

525,000

the amount, in US dollars, that an Audi A1 painted by the British artist **Damien Hirst** was sold for in an auction at Sir Elton John's White Tie & Tiara Ball in June



Click for safety

Using the web for road safety campaigns can make a difference as **Georgia Lewis** discovers

The UAE has one of the highest per capita rates of road deaths in the world and raising awareness of safe driving practices is a long process. While the police are improving law enforcement, regular people and organisations are trying to raise awareness and change attitudes among drivers. One of the easiest – and cheapest – ways to do this is online.

The incredible popularity of Facebook – with more than 500 million users and counting – is an especially obvious and ideal way for road safety advocates to get their message across in local and international campaigns.

Lesley Cully, a Dubai-based British mother of two daughters, has started a Facebook group called "Buckle Up in the Back Dubai!" and it is aimed at encouraging parents in the UAE to ensure all children in all cars are properly restrained.

Cully started the group, which has more than 600 fans, in May 2010. "I have lived in Dubai for four years and still cannot get used to seeing children in cars without any type of seat belt or restraint," she says.

"I am a vocal person and so I used to beep my horn at drivers I saw and tug on my own seat belt while pointing to their children," she says of her first attempts at activism. "I'm sure most of them ignore me but one woman did look suitably embarrassed and put her child in the car seat immediately – why she hadn't already I have no idea, as why fit it if you don't intend to use it?"

Cully found that non-use of seat belts and child safety seats is not restricted to certain nationalities either. "My daughter has been invited to a few play-dates and I always ask whether they need to borrow my car seat for her and I have been appalled at the numbers of 'oh, we don't use them but if you want to give us yours, feel free' responses," she says.

Tired of laissez-faire attitudes to child car safety, Cully decided to take action. "I started wondering about what I could do rather than having a potential five arguments every morning with other parents," she says – and the Facebook group seemed like an easy place to start.

"I'm not trained in media or campaigning but I do like Facebook as a social site – it's quick, easy to use and I can 'speak' to people locally without any cost or start-up money. It means I can tell others about my intentions and see if anyone can help."

In the past week, Cully has used the site to draw attention to Abu Dhabi's Corniche Hospital giving free child safety seats to new parents as well as calling for volunteers to help promote the group.

"It's scary the amount of people that don't ensure their children are safe, just gets me every time," is Cully's comment underneath a posting made by a member on the group's wall of *The National's* report on the project and the UAE's seat belt and child safety seat statistics.

For Cully, Facebook is just the start of her campaign. As a result of the Facebook group, a company has already contacted her about sponsoring bumper stickers to help spread the message further.

"I then intend going to schools to talk about the importance of buckling up and the consequences of them not using a car seat," says Cully. "I want to launch competitions to design safety posters, that sort of thing. In fact, one of my dreams is to see Modesh holding up a Buckle Up in the Back Dubai poster – that would be fantastic."

"How other parents can put their children into a moving vehicle that has the potential to kill them at slow speed just for the sake of a seat belt is just something I can no longer sit back and watch without doing something."

Seeking positive outcomes after a tragedy can also motivate online road safety campaigns, such as the Suraya Foundation, Volvo's All Those Left Behind website and the US-based Heather's Story site.

The UAE's Suraya Foundation (www.surayafoundation.com), which is in English and Arabic, is still in its early stages with a website, Facebook group and Twitter account. One of the foundation's ambassadors is Mohd Shahnawez, a Bengali-Canadian Dubai resident,



Lesley Cully has started a Facebook page titled **Buckle Up in the Back Dubai**: "How other parents can put their children into a moving vehicle that has the potential to kill them at slow speed just for the sake of a seat belt is just something I can no longer sit back and watch." Jeff Topping / The National

whose sister, Suraiyah Akhter, 22, was killed in an accident at a Ras al Khaimah U-turn last year.

He has been lobbying the authorities in RAK to close off the U-turn, which has been the scene of two more crashes since his sister's death. The authorities are still looking into this, as well as closing similarly dangerous U-turns on the same stretch of road.

Shahnawez is also keen to use the foundation to "change mindsets".

"The biggest problem is the attitudes to road safety and that is the hardest thing to change," says Shahnawez.

As well as using the website and social media to raise awareness of the importance of safe driving and to highlight effective campaigns from around the world, Shahnawez is using the site to reach out to people who can volunteer their time and talents to broader media campaigns.

"We already have infographics, storyboards and radio ad scripts on the site," he says. "The campaign is called 'Are You Reckless?' and it asks people that very question rather than just saying something like 'Take care' which is pretty weak. Or the signs [erected by the Dubai RTA] that say 'Beware of others' faults' – what is that about?"

The foundation has the pro bono assistance of Metaphrenic, an advertising and marketing agency, to help with creative projects and to gauge the effectiveness of the campaigns.

"We need to make people think about what they are doing and we need to create peer pressure to get people to change their habits, such as wearing seat belts."

One of his aims is to have radio campaigns aimed at young, male Emirati drivers as well as south Asian expats, two groups with high road accident rates. "We have to be very careful and very professional," he says. "For example, I am looking for an Emirati for the advertisement aimed at young Emiratis."

While the foundation's website campaign is new, Shahnawez is

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Mohd Shahnawez Suraya Foundation

open to ideas to go offline and hopes that volunteers, such as marketing experts, can come forward with ideas that are low-tech but effective for different groups in the community. "How many labourers go to a website?" he asks

Tomas Ernberg, the managing director for Volvo Middle East, hopes that later this year plenty of people will log on to their road accident memorial website, www.allthoseleftbehind.com, which launched 12 months ago. Volvo invited the public to submit stories about loved ones who have been killed in car accidents. For the last year, it has been a portal for the submission of stories but now it is being relaunched with the public contributions.

"We had a target of 20-25 stories but we received more than 50," says Ernberg. "Of those, the best have been selected for the website."

Ernberg admits that the website, originally the idea of Ogilvy, Volvo's UAE advertising and PR agency, is "a bit bold". "It could be a hit or a miss but we were told [by Volvo's head office] to go for it," he says.

He says the launch of the website with the stories is part of the second phase of the campaign. "Phase two with Ramadan is more positive," says Ernberg. "This phase, as well as the website relaunch, also



Suraya Akhter died in a traffic accident in RAK. Courtesy Mohd Shahnawez

involved handing out a booklet of 25 road safety tips along with iftar packs at 14 Enoc stations."

Online, meanwhile, the people who contributed the stories published on the All Those Left Behind website will become partners in the foundation. "We will also have forum groups for people to discuss road safety issues and from there the sky is the limit," says Ernberg.

In the US, Mark Horner, the new media co-ordinator for the Washington State Department of Licensing, started Heather's Story (www.heathersstory.org) after the death of Heather Lerch. She was killed in a car crash aged 19 and it is believed that she was texting while driving in rain on a dark road. A few weeks before, Washington State passed a law outlawing the use of hand-held devices while driving.

Wendy and Dan Lerch, Heather's parents, made a video to share their experience and the site was born. "Heather's parents, Dan and Wendy, were wonderful – during the interview, I paused to tell them that I was struck by the fact that they were speaking on camera to me only weeks after Heather's death," recalls Horner on the making of the five-and-a-half minute interview.

Horner says what started as YouTube video "snowballed". The couple spoke at news conferences and the insurance company released Heather's vehicle from storage so the public could see the damage done by texting and driving.

"Because they [Heather's parents] had trusted me on something so incredibly personal, I wanted to give them something back, so I built the website in Heather's honour," says Horner. "I embedded the two YouTube videos I'd produced for work into the website."

He describes building the website as "a learning curve". He funded himself and created it in his own time. "I pay for the monthly hosting, paid for the domain name and also purchased a WordPress theme

that I think nicely complements the look and feel of the videos," he says. "The costs don't amount to a great amount. I was – and remain – happy to have made the site for Dan and Wendy."

Horner says the site aims to remember Heather, prevent injuries "and maybe even save a life."

The site can be translated into several languages, including Arabic.

He is hopeful that search engine optimisation methods and partnering with another site, www.txtresponsibly.org, will help the site get more hits.

The US state of Texas's road safety authorities have launched a website to encourage teenagers to drive safely. The site, www.t-drivers.com, has all content contributed by teenagers, has been active since 2003 as part of Texas's Teens In The Driver Seat programme.

It was the brainchild of Russell Henk, a senior research engineer at the Texas Transportation Institute. Department staff maintain the site based on information submitted by the teenaged contributors.

Bernie Fette, a programme spokesperson, says the site was developed "to reverse the alarming upward trend of teen driver crashes in Texas and the United States".

"The programme is based on the premise that teens are more likely to listen to each other than to anyone else, and that the absence of 'adult fingerprints' would constitute the most effective approach."

A drop in fatal crashes involving teenagers in the state is seen as a marker of the site and the programme's success, says Fette.

"In the first five years of the TDS Program in Texas, the state experienced a 33 per cent decline in teen-driver fatal crashes – a decline that was more than double the national average," he says.

As well, Texas was the only American state to experience a decline in this rate for five consecutive years and Fette says the website is partly responsible for this improvement.

"Because the website is the central communication mechanism for the program, the successes of the site and the programme are in many ways, one in the same," he explains. "Apart from that, I would say that our success has been due to a vigilant effort to ensure that the website contains as much user-generated content as possible. It is that quality that ensures the credibility of TDS in the minds of the target audience."

@ To learn more about Heather's story, visit heathersstory.org to watch a video about her crash

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Audi MD hails his new team

Richard Whitehead

He played professionally for the Australian rugby league club St George Illawarra Dragons more than a few seasons ago, but Jeff Mannerling has since blazed a path through the auto industry as if it were a three-quarter line at Kogarah Oval. Now Audi's regional managing director, he boasts a record as strong as that of his table-topping team.

These days he speaks more in management mantras – "we measure our success in terms of customer delight" – than sporting field tough talk, but this is a man who loves sport.

"I've just had a great weekend," he says. "The family is back in Australia for the summer so I've been able to sit down with the remote control and watch all the matches. Back at home there is often a delay between playing and showing the footy, so sometimes I call my dad and tell him what happened before it's even screened over there."

Mannerling's manner is refreshingly different in an industry and territory where wood-panelled offices and a conservative approach are the norm.

He began right at the bottom of his career path. "After I left school, I was playing footy when I landed a job as a spare parts delivery driver for a dealership in Sydney. I moved into Audi nearly 16 years ago, and worked there in Australia for 10 years before coming to Dubai."

As the general manager for aftersales in Australia, he was handpicked for corresponding role in the Middle East, where it was a new area. As one of a number of senior Aussies populating the auto industry in this region, Mannerling suggests the country's auto industry provides a solid grounding. "It is a very sophisticated market, a little bit like the UK. It has very developed used car systems and processes and is very tactically driven."

As head of Audi he has the task of delivering regionally the car-maker's stated international aim of being the top premium manufacturer. With traditional incumbents in Mercedes and BMW, as well as Lexus and Infiniti, vying for the role, surely this is a rather ambitious goal? In a nutshell, he says, it depends on how you define it.

"We don't necessarily want to sell the most cars. Sure, some of our competitors sell a lot but one of the things here in the Middle East that makes a difference is delighting your customers. I believe there is a whole lot of people out here who aren't loyal to brands, and if you can really focus on your customer and really build your brand awareness, and have a strong desire to get there, we can do it."

He also loves selling his products even if he has moved away from the forecourt and into the management office. "I'm not in an ivory tower and I still love the service side of the business, the customer interaction. I enjoy being in the showroom because that's where the market is; it's not in my office."

"A big way to sell cars here is by word of mouth. Especially with the Emirati population, there is a lot of majlis discussion on who makes the nicest cars. It's very image-driven here. You need to sow the seed to get the conversation going."

What is his management style? "It's not about my style. I have a great team and together we make some good decisions." Is Dubai a good place to do business? "There are certainly challenges for us here to grasp." How satisfied is he with his dealerships? "Satisfied is a good word. I don't think you can ever really be satisfied."

No doubt his ability to sidestep comes from the nifty footwork he learned on the playing fields of Sydney.

Not every Australian rugby league player sports a mullet and a criminal record. Indeed, as Jeff Mannerling demonstrates, it is possible to follow the footy and be an urbane businessman at the same time.



Heather Lerch, 19, lost control of her car while texting and driving. A website created in her honour targets road safety. Courtesy of Washington State Patrol