

Riverside Transit Agency's

# 25-cent Rides Boost Youth Ridership



## *2019 APTA AdWheel Awards*

Category: Best Marketing and Communications to Increase Ridership or Sales: Shoestring Tactic





RTA, which spent less than \$600 during the winter of 2017 and summer of 2018 on an online and social media campaign that boosted sluggish youth ridership by 35 percent. We knew that young riders use social media as a key communications tool. That said, paying for social media advertisements was still relatively new territory for RTA, but it was necessary to reach our very special audience.

**STATEMENT OF NEED/OPPORTUNITY**

Public transit ridership tends to slow down during the winter and summer breaks when schools are out and families are on vacation. RTA is no exception. Traditionally, our winter and summer ridership can be up to 40 percent less than our spring and fall

ridership. To improve our summer ridership, RTA targeted our youngest riders. RTA’s Board of Directors authorized a youth winter promotional fare of 25 cents per boarding for all fixed-route buses from December 2017 through January 2018. The Board also authorized a summer promotional fare from June through September 2018. Our one goal was to boost ridership to reverse the downward trend.

**GOALS & OBJECTIVES**

- To increase summer youth ridership by at least 10 percent
- To successfully promote a special youth summer fare of 25 cents per ride
- To reach a specific target audience of youth in





middle and high school

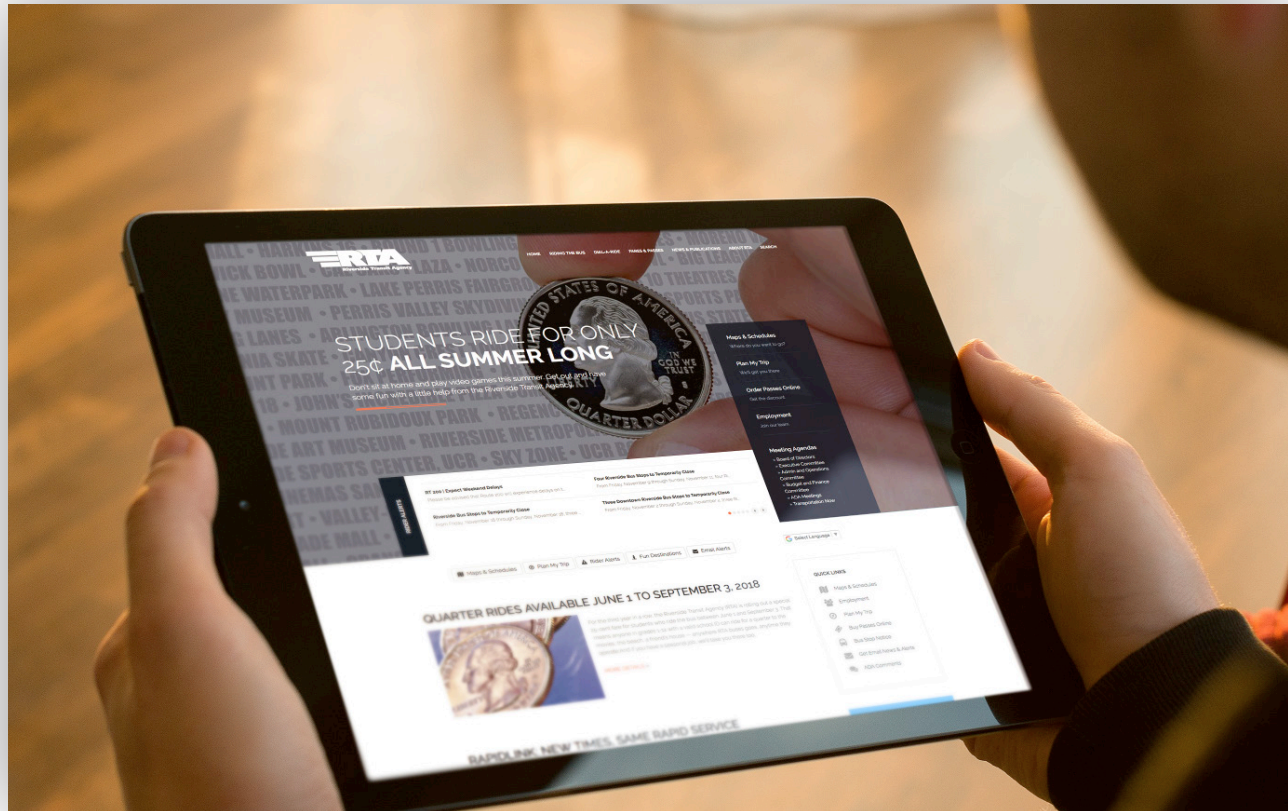
- To promote the summer fare as a positive way for kids to get around
- To publicize the promotional fare to local media and to keep the member of the press informed of changes so as to produce accurate stories
- To create an advertising campaign that reached out to all youth riders and their parents --- including Spanish-speakers

#### TARGETED AUDIENCE

- New and existing youth passengers and their parents
- Spanish-speaking customers
- Media outlets
- Members of the public
- Board members and stake-holders

#### SOLUTION/PROJECT SUMMARY

Our shoestring campaign was designed to attract youth riders with a simple message “You’re Only a Quarter Away.” Bottom line, we wanted to remind youth riders that they were only a quarter away from freedom to travel anywhere RTA buses go, anytime RTA operates. They simply needed to show their school IDs to qualify for the discount. In order to reach our youth riders, we brainstormed ways to reach out to this very specific audience. With the prominence of social media, RTA decided to contact them where they naturally hang out: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. RTA paid to advertise on these social media platforms in the weeks leading up to the special youth fare. In addition to the social media efforts, RTA sent hundreds of flyers to regional school districts, community centers, libraries, summer camps, YMCAs and Boys and Girls Clubs. Digital versions of the



flyers were created and distributed via email and through the help of RTA’s member jurisdictions and the many organizations they represent.

*The marketing and social media campaigns included:*

- A web page in RiversideTransit.com was created to highlight the special fare and include all the fun destinations that youth can venture to and the bus routes that can take them there.
- Twitter: \$240 was spent to advertise the youth fare promotion on Twitter during two periods: winter 2017 (December 8-22) and summer 2018 (May 18-June 8).
- Facebook/Instagram: \$350 was spent to advertise the youth fare promotion on Facebook (which includes Instagram) during the same two periods.
- Fliers: \$737 was spent on printing 10,000 “Only a Quarter Away” winter and summer promotional

fliers, 8.5x11 inches, English and Spanish versions, 80 lb. gloss book. The fliers also included the fun destinations. The fliers were distributed at key community events where many families attended.

- Total spent on the winter 2017 and summer 2018 campaigns is \_\_\_\_\_.

### LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

Part of the challenge of this shoestring campaign was limited funding to produce real results. We wanted to successfully convince young people to ride the bus instead of using other modes of transportation. Bus ridership still has a stigma attached to it, and many young people have opted to catch a ride in a car to destinations near and far. After all, California residents covet their cars. Paying for social media advertisements was still relatively new territory

for RTA, but it was necessary to reach our very special audience which uses social media as a key communications tool.

### **EVALUATING SUCCESS/LESSONS LEARNED**

The ultimate success of this shoestring campaign was whether or not we boosted summer ridership. When the campaign ended, we were pleased with the results. Traditionally, our summer and winter holiday ridership can be up to 40 percent less than our spring and fall ridership. That changed this year following our youth fare promotion when the decline was reduced to 26 percent in the winter and 10 percent in the summer. We believe that improvement was fueled by our summer and holiday fare promotion. So how many people took advantage of the 25-cent youth fares? During the winter promotion, our buses carried 17,196 youth boardings, up 30 percent from the previous year. During the summer promotion, our buses carried 190,000 youth boardings, up 10 percent from the same time last year. The results were so positive that RTA is planning to make the 25-cent rides a regular thing during school breaks. RTA found advertising via social media is a very cost-effective avenue for reaching a specific target market.

Our Twitter campaign resulted in nearly 60,000 impressions during the winter and summer campaigns with nearly 1,000 clicks, retweets or replies on the ad. Of the views, nearly two-thirds were male. Our Facebook and Instagram campaign resulted in total 52,000 views during the two campaigns, and 1,340 times a viewer was directed to our website. Half of the Facebook and Instagram views were by 13- to 17-year-olds. Roughly half of the views came from adults, perhaps parents curious about finding rides for their children during the summer break. We were happy to help those parents out with a safe and convenient ride for their children. The positive effect from this campaign was that many students rode the bus, perhaps for the first time. We are eager to earn their patronage during the school year and during their breaks and vacations. When the campaign ended, and the results were overwhelmingly positive, RTA was thrilled to provide a great way for students to find a safe and affordable way to get around town. Perhaps best of all, parents could rest assured that their children will be safe on the way to wherever they're going. More than anything before, the quarter rides have ignited student interest in riding the bus and, with any luck, made them long-term customers.