ABA Communications Board of Directors Report
Melanie Hinton/Fall 2017

Introduction:
It has been a successful and busy summer for ABA Communications. We launched two campaigns over the summer targeting consumers, as well as members, and promote ABA’s Crisis Communications member benefit with a mailing to all operator members as well as hosting two webinars.

I have developed a 2017-2018 Communications Strategy that reflects the priorities laid out in the Strategic Plan, not only for the communications team but how communications can help others achieve their goals as well. (strategy attached).

Promoting ABA
We launched two consumer-oriented campaigns this summer: Our Roads, Our Safety Partnership with FMCSA, American Truckers Association (ATA) and AAA and a #BusesKeepYouMoving social media campaign for the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic Amtrak corridors while work was being done at New York’s Penn Station. This project has been dubbed the #SummerOfHell by NY Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

We also encouraged members to follow ABA on social media as well as post the ABA logo on their websites to showcase their membership.

Our Roads, Our Safety Partnership
For nearly a year, ABA has been leading the charge on a partnership with FMCSA, ATA and AAA to promote as a surface transportation industry, safe driving on the roads around Commercial Motor Vehicles. FMCSA last August launched the campaign Our Roads, Our Safety. I have been talking about this partnership for some time now. I am happy to report that we launched the partnership and our first of three safety videos at the end of June.

ABA and our partners have been promoting the safety campaign on social media, our websites, our members and to the media. The initial report on the number of hits we all have generated has been positive. We have had more than 405,000 impressions and we have seen that the average time of people staying on the webpage has been 37 seconds (the length of the video). Our next video – Wide Turns – debuted in early September and the third video will be released around the Thanksgiving travel season. We encourage you to share our social media posts on the campaign and utilize the materials on the FMCSA website.

We were contacted by other transportation associations who want to join in this partnership. We have welcomed the Owner Operator Independent Drivers Association (OOIDA), the National American Fleet Association (NAFA) and the American Driver & Traffic Safety Education Association (they will be incorporating our videos and materials into their training modules.). The Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao has made this FMCSA’s number one safety campaign, so look for more materials, videos, events and signs in the top 10 states for traffic accidents.

Next steps for ABA will be inviting all of our State and Regional Motorcoach Association colleagues to participate in sharing this campaign. And the partnership will be deciding the next group of safety messages at its October meeting.

#BusesKeepYouMoving
Early summer saw news articles coming out of New York city about Amtrak and subway customers being stranded on trains during their commutes as well on different points coming into and leaving the city as NY’s Penn Station begins renovations. Gov. Cuomo dubbed this project the Summer of Hell. Those of us in Washington can empathize as our Metro is finishing up a year of “safe tracking” repairs to try and fix our metro system. To take advantage of the situation in a way to promote our many members who travel to NY either on scheduled runs or charters, we created an answer to #SummerOfHell: #BusesKeepYouMoving. When we saw a news article about the renovation project, we posted on social media and recommended that people to take the bus instead. We targeted commuters from Richmond, Va., up to Boston. We garnered some positive feedback and saw our social media numbers grow. I also reached out to reporters covering the issue to encourage them to report there are other means of transportation into the city, such as buses. This campaign ran through the end of August. To date, we had more than 121,872 impressions on posts.

Crisis Communications

While we had a relatively quiet summer regarding bus accidents, ABA put forth a campaign to educate our bus and tour operator members about ABA’s Crisis Communications member benefit. We mailed a flier to members laying out what to do in a crisis. Melanie Hinton participated in two webinars focused on crisis communications and social media.

We will continue to remind members of this free member benefit and contact members when we see alerts about incidents.

New At A Glance Weekly Series

In late July, ABA began a partnership with TourOperatorLand.com to highlight ABA member DMOs and CVBs in the Insider and on ABA’s website and TOL to send out weekly emails highlighting these members and ABA’s Annual Meeting & Marketplace. As of Sept. 11 we have highlighted Gettysburg, Pa.; Greater Palm Springs, Calif.; Memphis, Tenn.; Sacramento, Calif.; Oklahoma City, Okla.; Asheville, N.C.; Mississippi; and Louisville, Ky.

Show Your ABA Membership with Pride

In late July, ABA did a push for its members to showcase their ABA membership by placing the ABA logo on their website and company materials. With that initial push we sent dozens of companies the ABA logo to use. We also asked members to follow ABA on social media so they can keep up on all the latest ABA news and trends. This has proved a successful campaign and will be repeated throughout the year.

Government Affairs & Policy:

We have been quite busy on the legislative and regulatory side of the association. Early in the summer, ABA joined other travel industry associations to show support a number of travel and tourism issues, such as: funding cuts for Brand USA; funding cuts for state tourism offices; and visa processing issues.

ABA also made several statements regarding FMCSA regulation updates and findings; Intercity Bus Security Grant program funding; and other issues affecting the motorcoach industry.

Several of ABA’s statements were highlighted in Capitol Hill news organizations such as Politico and the Hill. Here are a few highlights:
Bus Association Concerned over Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration Rule Change
Transportation Today
Aug. 8, 2017

The American Bus Association (ABA) recently expressed concern over changes proposed by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) to rules governing lease and interchange.

“Our industry strongly supports efforts to ensure safety for our more than 600 million annual passengers,” ABA President and CEO Peter Pantuso said. “While we absolutely support the need to remove ‘bad actors’ from our nation’s roads, we should not penalize good, compliant carriers with unnecessary, ineffective leasing requirements. We appreciate the FMCSA for taking steps to make certain [it] get this rule right, but urge the agency to ensure our members and the industry as a whole have a voice in the process. We want to help FMCSA, but confusing and nonspecific notices do not allow our members to respond thoroughly.”

Politico
July 14, 2017
DEMS WARN OF PUBLIC TRANSIT SOFT TARGETS

Democrats on the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee issued a report laying out how Trump’s request to cut funding for public transit security to help fund a U.S.-Mexico border wall could leave the United States ”highly vulnerable to terrorist attacks.” Trump’s fiscal 2018 budget proposal would slash $52 million for public transportation security assistance — exactly the kind of ”soft targets” terrorists increasingly hit, Democrats noted. The administration has also proposed reducing TSA’s VIPR teams from 31 to eight. VIPR teams are deployed to airports and transit stations. ”Budgetary cuts of this magnitude to a variety of important counterterrorism efforts will have significant negative impacts,” according to the report.

ABA chimes in: The House Appropriations Homeland Security Subcommittee approved a fiscal 2018 DHS spending bill earlier this week, and the American Bus Association is pressing appropriators to include at least $10 million in funding for the Intercity Bus Security Program in the bill. There is currently no funding in the bill for that program. ”As with public transit operators and Amtrak, our industry should be equally prepared to mitigate these threats and respond to emergency situations, especially when these modes operate at shared terminal facilities,” ABA said in a letter sent to the House Appropriations Committee.

Politico
June 2, 2017
FMCSA opting not to increase bus liability coverage requirements

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration announced today that it will withdraw a proposal to increase the amount of compensation for victims of bus and truck crashes. FMCSA first issued a notice of advanced rulemaking in 2014 saying it was considering hiking the minimum levels of liability insurance coverage required for buses and trucks. The levels are currently set at $5 million for buses and $750,000 for trucks.

But the agency announced this morning that it is now withdrawing the notice, citing a lack of evidence to support the economic benefits of providing more compensation for crash victims.

“FMCSA has determined that it has insufficient data or information to support moving forward with a rulemaking proposal, at this time,” the agency said, according to a notice issued today.
The proposal to increase the insurance requirement has been supported by consumer safety groups. However, the American Bus Association has opposed the measure, saying it should be left up to individual carriers to decide what levels of insurance to carry. The group applauded FMCSA's decision to withdraw the proposal.

**Trump Budget Kills Program Meant to Boost US Tourism**
The Hill
May 23, 2017

*While the president’s budget is mostly just a messaging document and is unlikely to become law, travel advocates are sending a warning message about the impacts of gutting Brand USA.*

"*We find the Administration’s decision to discontinue funding of Brand USA to be short-sighted,*" said Peter Pantuso, president and CEO of the American Bus Association.

"*This proposal, coupled with executive order 13780, sets a dangerous precedent for the travel and tour industry in the United States, especially at a time when the growth of international tourism to the U.S. has slowed. The international tourism industry is key to President Trump’s number one priority — economic growth.*"

**ABA Annual Meeting & Marketplace 2018**

The Communications team has spent the summer building excitement about the 2018 ABA Annual Meeting & Marketplace. We have created a strong social media campaign highlighting the show with Marketplace Mondays, Wayback Wednesdays and Throwback Thursdays.

We have also invited our speakers to create videos promoting their sessions and Marketplace this year and will utilize these videos, along with the videos we captured last year, throughout the campaign.

We have created a social media campaign to promote membership in ABA targeting two different groups: operators and travel and tourism attractions. Each of these campaigns will highlight why ABA is the best association to join as well as how Marketplace is the show they need to attend. November and December ads will be focused on Marketplace.

**Membership:**

Working closely with the membership team, I have identified a number of ways we can promote our members more and in turn recruit new members.

In early September we launched a social media ad campaign focusing on two groups: operators and tour and travel. We have designed ads that will speak to each group about the benefits of ABA. We have also partnered with a few industry trade publications to place ABA ads and articles that promote ABA. As part of the social media campaign, we created a video that tells the membership story. This video will be on ABA’s website as well as different member groups on social media.

Early in the summer, ABA did a call for Heroes of the Industry stories asking members to tell us about the Corporate Social Responsibility. We have collected a number of stories which we will begin promoting as articles in the Destinations magazine starting with the Jan/Feb 2018 issues.
ABA also helped with coordination efforts during post-Hurricane Harvey evacuations and clean-up efforts. Utilizing ABA’s network we were able to help spread the word about the hurricane, areas affected and call for companies to help with evacuation efforts.

We will continue to meet regularly with the Membership Department on innovative ways to grow membership through our communications outlets.

Activities:

Media Engagement:

Over the summer, ABA sent out 13 statements and comments regarding government action as well as highlighting ABA success such as ABA’s Annual Meeting & Marketplace numbers from Cleveland and announcing ABA Foundation’s Scholarship winners.

Peter also did a number of interviews with Sirius XM’s Road Dog Trucker, Washington Post, POLITICO, New York Times, Wall Street Journal and Associated Press.

One of the highlights of media engagement this summer was responding to an article in School Bus Fleet magazine that stated that school buses were safer than motorcoaches. We questioned the assessment and received positive responses on social media from ABA members and non-members who were appreciative of ABA “sticking up for the industry.” ABA was the only association that responded to this article.

Media Statements:

Since May, ABA has sent out 13 press releases regarding the Annual Meeting & Marketplace, happenings within the government affecting the industry, including expressing worry about how President Trump’s travel ban will affect the motorcoach, travel and tourism industry.

ABA Calls on FMCSA to Clarify Notice on Lease and Interchange Rules

ABA Calls on Senate Homeland Security Appropriators to Fund Intercity Bus Security Grants

ABA Raises Concern over Visa Processing Times in Letter to President Trump

ABA Statement Regarding Budget Cuts to Missouri’s State, Local Travel and Tourism Offices

ABA Urges Restoration of Intercity Bus Security Grant Program Funds

ABA Supports NAS Findings on FMCSA Crash-risk System

ABA Joins Transportation Industry Partnership to Promote Safety for All Drivers

ABA’s Annual Meeting & Marketplace Gives Attendees more than 100 Million Reasons to Attend

FMCSA to Revise Lease and Interchange Rules, Extends Compliance Date to 2019

ABA Foundation Announces 2017-2018 Scholarship Winners

ABA Supports FMCSA Withdrawal of Insurance ANPRM for Motorcoaches, Others
ABA Responds to Article in School Bus Fleet Stating Motorcoaches are Unsafe

ABA Statement on White House Proposal to Eliminate Brand USA

Media Hits:
In addition to the Hill and Politico hits mentioned above ABA was quoted in a Washington Post article about start-ups utilizing crowdsourced bus service.

Start-ups Find Footing with Crowdsourced Bus Service in Cities with Ailing Transit
Washington Post
Luz Lazo
Sept. 2, 2017

Social Media Activities
We have been utilizing our social media channels more with the #ABAWorkingForYou campaign, highlighting our members with “National Days” each week and promoting the benefits of being a member of ABA as well as attending ABA events. This year we have been utilizing videos taken at ABA’s Annual Meeting & Marketplace to promote ABA’s Councils, meetings and ABA work in general. These videos have proved to be quite popular with followers. We also relaunched ABA’s Instagram page in August.

Because of our increase engagement and use of social media networks, we have seen our social media audience and interaction continue to grow:

Facebook: 4624 in April to 4770 now (as of Sept. 1) (+547 since June 2016)
Twitter: 3674 in April to 3807 now (as of Sept 1) (+431 since June 2016)
LinkedIn: 3532 in April to 3560 now (as of Sept 1) (+ 120 since June 2016)
Instagram: 397 as of Sept. 1

To put in context our competitors’ social media numbers are:

United Motorcoach Association
Facebook: 1878 as of Sept 1
Twitter: 1091 as of Sept 1

National Tour Association
Facebook: 4864 as of Sept 1
Twitter: 10.5k as of Sept 1

Website Update:
ABA continues to improve our website to ensure a user-friendly experience for our members and visitors. In June, we launched our Education portal which placed all of ABA’s education offerings in one easily recognizable place. We also launched our ABA Entry Level Driver Training program, which is the leading educational opportunity in the Education section.
You will notice as you move throughout the site, more videos are on the site. We are utilizing the great footage we have received from Terrapin Blue taken during Marketplace, Hill Day and BISC.

**Crisis Communication**

In 2017, ABA has assisted the following companies with Crisis Communication needs:

- Storer Coachways (1/4-1/5)
- Burlington Trailways (2/24)
- Transportation Charter Services (5/5)
- First Class Tours (5/9)
- Werner Coach (5/15)
- Miller Transportation (7/22-26)
- Chicago Classic Coach (8/2)