

AUTOMOTIVE

Lexus contrasts virtual and reality to drive dealership traffic

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Still from Lexus' Command Performance Sales Event ad. Image credit: Lexus

By SARAH JONES

Toyota Corp.'s Lexus is making the point that its cars can only be appreciated in-person by leveraging a trendy technology.

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In the automaker's "Virtual to Reality" ads, models are shown using various virtual reality devices to take a simulated test drive. While most VR efforts have centered on providing the viewer with an immersive experience, Lexus' ads instead take a third-person view, highlighting the limitations of the innovation in an effort to drive traffic to its dealers.

"More and more, consumers are retreating behind screens and VR devices to experience the world," said Chris Graves, chief creative officer at **Team One**, the Los Angeles-based agency behind Lexus' campaign.

"As a brand, Lexus is committed to craftsmanship and the bond between man and machine," he said. "We took this opportunity to highlight the fact that although technology can simulate many things, the visceral feeling behind the wheel of a Lexus isn't one of them."

Simulated senses

Lexus' Virtual to Reality ads are a promotion for its Command Performance Sales Event. The integrated marketing effort developed by agency Team One for Lexus features a number of the brand's models, including the new LS.

In three different spots, a model comes into contact with a virtual reality device.

One shows a man sitting down behind the wheel of a simulator. As he slips on a headset, he is transported to the interior of a Lexus vehicle.



Video still from Lexus' Command Performance Sales Event ad. Image credit: Lexus

As he speeds around a track in his virtual experience, a voiceover explains, "While exhilaration can be simulated, nothing compares to the real thing."

Another ad finds a woman walking into a sparsely decorated room that features a VR headset suspended from the ceiling. She places the device over her eyes and is shown admiring the craftsmanship behind the automaker's cars, running her hands over the simulated leather seats.

The third spot sees a man enter a futuristic room. He takes a seat in a pod-like recliner, and a screen rotates in front of him.

This commercial highlights the "confidence" of Lexus' cars, something else that the marketing says cannot be recreated digitally.

Embedded Video: <https://www.youtube.com/embed/xK8vpalg9lg>

2018 Lexus Command Performance Sales Event

All of the commercials push the viewer to go to the sale before the cars are gone, creating a sense of urgency.

"Spring isn't a typical time for many car brands to have sales events," Mr. Graves said. "It made for the perfect time for Lexus to dominate the conversation with a uniquely-positioned event."

Virtual meets reality

While virtual reality has largely been used as a storytelling tool, it has also been tapped by luxury brands as the first step that leads to an in-person experience.

For instance, hospitality service provider Crystal helps prospective travelers imagine themselves on one of its cruises with the addition of virtual reality technology.

Crystal Preview allows travelers to view Crystal's Serenity and Mozart ships and select shore destinations in 360 degrees, transporting consumers to the Arctic or locations along the Danube River. Most travelers consult digital channels before booking, making virtual reality another way to help them make decisions about their itineraries ([see story](#)).

Prada similarly further traversed the fluid identities of La Femme et L'Homme fragrances in a virtual reality application.

Surrounding its fragrance launch, La Femme Prada for women and L'Homme Prada for men, Prada developed a marketing concept that features multiple women and men, but who are shown to have interchangeable identities. The campaign works to show that La Femme Prada and L'Homme Prada characterize the Italian fashion house's consumers into a bundle of total brand identity

For fragrance marketing, virtual reality can help communicate a scent's personality, but it cannot supplant the experience of smelling a perfume ([see story](#)).

This concept is also being deployed by Lexus, as it looks to push consumers to explore reality over the virtual.

"It's our belief that this campaign will help shake people away from their many screens and remind them that nothing compares to the driver's seat," Team One's Mr. Graves said.

