

Need for speed: Tractor Outdoor partners with MCSA to return missing children to their homes

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Nelson Mandela once famously said that *"There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children."* Cut to 2022: at least one child is reported as missing every five hours in South Africa, with child kidnapping, abductions and human trafficking rising each day. If Madiba was here today, he would no doubt agree that our country should be gravely concerned about the state of its soul.

When a child goes missing, the first 24 hours are critical. As more time passes, the statistical likelihood of finding the child alive drops drastically. This is where the role of the community becomes so critical in recovering a lost child; and the more people who are aware that a child is missing, the better the chances.



Leading outdoor media owner Tractor Outdoor has partnered with Missing Children South Africa (MCSA), an organisation that assists the authorities whenever a child goes missing, to speedily return missing children safely to their homes. The media owner has offered up its country-wide digital billboard network – which reaches more than 30 million consumers each month – to the organisation on a no-charge basis, allowing for the rapid communication of new missing child alerts to key areas, as well as high-traffic locations such as highways and petrol stations.

Explains Remi Du Preez, commercial director at Tractor Outdoor: “There is nothing in this world more distressing to a family or a community than a child going missing.

“We approached MCSA with the intent of creating a digital channel that would facilitate fast-to-market communication close to areas where the child in question was last seen. This approach has been very successful in the United States; media owners and authorities collaborate closely when matters of national concern arise, and we wanted to replicate this model closer to home.”

Du Preez explains that key to the rapid dissemination of these alerts was designing a seamless process, which included the creation of a universal template. “MCSA can swiftly insert important details such as the child’s name, age, image and area where they were last seen into the template, and share it with Tractor’s content management team. Our team immediately upload the creative and schedule the campaign roll-out, and the alert is flighted within minutes of its receipt.”

Technology was key to the successful roll-out of this initiative. Tractor’s systems allow artwork to be easily connected across metros at the touch of a button, enabling high-priority content to be flighted before other content.

“Due to the dynamic nature of our systems, it generally takes less than five minutes for our system to identify available inventory and then upload content for flighting. As time is of extreme importance in missing children cases, this fast turnaround plays a crucial role.”

Bianca van Aswegen, national coordinator at MCSA, says that the partnership with Tractor could not have come at a better time for the organisation. “Over the past few months, there has been a dramatic and frightening spike in the number of child kidnappings, abductions, human trafficking cases and missing children. We’ve been inundated with new reports daily.

“Now with the increased and far-reaching exposure that we’re able to give these cases via Tractor’s network – and with each additional eyeball on our alerts – we improve the chances of bringing a child home.”

Prior to the partnership with Tractor, MCSA predominantly made use of social media and community-based flyers to alert communities about children reported as missing. “With the addition of Tractor’s digital screens, we’re not only reaching a wider audience; we’re also alerting more people to the existence of an organisation that assists caregivers should their child go missing, at no cost to them.

“This is hugely significant for us as an organisation, and we cannot thank Tractor Outdoor enough for offering this service to us, helping make South Africa a safer place for all our children,” she adds.

This form of community-centric collaboration is an ongoing drive for Tractor Outdoor, which previously launched #SMEHeroes; a pro-bono campaign that sought to give high-value media exposure to small businesses hardest hit by Covid-19 in 2020 and 2021, helping recoup losses incurred by the pandemic.

Says Du Preez, “One of Tractor’s foundational pillars is to give a voice to those who need it, and we are excited to roll out many other partnerships of this nature in the months to follow.”

For more information on Missing Children South Africa, visit www.missingchildren.org.za.

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