ROAD WARRIORS

Honors Thesis by: Holly Samuels
Project Advisor: Robert Papper
May 2006
Road Warriors

An Honors Thesis (NEWS 485)

By

Holly Samuels

Thesis Advisor
Robert Papper

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

May 2006

May 6, 2006
Abstract

The trucking industry in the United States is going through a major driver shortage. The shortage began in the late 1990s, and the hope for improvement is dim. Drivers are retiring in staggering numbers, and young people are straying from the industry. Most drivers say that pay rates haven’t increased with increased cost, and the home time drivers enjoy is shrinking. Young people aren’t willing to take a job that will keep them from home when they can work as a janitor and be with their families daily.

The demand for drivers is also increasing as US jobs are sent overseas and more and more product needs to be driven across the country.

Companies industry-wide are trying to solve the problem that will bring more potential drivers to the jobs. Meanwhile, they’re working harder at advertising job openings.

Acknowledgements

-I’d like to thank my parents for encouraging me to do whatever I dreamed to do, even if it doesn’t pay well and the hours are terrible!

-I’d like to thank my advisor, Bob Papper for always giving it to me honestly.

-I’d like to thank Chris Bavender for guiding me through the TV business.

-I’d like to thank Barry Umansky and Larry Riley for making me always want to know more, and sharing their endless knowledge.
Everything you wear, use, or eat has been carried on a truck. I decided to do my creative Honors thesis project on the trucking industry because it's underappreciated and is facing an industry-wide revamping. As it stands today, the American trucking industry isn't working. The needs of the American people are expanding and the industry needs to change with it; but there are a few kinks to work out first.

As a journalist, I wanted to tell the story. The website format works perfectly because I'm a Telecommunications major, and a visual learner. I wanted to tell the story in an exciting manner, while using my skills in different media.

As on any website, my team and I chose to divide this story into different chunks. Web stories are non-linear, and we wanted to make sure that each chunk told an individual story that supported the overall thesis, which is displayed on the splash page, also known as the home page.

We divided the story into four chunks: safety, education, life of a driver, and economics. These chunks each tell a portion of the trucking industry and what it's like to be a truck driver, but they serve a dual purpose. Each chunk is a contributor to a shortage of drivers; the overall story we're trying to tell. It was very important to us that the site not only gives the consumer a taste of life on the road, but it had to also answer the question we posed: why is there such a shortage of truck drivers in the US, and how can we make it better?

Each chunk was then split up into different pieces of information that are told using different media. We chose graphics to tell stories that are visual, but need explaining. We chose video to tell stories that have action, and we chose photo slideshows to tell stories that are visual without much movement. We also added audio
to some of the slideshows when we felt it was appropriate so the consumer could be taken on a journey. Using audio, especially "nat sound," or the sounds you hear naturally in the setting portrayed in the video or photos, is the best way to make a view feel like he or she is there. We tried to use nat sound whenever possible.

On the splash page, we tried to bring the feeling of being on the road to the viewer. We added sounds to the splash page for a little fun, and the font we chose reflects what we thought of when we thought "big trucks." We added yellow lines to the title on the splash page to reflect the lines on the road. My partners and I discussed the color choices, and we all agreed that a steely gray is the color we thought reflected the trucking industry. We also tried to design the site to have an industrial feel.

Some of the pages that branch off of our chunk pages don't support the thesis, but we chose to include things like the first-aid information, which branches off of the Safety page, because we thought it was interesting. There are things that drivers must carry with them that most people wouldn’t even think about. We included this information because we thought it supported the feeling of being away from home that we wanted to highlight as a major reason for young people shying away from the trucking industry. We wanted to make the consumer realize what it’s like to be away from home for as long as most drivers have to be on the road.

We also included things like the blind spot interactive to draw attention to the way we need to drive when we’re near tractor-trailers. While riding with a truck driving student we learned how dangerous and hard to control the trucks really are.

I hope that my project brings awareness of the problems our trucking industry is facing, and makes people aware of how important this industry is to the US. Our
dependence on trucks is only going to become stronger in the future, but the industry has to make some changes before it can serve this country the way it will need it to.
Bibliography

AAA Insurance. 25 April 2006. AAA.


Antrim, Carol. Personal interview. 23 March 2006.

Cheak, Jeremy. Personal interview. 12 April 2006.


Maddox, Don. Personal interview. 12 April 2006.

Martin, Richard. Personal interview. 23 March 2006.


Merder, Mark. Personal interview. 30 March 2006.
