertising wouldn't have a big enough impact. So we flipped things a little.

Uncovering two critical customer truths.

1. Despite their love of their new lifestyle and reluctance to leave it for even a second, there still was a very real sense of obligation amongst young Victorians to visit their family and friends back home.

2. While friends and family wouldn't mind the odd non-financially motivated visit once in a while, we weren't dealing with sad, lonely and rejected parents and friends. Just as their city kids and friends were doing, these people were getting on with their lives too.

These are just some of the great quotes we collected from the in-depth interviews².

"He only calls when he wants something from me."

"She comes back for Christmas so that we remember who she is when she calls us for something."

¹ Agency Research Finding (2012): Refer to Appendix 1

² Agency Research Finding (2012): Refer to Appendix 1

"He doesn't realise that I was once his age."

"When she calls up and asks for money, I make her work damn hard for it."

"I will make her feel as guilty as possible before I transfer the funds."³

Combined, these insights unveiled a disparity between what people in the city and country felt. People in the city felt an underlying obligation to their family, their friends and their past.

Country people don't feel any obligation. They weren't the ones who left. They just wanted the rare visit to become a little less infrequent.

To change the ingrained behaviour of the city dwellers, we needed to tap into the latent sense of obligation they felt – and we realised that this sense of obligation was best unlocked with guilt. To turn that feeling of obligation into action we had to trigger the guilt nerve.

It was based on this; we created a strategy that would leverage the power of loved ones and the guilt they could evoke. We turned to a willing accomplice: our country cousins. An advertising message from V/Line could never possess the power to move our target, but a "guilt" message from home is another story.

3. What was the creative work?

Detail the creative output in terms of its content, the media channels, and the investment behind it?

Our creative solution wasn't to advertise the trains or even the country. And as a train operator we didn't feel we had the right to make people feel guilty about their reluctance to travel. But we could create a new product to advertise – The Guilt Trip, V/Line's first new product innovation in over 50 years.

To sell our product, we created a three-part strategy:

1. **Tell Victorians about our new product, The Guilt Trip:** We used traditional media and public relations to kick off the campaign, with the State's Transport Minister launching the campaign (Image 1). The idea that it was now possible to purchase a Guilt Trip was novel enough to gain great traction in regional press and television networks. With a media budget of \$400,000 we utilized paid outdoor, press and radio to bring the idea to life (Image 2).
2. **Get country people to do the selling for us.** To leverage the power of guilt, we needed to put real people and real guilt front and center. Online films, regional media and Guilt Trip handbooks offering tips for effective guilt trips focused on teaching country people about the power of guilt and how to use it. Through a new website acting as a ticket sales platform – Guilttrips.com.au – people were able to send light-hearted messages of guilt and pre-paid V/Line train tickets to their city-based loved ones (Image 5). This approach, and indeed the media weighting, was in marked contrast to V/Line's traditional marketing strategy and a

³ Agency Research Findings: Refer to Appendix 1

disruption from the brand's heritage.

3. **Use social media to enhance the guilt.** The Guilt Trip platform was designed to allow users to publically guilt their family and friends to come home – through Facebook and Twitter (Image 6).

A mere two days after launch, the "Guilt Trips" website was featured in the CSS Awards and in AWWWards⁴ as a nominee for Site of the Day.

Examples of creative work



Image 1. Terry Mulder, Public Transport Minister Launching Guilt Trips⁵



Image 2. The website where visitors could buy Guilt Trip tickets and send⁶ guilt messages to their city-dwelling friends and family.

⁴ AWWWards link: <http://www.awwwards.com/best-websites/guilt-trips>

CSS Link: <http://www.campaignbrief.com/2012/05/regional-train-operator-vline.html>

⁵ Terry Mulder launching Guilt Trips: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vkeA07JWigk>

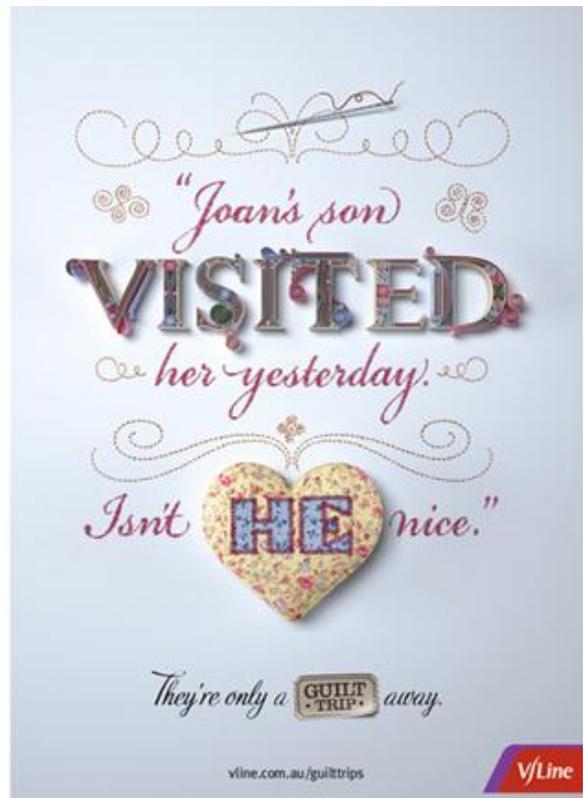


Image 3: Press and out-of-home ads sustained the guilt message.⁷

⁶ V-Line Guilt Trips website: <http://www.vline.com.au/about/publications/GuiltTrips.html>

⁷ V-Line, Guilt Trips page: <http://www.vline.com.au/about/publications/GuiltTrips.html>



Image 4. Guilt Trips for Everyday Living, a book full of imaginative ways to guilt trip your children or grandchildren into visiting you, was mailed to mothers who had expressed their interest via the website.⁸



Image 5. The personalised Guilt Trip message city dwellers received from their loved ones.⁹

⁸ http://digitalshowcase.com.au/guilttrips_booklet

⁹ Image extracted from McCann's work: <http://mccann.com.au/project/guilt-trips/>

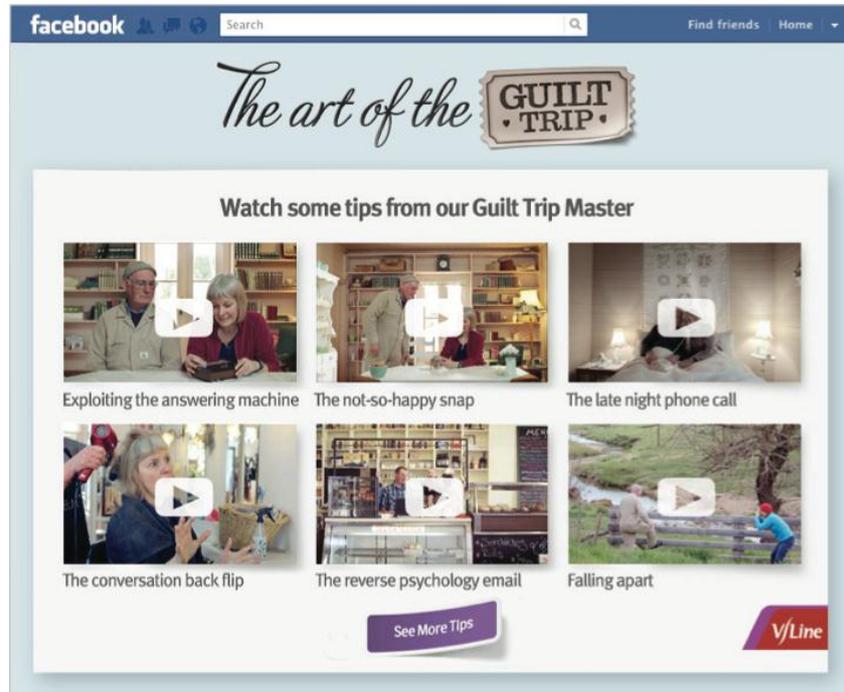


Image 6. Helpful tips on social media to empower country residents to guilt their loved ones.¹⁰

With the Guilt Trip, we took a dramatic leap forward from V/Line's traditional thinking, unveiling an entirely new revenue stream V/Line had not considered

¹⁰ Image 6: Temporary page on V/Line's Facebook Page

4. What effect did it have in the world?

Explain what happened after the work appeared. Again, be aware of the difference between interim and sales effects.

For a small campaign, that had very big obstacles, the results exceeded all expectations.

1. Sales Objective: 5% up-lift in ticket sales over six-month campaign period.

Result: A 15% increase in off peak sales¹¹.

Eight months since launch, total off-peak monthly sales increased an average 15% and continued to thrive beyond the campaign without additional promotion¹². In eight months, the campaign had sold an additional 123,000 tickets¹³. An impressive result considering the V/Line experience hadn't really changed at all.

2. Revenue Objective: An additional \$1.5 million in revenue.

Result: The campaign generated an additional \$4 Million in revenue.

Guilt trips used emotional leverage to avoid providing a financial incentive. With an average single off-peak ticket valued at \$33, the total revenue from the additional \$123,000 tickets saw \$4 Million in additional revenue; exceeding our KPI by 167%.¹⁴

3. Interim Objective: Increase in consideration leading to purchase (enquiries) by 10%

Result: A 28% increase in call center enquiries related to VFR travel

"Guilt Trips" also exceeded the campaign's third objective – consideration during campaign activity increased with call-center enquiries for VFR travel rising on average 28% (Figure 1)¹⁵.

The investment in the campaign returned 400% in a month in incremental VFR travel and VFR enquiries are still 60% higher than prior to launch.

¹¹ V/Line sales data: Refer to Appendix 3

¹² V/Line sales data: Refer to Appendix 3

¹³ V/Line sales data: Refer to Appendix 3

¹⁴ V/Line sales data: \$4 million figure is based on 123,000 tickets sold (.Refer to Appendix 3) at price of \$33 being sold.

¹⁵ V/Line sales data: Refer to Appendix 4

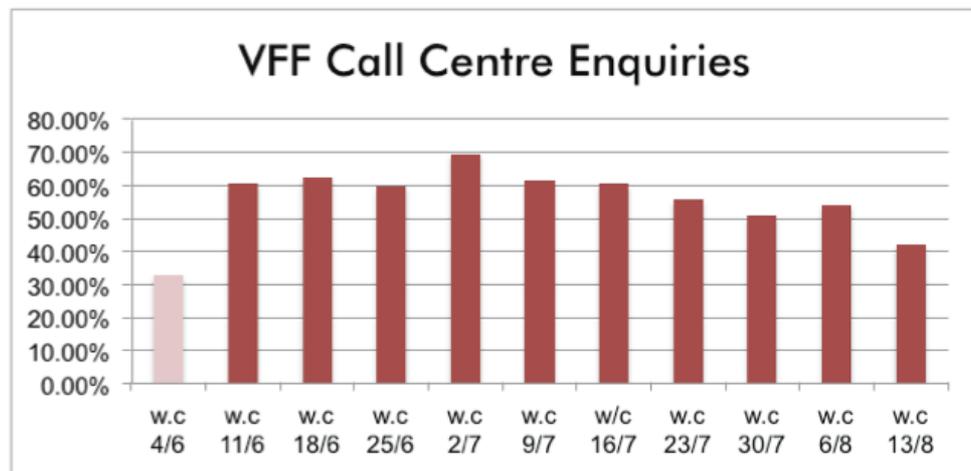


Figure 1. Graph showing how call center enquiries increase significantly during the campaign compared to pre-campaign.¹⁶

Other results worth mentioning.

The great achievement of the idea was its ability to inseparably link the creative strategy with the channel strategy – in the process transforming a preference for the bright city lights into an impossible-to-ignore invitation to return home from a loved one. We turned just another train trip into a new product that had a value far greater than the purchase price.

Like many campaigns, one of the major challenges was converting impressions into tangible action. To deliver sales the creative first had to drive traffic to the V/Line website to purchase Guilt Trips.

Arresting art direction and a clever media buy of digital banners delivered click-through rates well above industry norms (Figure 2). In Australia the benchmark click-through rate on digital banners is about 0.08%¹⁷.

We averaged click-through rates higher than this industry standard at just over 0.14%¹⁸. Using more engaging channels such as YouTube delivered even more impressive results with click-through rates over 1.46%¹⁹.

¹⁶ V/Line sales data: Refer to Appendix 4

¹⁷ Google Click through rate by country, page 16:

<http://static.googleusercontent.com/media/www.google.com.au/en/au/doubleclick/pdfs/DoubleClick-07-2010-DoubleClick-Benchmarks-Report-2009-Year-in-Review-US.pdf>

¹⁸ V-Line Guilt Trip Click through rate: Refer to Appendix 2

¹⁹ Emitch 2013

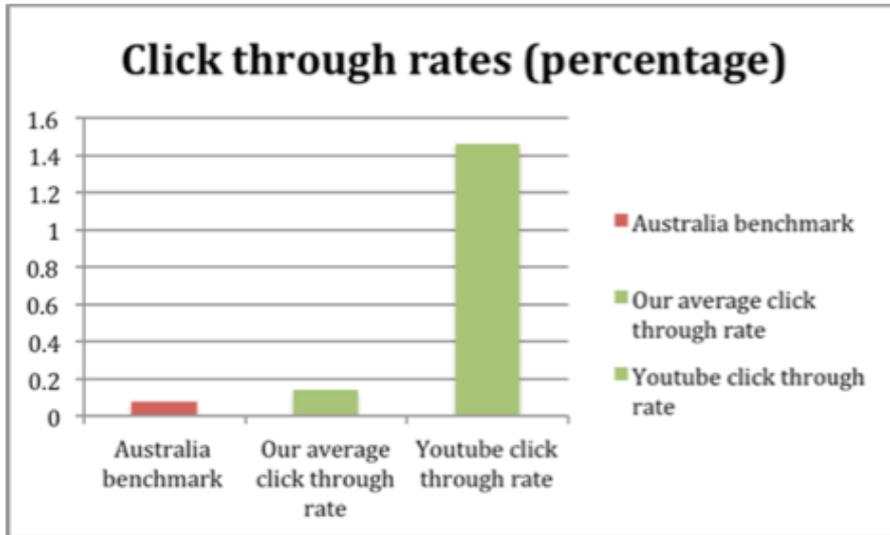


Figure 2. Click Through Rates (Percentage), Australia 2013

Converting engagement into action, growing online sales 4x our target

The online component of the campaign played a major role in driving ticket sales. Online V/Line ticket sales increased 20% immediately after launch and maintained a monthly ticket sale average of just under 11,000 tickets a month compared to under 9,000 a month when the campaign was not in field (Figure 3)²⁰.

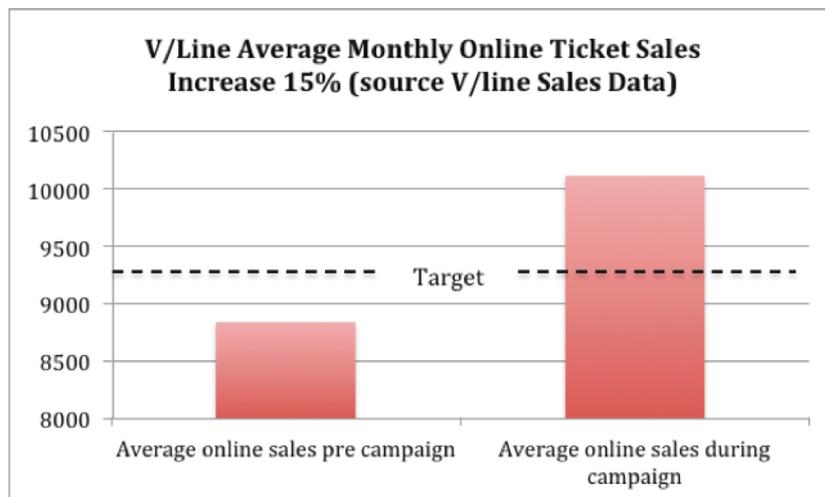


Figure 3. Average Monthly Online Ticket Sales (V/Line) 2013

²⁰ V/Line Online Sales: Refer to Appendix Three. Graph is a representation of the average of monthly sales data

5. How do you discount the other factors that could have caused some or all of this effect?

You may use econometrics if you wish but it is not a necessity.

"Guilt Trips" campaign was a direct response campaign selling a new product, and the only campaign in market for V/Line during this period.

In addition this was the only campaign promoting VFR travel to Victorian country towns.

There were no sales promotions or new events throughout the campaign period that would otherwise impact V/Line sales figures.

6. What was the commercial gain for your Client as result of running the creative work?

Entries will benefit from their ability to isolate a return on investment, not just a picture of sales growth or changes in brand measures.

Over the campaign period, we saw an additional 123,000 tickets sold for off-peak travel. This was an approximate injection of \$4 Million in revenue²¹. With total cost, including media at \$500,000 over a period of 8 months, Guilt Trips delivered a Return on Investment of 1,047%.

²¹V/Line sales data: \$4 million figure is based on 123,000 tickets sold (Refer to Appendix 3)

7. What do you think this case adds to our understanding of how creativity can be effective?

We often assess the effectiveness of creativity by its ability to influence people's attitudes and behaviours; that a beautifully crafted ad will move people to action, and grow brand love. And it's true. There's a lot of power in a beautifully crafted piece of communication. However, as powerful as a piece of communication can be, it will always pale in comparison to the impact humans have on other humans, especially if there is a real emotional investment.

Today, creativity and effectiveness are increasingly measured by real world impact; by it's human impact. For the longest time, the most important facet of our strategies (our audience) were treated as passive spectators, waiting to be distracted by something new and shiny. Even when we flippantly referred to positive word-of-mouth or buzz, it was more about us (our brand) than people.

Guilt Trips, although a sales mechanism, was first and foremost about people. The effectiveness in the creative solution was in its power to make people the centre of the story, not us. That the key "relationship" in this campaign wasn't between the brand and the target market, but between mothers and their children. The true strength of the idea was its ability to empower an influencing audience to do our selling for us. All we needed to do was give them the right tools and opportunity, and they would do the rest.

Effectively, "Guilt Trips" unearthed an insight that disrupted V/Line's traditional thinking about its role in society – quite an achievement for a 150-year-old brand that had not changed much over the course of its life. We were there to fulfil our purpose, nothing more. We don't simply drive trains and sell tickets – we exist to bring loved ones back home to the country. One Guilt Trip at a time.

