Ride Hard, Ride Safe! Val d'Isère

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RESUME (version française): Cette présentation souhaite montrer comment Val d’Isère avec Henry’s Avalanche Talk (HAT) a mis en place, dès 2010, une campagne de sécurité et de communication liée aux dangers des avalanches et à la pratique du hors piste notamment. L’objectif de cette présentation est de faire comprendre et partager le concept Ride Hard Ride Safe avec la communauté internationale, pour contribuer à l’émergence de nouvelles idées pour continuer à réduire les accidents par l’éducation et la connaissance, plutôt que par l’interdiction et la répression.

MOTS-CLEF : ski, hor-piste, avalanche, sensibilisation, sécurité.

ABSTRACT (English version): This presentation shows how, in 2010, Val d’Isère with Henry’s Avalanche Talk (HAT) put into place a safety and communication campaign aimed primarily at increasing awareness about off-piste skiing and the danger of avalanches. The goal of this presentation is to communicate and share the ‘Ride Hard, Ride Safe!’ concept with the international community in order to encourage discussion, debate and new ideas on how ski areas can best reduce accidents through education and awareness rather than repression and restrictions.

KEYWORDS: skiing, off-piste, avalanche, awareness, safety.

1 INTRODUCTION

The increased popularity of off-piste skiing and the huge size of the ski area around Val d’Isère, known as the Espace Killy (which includes Val d’Isère and Tignes), has led to the need for public awareness on accident prevention amongst an increasingly adventurous clientele, who often have little or no knowledge of mountain safety. The decision by the local authorities to embrace the concept of Ride Hard, Ride Safe!, was a decision to choose awareness, information and education over restrictions.

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Figures 1 & 2. Off-piste (Val d’Isère - Espace Killy, France) Over 80 lifts give access to three glaciers and around 10,000 hectares (24,700 acres) of off-piste terrain along with 300km of marked ‘piste’. The public is able to access this off-piste terrain from lifts and the secured runs or marked ‘pistes’. (photo credit: H. Schniewind Figure 1; www.peakphotographics.com Figure 2)
1.1 The general framework of the campaign is into the following categories:

- Target Audiences
- Language
- Actions (Pre-season & In-resort)
- Communication Channels & Subject Matter

2 TARGET AUDIENCES

More than 50% of the ski area’s clientele is foreign (non-French) mainly from the United Kingdom or they communicate in English as a second language (for example, many Dutch, Scandinavians and Russians visit Val d’Isère).

Among this clientele the message is targeted at: people on holiday (adults and children), seasonal workers and aspiring professionals. In order to reach these groups, relations have been developed with, for example:

- Tour Operators
- The British Consulate General
- Aspiring professionals (training groups like the British Association of Snowsports Instructors)

3 LANGUAGE

Both French and English are used in the Campaign due to the multinational clientele of Val d’Isère.

The Pre-season events are mostly in English, as is shown in the next section.

In-resort events and communication (during the winter season) which include: talks, courses, radio, print publications etc. are provided on a regular basis both in French and English – also shown in the next section.

4 ACTIONS

The campaign is divided into two principal ‘action’ categories:

- Pre-season awareness
- In-resort awareness

4.1 Pre-season awareness

Part of the pre-season awareness campaign is a public awareness tour through the United Kingdom in October and November realised by HAT.

The pre-season events are divided into:

- Talks
- Ski shows
- Practical training

Figure 4. A talk for the general public (London, UK) at a mountain sports retailer Ellis Brigham (photo credit: HAT photo archive).

Figure 5 above. A talk for students Bramley, UK) in a more formal setting (photo credit: H. Schniewind).
Figure 6 above. Ski Shows: information & awareness at a stand at a ski show (London, UK). Talks & some practical training are delivered at ski shows too (photo credit: H. Schniewind).

Figure 7 above. Practical training (Sandbanks Beach, UK) using avalanche transceivers (photo credit: H. Schniewind).

Figure 8 above. Practical training (Wimbledon Common, London, UK) using avalanche transceivers (photo credit: H. Schniewind).

Figure 9 above. A talk for aspiring professionals in the Pacific Bar in (Val d’Isère, France) (photo credit: www.peakphotographics.com).

Figure 10 above. Practical training (Val d’Isère, France) using avalanche transceivers (photo credit: Mountain Echo archive).

Figure 11 above. Practical training for school children on search and rescue procedures (Val d’Isère, France) with the Services des Pistes (photo credit: H. Schniewind).

4.2 In-resort awareness

The in-resort events during the season, from the end of November to early May, are divided into:

- Talks (formal in the conference centre and informal in bars),
- Practical training
- Information on current conditions which is addressed in the next section, 5 COMMUNICATION CHANNELS & SUBJECTS
COMMUNICATION CHANNELS & SUBJECT MATTER

Above and beyond talks, courses, the *Ride Hard, Ride Safe! Val d’Isère* campaign uses websites, social media and traditional media such as radio, television and printed media to provide the most up-to-date educational and information possible.

The use of media is primarily aimed at two categories that we have named:
- Off-piste and avalanche safety
- Behaviours and administrative

5.1 Off-piste and avalanche safety

Figure 12 above. Practical snow conditions updates on the HAT website several times per week (photo credit: HAT photo archive).

Figure 13 above. Website and social media (Facebook & Twitter) are used to communicate information in video format on current conditions (photo credit: HAT archive).

Figure 14 above. Detailed descriptions of recent accidents (Val d’Isère, France). Accident case studies (when possible and/or allowed) are published on a blog in collaboration with the Service des Pistes (photo credit: HAT archive).
5.2 Behaviours and administrative issues

Information & awareness aimed at encouraging responsible behaviour, e.g. effects/dangers of cold weather & alcohol, in the resort is also part of the campaign along with addressing administrative issues like proper insurance coverage.

Figure 15 above. Local radio is used to summarise current conditions and for a weekly chat based on questions from the general public (photo credit: Radio – TV Val d’Isère).

Figure 16 & 17 above. Articles on in-depth subjects are placed in local publications and large newspapers (mass media) like the Daily Telegraph in the UK (photo credits: Mountain Echo archive & Telegraph.co.uk archive).

Figures 18 & 19 above. Poster campaign encouraging healthy behaviour and responsible insurance coverage (Val d’Isère France) in collaboration with the British overseas consult (credits: courtesy of the British Foreign Office).
Figure 20 above: Collaboration with the local medical community on communication of safety, prevention of accidents and basic administrative issues, such as accident insurance, are integrated into the campaign as well (credits: Mountain Echo archive).

6 CONCLUSIONS

The Ride Hard, Ride Safe! Val d’Isère campaign has been able to deliver 50-70 events a year in total through:

The pre-season events that are appreciated for the proactive approach to helping people have fun and be safe off piste. Renewed interest each year by partners, the public and the press attest to the success of the campaign in the UK.

The partners who help to make the pre-season events happen on the UK side, are: Ellis Brigham (a large UK mountain sports retailer who provide the campaign with venues in some of their over 30 stores), Arc’teryx UK, Ortovox UK and the Ski Club of Great Britain and of course the town of Val d’Isère.

The in-resort events during the season which are also received with a great amount of enthusiasm and appreciation especially regarding the ‘current conditions’ dimension to talks, radio broadcasts, blog posts and weekly updates in local press (for example the Mountain Echo).

Other partners who help to make the in-resort side of the campaign work during the season are: the Val d’Isère Service des Pistes (or Régie des Pistes), Tourist Office, Radio Val d’Isère, some of the local businesses that provide venues, Ortovox France, RECCO and especially the town of Val d’Isère itself represented by the Mayor and the ‘Marie’.

6.1 Attendance figures

- Several hundred thousands winter sports enthusiasts are reached
- Ten to twenty thousand people are further informed through the local Val d’Isère press, radio, social media, blogs and on-line information and education
- Three to four thousand people attend talks each year
- Three to four hundred people attend practical training sessions each year

The challenges that remain consist of trying to evaluate how much of this awareness and education actually changes peoples’ behaviour for the better, how to interest the public in the first place and how to continue to generate the financial support that is needed to evolve in an innovative and dynamic way.

We very much welcome feedback: comments, questions, debate and new ideas on how we, and other ski areas, can best reduce accidents through education and awareness rather than repression and restrictions.