

**Broward County Health Department  
Drowning Prevention Campaign  
Focus Group  
Executive Summary  
July 21, 2008**

**Background Information**

The Broward County Health Department – Health Education Section has created a demonstration project, *Drowning Prevention - Children under Age Five*, to further an understanding of the most effective ways to motivate parents to take preventive action to avoid a drowning. Residents in Broward County zip codes 33028 and 33029 have been selected as the target audience for the project.

Ambit was commissioned to conduct qualitative research through focus groups to learn perceptions and opinions of parents of children under age three in homes with swimming pools located in zip codes 33028 and 33029.

In preparation for the focus groups, Ambit

- Reviewed previously completed quantitative studies including the Nova Southeastern University Drowning Prevention Practices Pilot Study dated June 2007
- Gathered information and summarized public outreach efforts in South Florida and other areas where drowning prevention campaigns have been conducted
- Searched various national archives available to Ambit through our professional affiliations for comparative information.

Ambit created a series of 20 concept boards coupling images and headlines from the information gathered. Each board displayed an image and headline thought to be representative of those needed to motivate parents on the subject of prevention of child drowning in the home.

During the focus groups, each of the concept boards were presented to participants to glean their reactions as to which would motivate them or someone like them to take actions to prevent young children from drowning when there is a pool at the home.

The focus groups had the following objectives:

- Determine participants' reactions to various images and headlines
- Assess potential for various image/headline combinations to positively influence parents
- Evaluate effectiveness of a list of preventative steps
- Identify media habits

## Methodology

Two focus groups were conducted.

Participants, randomly recruited by telephone, were screened to be a parent with at least one child aged three or younger living in the household, residing in the target zip codes in a single family home with a pool.

The focus groups were conducted at Memorial Hospital in Miramar, Florida, on Friday, June 13th. Both groups were audio and videotaped for reporting purposes. All participants received a fee for their time.

1. Participants were initially asked their impressions of the 20 graphic boards, and their reactions to images and related headlines.
2. The boards were then ranked as highly motivational, moderately motivational, or of little or no motivational value.
3. Highly and moderately motivational boards were analyzed. Participants matched images with headlines to create what they thought to be the most motivating combinations.
4. Participants reviewed an additional board with a life preserver graphic and provided their opinions about its images and headline.
5. Participants were asked to evaluate a list of preventative steps to respond to the question: "Do these solutions provide enough information to a parent who wants to protect their children from drowning?"
6. Last, participants ranked media and other sources for receiving information about child safety.

## Key Insights

Participants were vocal in their responses to images and headline which, because of the subject matter, evoked considerable personal emotion. As the subject of the focus group unfolded, several shared stories, usually associated with a personal experience.

They warmed to the task of sifting through the images and headlines to identify those that would be most likely to motivate them or someone like them to take actions in their home to prevent young children from drowning.

They felt that:

**Images** must show a child in danger of drowning or actually drowning.

**Headlines** must be specific to drowning. From the 20 headlines, the following were initially selected as the favorites:

- Drowning is silent and fast.
- The day my child drowned started out just like any other day.
- Most children who drown were missing less than 5 minutes.
- Drowning is the leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 4 in Florida.
- "You don't want me to show up at your pool."
- Most children drown in the family pool.
- "Isn't my life worth the price of a pool fence?"

All participants preferred concepts that created discomfort in the viewer.

- "Hit the audience where it hurts."
- "People need to be scared."
- "People are desensitized. They are not scared anymore."

They reacted to the image first, then the headline.

Upon review of the "life preserver" board, participants felt that the life preserver image looked too commercial (like an advertisement), although several parents liked the photo of the child inside the preserver. Specific words on the "life preserver" board (Protect, Supervise, and Prepare) were discussed, but there was not consensus as to what would make the messages stronger. Comments such as:

- Supervise: "It does not seem strong" were countered by others who felt it was quite strong. "Supervise means actively watching" contrasted with "Supervise doesn't mean anything to me."
- Discussion about the words "prepare" and "protect" all had similar lack of resolution.

The preventative steps board listed steps parents could take to protect their children from drowning. Participants after considerable general discussion decided that the preventative steps were sufficiently descriptive to provide a parent with a path to take action if motivated.

- It gives you a guideline but doesn't motivate you. The headline motivates you.
- These are things that most adults already know. Nothing surprising or new, so human nature might be dismissive to say "I already knew that."
- Some parents do not know these things.
- If I am doing one, does it mean I don't have to do the other things?
- What kind of rescue equipment?

There was overall agreement that on all boards, after capturing a viewers' attention with an upsetting photo and headline, it will be important to include information such as the preventative steps to provide parents with "what we can do" to safeguard their children against drowning.

## **Media Habits**

Participants completed a questionnaire to rate the effectiveness of various media in reaching them. TV, newspapers, radio, magazines and direct mail were ranked from 1 to 5, with 1 being the highest.

Television ranked the highest, by almost 2 to 1. Stay-at-home moms watch TV programs with their kids during the day, with many watching the news in the evening. Magazines ranked a far second, close to the other choices. *Parenting* was the most frequently read publication.

## **Conclusions**

Participants agreed that, for the ads to successfully motivate a parent, they must move the parent (viewer) through a two step process:

1. Catch my attention with a discomforting image and shocking headline.
2. Tell me what to do to prevent my child(ren) from drowning.

Three images and five messages were selected as the strongest and most motivational. Most participants would be comfortable using any of these combinations of headlines and images.

## SELECTED PHOTOS

1. Child submerged viewed from under water



2. Paramedic leaning over drowned child



3. Child crawling towards door while mom works (must show pool through doorway.)



## SELECTED HEADLINES

1. Drowning is silent and fast.
2. Most children drown in the family pool.
3. Drowning is the leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 4 in Florida.
4. Most children who drown were missing less than 5 minutes.
5. The day my child drowned started out just like any other day.