

## Everybody hurts – 17 years of TAC research

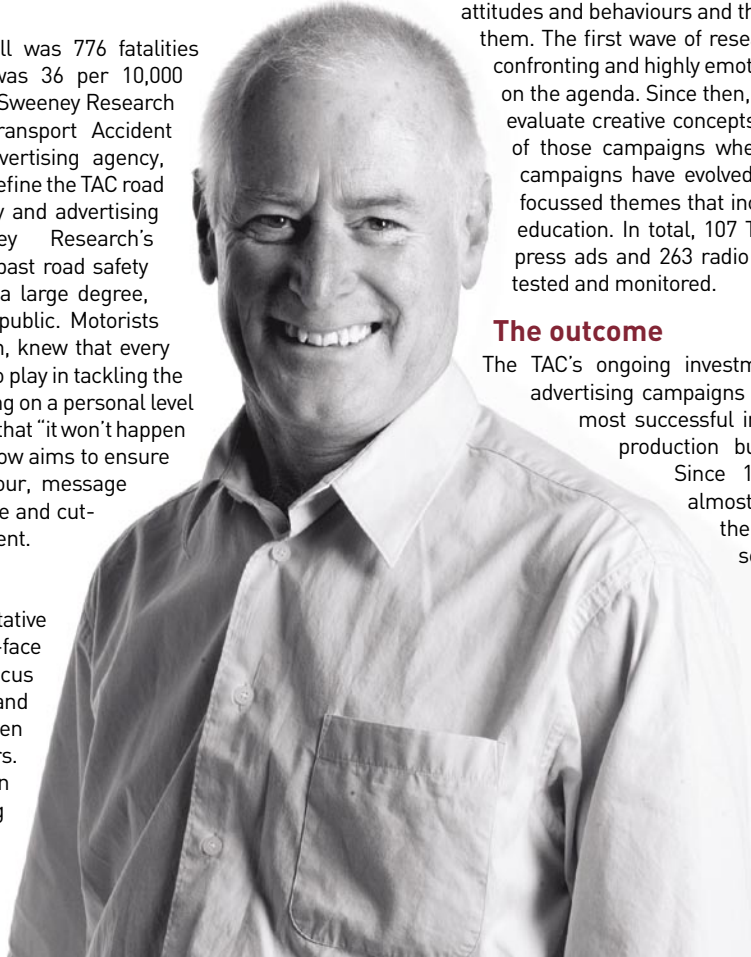
**Researcher:** Peter Hennessy, Sweeney Research  
**Client:** Victorian Transport Accident Commission

### The brief

In 1989, the Victorian road toll was 776 fatalities and the serious injury rate was 36 per 10,000 registered vehicles. Since then, Sweeney Research has worked with Victoria's Transport Accident Commission (TAC) and its advertising agency, Grey Worldwide to develop and refine the TAC road safety communications strategy and advertising materials. Initially, Sweeney Research's challenge was to find out why past road safety advertising campaigns had, to a large degree, been ignored by the Victorian public. Motorists knew the road toll was too high, knew that every individual road user had a part to play in tackling the problem - yet failed to do anything on a personal level because so many held the belief that "it won't happen to me". The ongoing research now aims to ensure changing attitudes and behaviour, message clarity, relevance to the audience and cut-through in a cluttered environment.

### The solution

A combination of quantitative (telephone, online and face-to-face surveys) and qualitative (focus groups, depth interviews and online groups) research has been conducted over the past 17 years. The purpose of this has been to understand the underlying beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of Victorian motorists, the reason for these beliefs,



*Peter Hennessy, Sweeney Research*

attitudes and behaviours and the barriers the TAC faces in changing them. The first wave of research in 1989 pointed to the need for confronting and highly emotive campaigns. These put road safety on the agenda. Since then, Sweeney Research has continued to evaluate creative concepts and then monitor the effectiveness of those campaigns when they are rolled out. As a result, campaigns have evolved from awareness building to action focussed themes that incorporate emotion, enforcement and education. In total, 107 TV commercials, 228 billboards, 831 press ads and 263 radio commercials have been developed, tested and monitored.

### The outcome

The TAC's ongoing investment into research has helped its advertising campaigns become recognised as some of the most successful in the world (in 2005/06, 10% of the production budget was allocated to research). Since 1989, the Victorian road toll has almost halved despite a 40% increase in the number of vehicles on the road. The serious injury rate has fallen from 36 to 16.2 per 10,000 vehicles, over the same period. No other state has performed as well in cutting its road toll. The attitudes and behaviour of Victorian motorists have changed enormously. Individual advertisements have been used in other states and territories as well as overseas in countries including New Zealand, South Africa, Fiji, India and the United Kingdom.



### What the judges said

"This one was a 'lay-down misere'. It was clear from this entry that both the client, TAC, and its advertising agency, Grey Worldwide, believe that Sweeney Research's work has saved lives. In absolute terms, the campaigns have helped prevent more than 5,500 fatalities. This is research effectiveness at its best."

### From the client

"Research enables the TAC to stay in touch with the Victorian community. The combination of continuous tracking, a 'point in time' approach (like the TAC's road safety monitor) and campaign testing provides us with a very clear insight into community attitudes. It also lets us know when the audience might be ready to hear about new issues."

Colin Radford, chief communications & external relations officer

◀ *The TAC's latest 'Wipe off 5' campaign launched earlier this year. The campaign investigated the difference small increases in speed can make to the severity of crashes. It called on the expertise of police crash investigator Sergeant Peter Bellion who is featured in the photo.*



*Colin Radford,  
Transport Accident Commission*