

RESEARCH

Luxury automakers lead the way in effective TV advertising

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Image from Mercedes-Benz film

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

German automaker Mercedes-Benz is once again the top advertiser in the luxury automotive game, according to advertising consultancy firm Ace Metrix.

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The automaker had an average Ace score of 599 out of 950, surpassing last year's score of 592 to stay ahead of runner-up Buick, which averaged 593. Successful advertising is necessary in positioning a brand, distinguishing product and of course informing consumers, but in a crowded market only the best ads will be remembered.

"While sales event' type advertising still exists, consumers are attracted by more breakthrough advertising that surprises and delights them, as well as provides them with often perception-changing information about a vehicle," said Skip Streets, vice president of strategy, [Ace Metrix](#).

Refreshing ads

Alongside Mercedes and Buick, Audi, BMW and Lexus rounded out the top five.

Mercedes' best-scoring ad was "Crashworthy," which shows backwards, slow-motion footage of car collisions from the outside, so a damaged vehicle appears to repair itself. The ad sells Mercedes vehicles' ability to detect an incoming crash and automatically protect against it by braking.

Mercedes-Benz: Crashworthy

The ad received a score of 661 and was categorized as being "powered by" information. Two of the brand's other most notable ads, "Self-Driving" and "Crash Test," were also noted for conveying information.

German automaker BMW's best performing ads were more varied. The brand's Super Bowl ad, "Newfangled Idea," which shows broadcast journalists Bryant Gumbel and Katie Couric first discussing the Internet and then the BMW i3's wind-power, was noted for information as well as perception change ([see story](#)).

BMW's next best scorer, "Create the Future," which promotes the 7 Series by telling consumers "the best way to predict the future is to create it" promotes desire, while the "Cute Cottage" ad makes the brand more likable.

BMW: Newfangled idea

Among the larger trends, Ace Metrix found that ads designed to grab the viewer's attention from the get-go tended to

score better. Premium brands such as Infiniti, Acura and Volvo tended to outperform luxury brands in this respect. Lexus' ad strategy focused on grabbing attention and creating desire, with each of their top five being marked in at least one of those categories. Interestingly, its highest scorer, "Refreshing Ride" outperformed the next-best Super Bowl ad by 35 points and appealed on the basis of likability and desire rather than by being attention-grabbing.

Lexus: Refreshing Ride

By seeing what kind of ads best appeal to the consumer, a brand could revamp its advertising strategy for the future. At the same time, ad type is for many consumers a defining touchpoint, and changing it significantly could position the brand differently than it wants to be.

Refusing to change has its downsides, too. Consumers may tire of one approach and want something new, and staying ahead of that trend can make all the difference.

"In 2014 many of Mercedes-Benz USA's ads were powered by the ability to create desire," said Peter Daboll, CEO of Ace Metrix, in a statement. "This year, in addition to desire, Mercedes employed several different successful strategies to creating ads that consumers love, including delivery of compelling product information, especially around safety, and messages to change perception of the brand not to mention its extremely successful Super Bowl ad, Fable."

Audi: New Arrival

Still others might be partway through a long-term strategy. In 2015 so far, Audi's advertisements, such as "High Class" and "New Arrival," have been about changing brand perception. While the 2015 ads so far may be about positioning Audi, in the future, it might make sense for the brand to use advertisements to create desire.

Creating the future

Although television advertisements are the primary mode of contact with a brand for many consumers, there are indications that the digital climate will bring about change on this front.

Multichannel retailing is the future of the automotive industry, with 50 to 60 percent of sales leads expected to come through digital means by 2016, compared to 15 percent in 2014, according to a July 2015 by Frost & Sullivan.

New store formats, such as digital showrooms and pop-ups, offer original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) a cost-effective way to reach consumers and generate sales, but this change in retail strategy requires investment from brands. As automakers alter the way in which consumers interact with their brand during the purchase path and post-purchase, the challenge will be to retain a sense of consistency and loyalty ([see story](#)).

Some brands have already begun targeting the younger, aspirational digital natives through clever and ironic means. For example, in September Audi helped aspirational consumers manage their wallets to one day afford an R8 model through a comical social video.

The price of Audi's R8 model begins at \$115,900, making the automobile unattainable for many of the automaker's enthusiasts, but with some constructive saving nothing is out of the question. Playfully skirting around the financial means necessary to own an R8 is a humorous approach that is likely to connect with aspirational consumers rather than alienate them ([see story](#)).

"Luxury advertisers are really experimenting with different ad lengths, as well as different media for their video ads," Mr. Street said. "Online has increasingly become more important to the mix, and it will be interesting to watch how this increases over the next few years."

Final Take

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