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Cooling Global Warming Through Transit

Abstract

For generations, cars have been cool because they are perceived to correlate to independence and wealth. People's attachment to their cars is one of the most cited examples of why government doesn't want to invest in mass transit. Accompanying this ideology is an underlying fear and distaste for buses. Recently, Cleveland purposely avoided such a stigma in naming its new bus line "The Health Line" and referring to it always as rapid transit. Yet, providing "cool" features to buses, like making them hybrid or dressing them up like quaint trolleys, has been largely unsuccessful in overhauling the image of buses. Buses aren't cool. Yet.

Keywords

Buffalo, Environment, Transit, Report, PPG, PDF

Cooling Global Warming Through Transit

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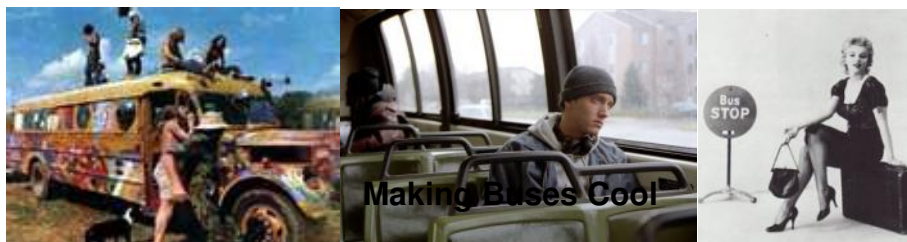
What is Cool?

Cool is a term that was coined by jazz musician Lester Young in the 1920's but has been adopted by generation after generation.¹ Today, coolness is about "being in the know," about authenticity.² Coolness confers a sense of rebellion. In today's market, cool is about knowing what is coming next and why.³



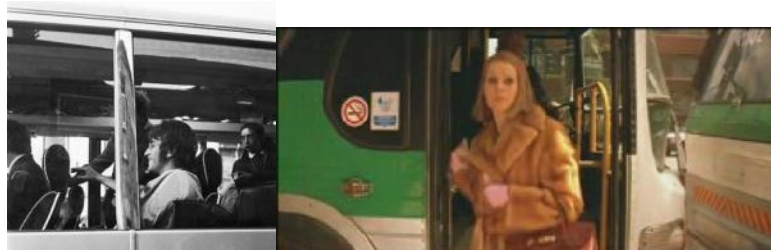
Buses Then and Now

For generations, cars have been cool because they are perceived to correlate to independence and wealth. People's attachment to their cars is one of the most cited examples of why government doesn't want to invest in mass transit. Accompanying this ideology is an underlying fear and distaste for buses.⁴ Recently, Cleveland purposely avoided such a stigma in naming its new bus line "The Health Line" and referring to it always as rapid transit.⁵ Yet, providing "cool" features to buses, like making them hybrid or dressing them up like quaint trolleys, has been largely unsuccessful in overhauling the image of buses.⁶ Buses aren't cool. Yet.



Especially when it comes to public transit, supply flows from demand⁷. Ridership drives services and attracts funding.⁸ So, what will attract that ridership? “What buses lack in sex appeal, they make up for in personality.” If you show a small, vital cross-section of the population that the bus has an accessible charm congruent with the already popular eco-culture, the image of bus riding will be transformed.⁹

What is recognized culturally to be cool spreads in a predictable pattern.¹⁰ The first people to sign on to a trend are the innovators. Next come the early adopters, who watch and imitate the innovators, followed by the early majority and late majority.¹¹ To successfully rebrand something as cool, you have to start by convincing the innovators that your product is good. The most successful rebranding campaigns avoid trying to make the audience feel guilty, but instead design an association between the product and a positive emotion. Promoting buses as cool and cars as uncool will be the NFTA’s best marketing strategy.¹²



Where to Start

The demographic of late teens to early twenty-somethings is the most invested in coolness and is the best positioned to re-think how to commute.¹³ Many cannot or can barely afford to own a car, yet already have some commuting needs for school or a job.¹⁴ What they don’t have is a fully ingrained pattern of commuting for a career. The current generation of young people is more geared up than any other to buy into mass transit. What is more rebellious, more cool than consuming less when the baby-boomer “protest Generation” has turned out to be the Generation of Super-Consumers?¹⁵ People of college age accept the concept of global warming. Moreover, they covet “green credentials” in their consumption.¹⁶ Now is the time to reach them, to show them how enjoyable (and green) the bus can be, before they form a car addiction.



How It Can Work

Most importantly, creating a cool image doesn't have to cost a lot of money. Big marketing campaigns are often counter-productive.¹⁷ Cool is created by grassroots, which means time and energy, not advertising money.¹⁸ The NFTA can get the ball rolling by changing its advertising tactics. Take the money spent on the quarterly newsletter no one reads and the multi-color flyers riders ignore and use it instead to pay for an organizer.

- Step one: Visit college campuses, coffee shops, and bars. Find the innovators.
- Step two: Talk to them about the luxuries and greenness of transit. Get them involved in the transit planning process.¹⁹
- Step three: Ask or pay them (doesn't have to be payment in money) to ride and to talk to people about transit.
- Step four: Create or participate in events that are cool to the target audience, like concerts, sporting events, and other social events.²⁰
- Step five: Enlist the help of local schools and agencies. UB Green, Buffalo Place, Buffalo First, PUSH, and the City itself are natural allies to create a positive feedback loop for this type of project.



The Good It Will Do

In Bogota, Columbia air pollution dropped 40% in the first year as riders took to the new system of sleek new buses in dedicated lanes combined with elevated bus stop enclosures where riders could pre-purchase tickets.²¹ Given that Buffalo has an air quality grade of D, that is something that should give pause, especially since transportation emissions are expected to double by 2030.²² Public transit already reduces greenhouse gas output in the U.S. by 37 metric tons per year and creates 19% more jobs per dollar invested than road projects do.²³ Switching from single-rider vehicles to public transit is one of the most effective ways to reduce carbon emissions.²⁴ Better still, we can prevent car ridership by teaching transit use early.



¹ Sara Bird & Alan Tapp, *Social Marketing and the Meaning of Cool*, XIV Social Marketing Quarterly 1:1-2 (2008).

² *Id.* at 3

³ *Id.*

⁴ “Bicycles can be chic, subways artful, but buses? Buses are not exactly the golden child of transportation. They’re more like the red-headed step child: Deep down you know they mean well, but they’re just a little harder to love.” Kyla Fullenwider, *Project: What’s the Best Bus Route in America?* GOOD Magazine, Nov 1, 2010 (6:30pm PDT), available at <http://www.good.is/post/project-what-s-the-best-bus-route-in-america/>

⁵ Kai Ryssdal, *Rapid Bus Transit a Cheaper Alternative to Rail*, Marketplace: American Public Media (Nov. 9, 2010), available at <http://marketplace.publicradio.org/display/web/2010/11/09/pm-rapid-bus-transit-a-cheaper-alternative-to-rail/>

⁶ David Deutch, *The Bus Stigma*, posted on Four Story: Supporting Fair Living Conditions for Everyone, <http://fourstory.org/features/story/the-bus-stigma/>

⁷ Charles W. Huffline & Joanna Morsicato, *Changing Campus Culture: Making the Bus “Cool,”* Westernite (Oct. 11, 2009), available at <http://westernite.wordpress.com/2009/10/11/changing-campus-culture-making-the-bus-%e2%80%9ccool%e2%80%9d/>

⁸ Federal Transportation Administration Grant Webpage (2010), http://www.fta.dot.gov/funding/finance/grants_financing_106.html; Interview with C. Douglas Hartmayer, NFTA Dir. of Pub. Affairs and Bob Gower, Manager of Serv. Planning, in Buffalo, NY (Oct. 20, 2010); NFTA Budget for Fiscal Year Ending 2011 Part 2 (2010), available at http://nfta.com/annual_report.asp.

⁹ Richard Weir, *Let’s Hear it For the Bus*, Boston Herald.com (Nov. 9, 2010, 8:25 pm), available at http://www.bostonherald.com/blogs/news/on_the_t?p=107&position=recent/. For example, Greyhound’s Bolt Bus and the KnowItExpress. Tamara Keith, *Making the Bus Cool*, The Environment Report (Mar. 2, 2009), available at http://www.environmentreport.org/story.php?story_id=4377; Stephen Lowman, *D.C.’s New Hipster Bus Rolls Straight into Brooklyn*, The Washington Post (Oct. 23, 2010), available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2010/10/22/AR2010102206944.html>

¹⁰ FRONTLINE. 2005. The merchants of cool: A report on the creators and marketers of popular culture for teenagers. PBS (online). <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/cool/view/> (accessed November 5, 2007).

¹¹ Malcolm Gladwell, *The Coolhunt*, The New Yorker 77 (Mar 17, 1997), available at http://gladwell.com/1997/1997_03_17_a_cool.htm

¹² G. Hastings, *Social marketing: Why should the devil have all the best tunes?* Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann (2007); Charles W. Huffline & Joanna Morsicato, *Changing Campus Culture: Making the Bus “Cool,”* Westernite (Oct. 11, 2009), available at <http://westernite.wordpress.com/2009/10/11/changing-campus-culture-making-the-bus-%e2%80%9ccool%e2%80%9d/>

¹³ 76% of University at Buffalo students commute in single-occupancy vehicles. College Sustainability Report Card, *University at Buffalo’s Report Card 2011*, available at <http://www.greenreportcard.org/report-card-2011/schools/university-at-buffalosuny/surveys/campus-survey#transportation>

¹⁴ Ari B. Bloomekatz, *Riding the Bus Changes Her View: A self-described snob makes the switch to public transit*. Los Angeles Times (Feb 27, 2010), available at <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/feb/27/local/la-me-bus-snob27-2010feb27/2>

¹⁵ *Supra* note 12.

¹⁶ Keith, *supra* note 10.

¹⁷ *Supra* note 12.

¹⁸ *Supra* note 11.

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ Supra note 11.

²¹ Joe Romm, *Making Buses Cool Again*, Climate Progress, Jul 19, 2009 at 7:36 am, available at <http://climateprogress.org/2009/07/19/making-buses-cool-again-bus-rapid-transit-brt-bogota/>

²² American Lung Association, *State of the Air Report 2010: City Rankings*, <http://www.stateoftheair.org/2010/key-findings/SOTA2010.pdf> ; Phillip A Hummel, *Next Stop - A Cleaner and Healthier Environment: Global Strategies to Promote Public Transit*, 35 *Transp. L.J.* 263 (2008).

²³ Statements of Senator s Christopher Dodd and Jeff Merkley, *Public Transportation: A Core Climate Solution*, Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, United States Senate. Y 4.B 22/3 111th: S/HRG 111-275 US (July 7, 2009)

²⁴ Sierra Club, *Clean energy Solutions: Ten Things You Can Do to Help Curb Global Warming*, (2010), <http://www.sierraclub.org/energy/tenthings/>.

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