



Messaging

By Tom Megginson, Creative Director, Acart Communications

What is a messaging strategy? Why do I need one?

A messaging strategy helps to ensure a campaign has a clear, focused message in all of its materials, press/media materials, and on social media.

Your messaging includes different types of words and messages:

- campaign name (see: Branding)
- campaign slogan or tagline (see: Branding)
- key message
- secondary messages
- hashtags (for use on social media)

How do I create a key message?

A “key message” is generally defined as a description of who you are and what you are trying to accomplish.

In the online world of community groups, it is best to keep this message as short as possible, so that it can appear on a website homepage, or social media pages. (There’s a free letter counter at www.lettercount.com that will help you make sure it fits in the various pages.) For example, [@walkottawa](https://twitter.com/walkottawa) simply uses “Walkability issues in Ottawa” as its key message on Twitter, which shows topicality and focus.

How do I create secondary messages?

Secondary messages are a family of statements that are similarly structured and that address the main topics or audiences your group, or campaign, wants to influence.

For example, if your campaign seeks to tell drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians to be respectful of each other, you might develop three secondary messages (one for each group) that promote the benefits of respecting the road rights of the other two

- **To drivers:** Cyclists and pedestrians are more vulnerable to injury. Give them space, and we’ll all get to our destinations with less stress.
- **To cyclists:** Pedestrians and drivers count on you to move predictably. Share the road (and not the sidewalk) by the rules, and everyone will enjoy their ride.
- **To pedestrians:** Drivers and cyclists are moving fast. Watch for them, cross roads at appropriate times and places, and our roads will be more friendly for everyone.



How do I create a hashtag?

A hashtag is a word, or combination of words, that appear beside a pound symbol (#) and make posts on social media searchable on most networks. For example, a search for the #roadsafety hashtag, on Twitter, produces a list of the most important recent Tweets tagged with that topic.

There are two ways in which hashtags are used in campaigns. The first is to use generic tags (such as #roadsafety, above) which allows your content to be seen by interested people who are not necessarily following you, on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram.

The other type of hashtag is a “campaign” one, such as #IceBucketChallenge, which is unique to a campaign and helps it “go viral” as more and more people share it, and a search for the hashtag yields exclusively to posts about your campaign. Including it in printed materials allows people to find it online more easily than remembering a web address.

This latter type of hashtag, however, comes with risks. The first is that the hashtag has been used, or is being used, by someone else in a negative context. For example, if you were to use the hashtag #watchtheroads as a safety message, you might be disappointed to see that it is often used jokingly by new drivers to warn others that they might drive unsafely. A simple search, within each social media network for the hashtag you are considering, can avoid this problem.

What kind of messaging should I not use?

This campaign toolkit has been developed with research that indicates negative messages and imagery are less effective, in social marketing, than positive ones.

Avoid:

- shaming of drivers, pedestrians, or cyclists
- fear-based messages or violent imagery
- language that could be considered racist, sexist, or homophobic (obviously!)

For examples of positive and negative traffic safety campaigns from around the world, visit the social marketing review blog **Osocio** at osocio.org/category/road_safety.

This document is part of the Community-Based Toolkit for Road Safety Campaigns.

Visit www.tirf.ca to download digital copies of the complete set.

To order a printed toolkit please contact the Manager, Marketing and Communications at the Traffic Injury Research Foundation.

1-877-238-5235 | tirf@tirf.ca



**Safer Roads
Ottawa** | **Sécurité des
routes Ottawa**
Toward Zero | *Vers zéro*

