



Dynamic Message Sign Contest

Transcomm 2019 Awards – 7c: Public Involvement Approach: without consultant



Background/Situation:

In 2018, the Illinois Department of Transportation DMS (Dynamic Message Sign) committee met to discuss messages used on the network of nearly 100 digital signs throughout the state – seen by millions of drivers each year. According to federal guidelines, these signs must display messages related to safety, but the department relaxed its internal policy to incorporate humor, current events and pop culture within the federal parameters. Once the public started noticing the new approach to messaging, they began to provide feedback via social media and on the IDOT website.

At the same time, the department was ramping up tactics to decrease traffic fatalities, which had averaged more than 1,000 three years in a row. The committee decided to leverage the public's opinions and ideas for digital messages to increase awareness of the high number of fatalities and to remind motorists that road safety is everyone's responsibility.

Goals/Objectives:

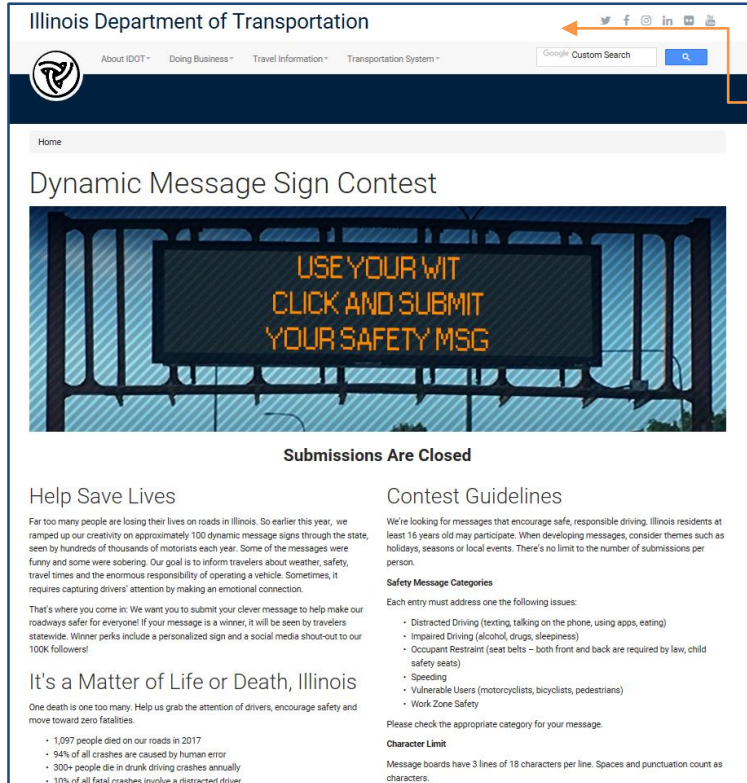
- Engage the motoring public about safety in six categories: distracted driving, impaired driving, occupant restraint, speeding, vulnerable users (bike/ped) and work zones.
- Leverage earned media to extend the department's safety messages
- Help decrease traffic fatalities
- Weave into annual, comprehensive marketing campaign – Life or Death Illinois – to extend the reach of the campaign and leverage halo effective of already established brand and messaging

The contest was formed as an implementable solution to reduce fatal and serious crashes in Illinois by reaching out to the motoring public as they drive. In addition, the DMS messages are one way to specifically combat distracted driving, an underlying cause of crashes which often goes unreported. By relaying messages to active drivers, DMS have the unique ability to caution against reckless habits that may currently be in progress. Displaying messages from fellow drivers also adds a personal investment for motorists to continue a dialog about safe driving.



Target Audience:

The target audience for the contest was Illinois residents over 16 years old. The contest was publicized to this audience via press releases and agency social media channels, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn.



The screenshot shows the IDOT website's contest page. At the top, the IDOT logo and navigation links are visible. A search bar is present. The main heading is "Dynamic Message Sign Contest". Below it is a large image of a highway sign that reads "USE YOUR WIT CLICK AND SUBMIT YOUR SAFETY MSG". The page is divided into three main sections: "Help Save Lives", "Contest Guidelines", and "Submissions Are Closed". The "Help Save Lives" section includes statistics about road deaths in Illinois. The "Contest Guidelines" section lists rules for message categories and submission requirements. The "Submissions Are Closed" section is prominently displayed in the center.

Illinois Department of Transportation

Home

Dynamic Message Sign Contest

USE YOUR WIT
CLICK AND SUBMIT
YOUR SAFETY MSG

Submissions Are Closed

Help Save Lives

Far too many people are losing their lives on roads in Illinois. So earlier this year, we ramped up our creativity on approximately 100 dynamic message signs through the state, seen by hundreds of thousands of motorists each year. Some of the messages were funny and some were sobering. Our goal is to inform travelers about weather, safety, travel times and the enormous responsibility of operating a vehicle. Sometimes, it requires capturing drivers' attention by making an emotional connection.

That's where you come in. We want you to submit your clever message to help make our roadways safer for everyone! If your message is a winner, it will be seen by travelers statewide. Winner perks include a personalized sign and a social media shout-out to our 100K followers!

It's a Matter of Life or Death, Illinois

One death is one too many. Help us grab the attention of drivers, encourage safety and move toward zero fatalities.

- 1,097 people died on our roads in 2017
- 94% of all crashes are caused by human error
- 300+ people die in drunk driving crashes annually
- 10% of all fatal crashes involve a distracted driver

Contest Guidelines

We're looking for messages that encourage safe, responsible driving. Illinois residents at least 16 years old may participate. When developing messages, consider themes such as holidays, seasons or local events. There's no limit to the number of submissions per person.

Safety Message Categories

Each entry must address one of the following issues:

- Distracted Driving (texting, talking on the phone, using apps, eating)
- Impaired Driving (alcohol, drugs, sleepiness)
- Occupant Restraint (seat belts – both front and back are required by law, child safety seats)
- Speeding
- Vulnerable Users (motorcyclists, bicyclists, pedestrians)
- Work Zone Safety

Please check the appropriate category for your message.

Character Limit

Message boards have 3 lines of 18 characters per line. Spaces and punctuation count as characters.

The Office of Communications created a webpage with background on the contest, rules and a submission form.

<http://www.idot.illinois.gov/dms-contest>

See your idea in lights and improve safety on Illinois roads

New IDOT contest asks public to submit ideas for electronic signs

Monday, October 22, 2018 - Transportation, Department of

CHICAGO - Do you have a creative flair and an interest in helping to improve safety on Illinois roads? The Illinois Department of Transportation is inviting the public to submit ideas for safety messages to display on the electronic signs located over highways throughout the state.

"Our dynamic message signs are seen by millions of motorists and are one of the best tools we have to reach the public with important information that can save lives," said Illinois Transportation Secretary Randy Blumenthal. "This contest is yet another way to drive home the message that driving has life or death consequences. Safety is everyone's responsibility. We look forward to seeing your ideas."

Some of the basic rules include:

- Keep it short and simple. Messages are restricted to three lines with 18 characters per line. Spaces and punctuation count as characters.
- Each message must align with one of the six categories: distracted driving, impaired driving, speeding, occupant restraint, work zone safety and vulnerable users, such as motorcyclists, bicyclists and pedestrians.
- One message from each category will be chosen for display by an internal IDOT committee.
- The deadline for submissions is Nov. 19. Winners will be announced in early 2019.

Click here or visit idot.illinois.gov/dms-contest to learn more about contest rules and to submit ideas. Visit the [Travel Midwest site](http://TravelMidwest.com) to see messages currently on display in real time.

The winning messages will be displayed at times throughout the year to help promote traffic safety. Winning entrants also receive a personalized street sign.

The sign contest and renewed focus on safety messaging are part of IDOT's Life or Death Illinois campaign in response to back-to-back years of more than 1,000 deaths on Illinois roads, the highest total in a decade. Other efforts include crashed cars at rest areas as a physical reminder of the importance of responsible driving and continued development of new ways to improve safety in work zones. On Oct. 30, IDOT will convene state and local agencies, elected officials and other stakeholders for a safety summit with discussion focused on distracted driving.

Life or Death Illinois is a multimedia campaign that includes vivid imagery and key statistics to underline the importance of safe driving and appeal to audiences to stop and consider the seriousness of the issues on the state's roads. It marks the first time IDOT expanded its key safety messages beyond the ongoing problems of impaired driving and unbuckled motorists to include new materials aimed at reducing deaths and injuries from distracted driving in work zones and distracted driving.

Visit lifeordeathillinois.com for more information.

The initial press release garnered media attention that drove more submissions.

<https://www2.illinois.gov/Pages/news-item.aspx?ReleaseID=19265>

Measurable Results:

More than 1,400 entries were submitted in six categories by residents from across the state. Of the six categories, Distracted Driving saw the most entries.

Public relations activities created media mentions and high levels of engagement on social media. The best Facebook post reached nearly 13,000 people alone.

The contest also brought additional awareness of the Life or Death Illinois campaign, and a follow up press release at the conclusion of the event garnered more earned media.

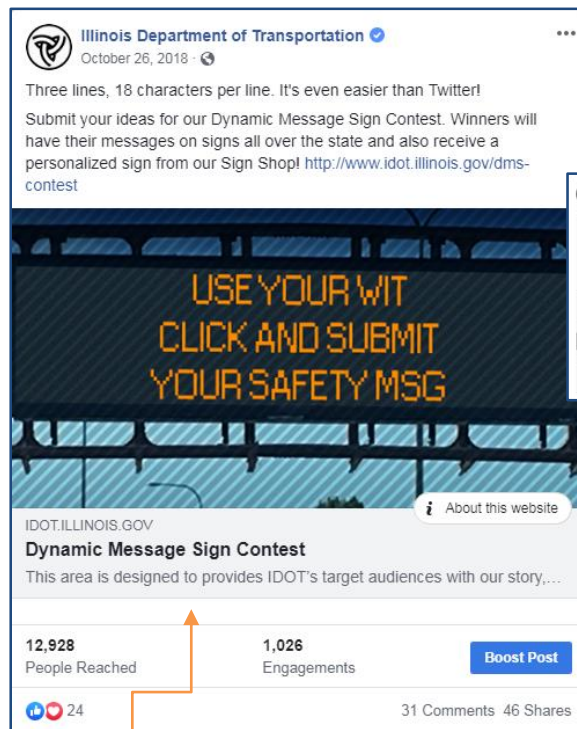
As of April 30, 2019, preliminary data shows traffic fatalities are down 72, year to date. While the contest alone cannot claim success for the reduction in fatalities, it played a part in increased awareness of this safety issue.

Winner Selection

The IDOT digital message sign committee reviewed all submissions and the Transportation Secretary selected a winning message in each category.

Prizes:

- ☐ Message displayed statewide, seen by hundreds of thousands of motorists
- ☐ A personalized sign from our the IDOT Sign Shop
- ☐ Social media mentions to more than 100K followers. We asked winners to tag us in a selfie with their personalized street sign in order to reshare across department social media accounts. Signs were shipped in April 2019.



Examples of social media posts show high engagement from the public.





WINNERS

**PUT DOWN THE PHONE
AND NOBODY
GETS HURT**

Leanne Harbour

Category: Distracted Driving

**ONLY THE CASSEROLE
SHOULD BE BAKED
DON'T DRIVE HIGH**

Grant Mitchell

Category: Impaired Driving

**YOU LOOK SO
CUTE IN THAT
SEATBELT**

Audra Noyes

Category: Occupant Restraint

**DASHING THRU
THE SNOW?
SLOW DOWN!**

John Shukites

Category: Speeding

**DRIVE LIKE YOUR
FAMILY IS IN THE
NEXT CAR**

Gene Larkin

Category: Vulnerable Users

**SOMEONE I LOVE
WORKS ON ROADS
SLOW IN THE ZONE!**

Lisa Hansen

Category: Work Zone