

AUTOMOTIVE

## Lexus leverages humor, emotion in human-centric holiday sales push

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*Lexus' December to Remember campaign is entering its second decade. Image courtesy of Lexus*

By SARAH JONES

Toyota Corp.'s Lexus is turning attention towards the joy of anticipation this holiday season with a campaign that centers on the gifters rather than the recipients.

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Now in its 20th year, the automaker's annual December to Remember advertising effort follows the humorous lengths that families have to take to hide a heftily sized gift. While the campaign serves as a promotion for year-end sale offers, Lexus has chosen to lead with emotion and storytelling rather than price.

"From the beginning, Lexus has had a uniquely consumer-oriented, human-centric approach to product development and the dealership experience," said Lisa Materazzo, vice president of marketing at **Lexus**. "The holiday campaign was no different.

"Lexus conducted consumer research that sought to understand the emotional allure of the holidays," she said. "The research revealed a key insight: one of the most treasured holiday memories are the gift-giving moments.

"And it's not just what we give our loved ones that excites us, it's the reaction we get in return when a loved one opens our gift. The act of giving is as important to us as the gift itself."

### Sale storytelling

Similarly to other automakers, Lexus has had a year-end clearance event around the holidays since its beginning in 1989, due to needing to clear out old model year vehicles. But in 1999, the marque changed its approach towards marketing this sale, shifting from promotional ads to ones that were more emotionally driven.

Lexus' move was based on consumer research, which found that shoppers were moved by the gift giving process and the reaction they received from their gift recipients.

Taking this idea as a starting point, this year's December to Remember campaign features the gifters as the main characters.

A focal point and prop is the big red bow that sits atop the cars in Lexus' ads.

One spot shows a father and son unsuccessfully trying to hide a large-scale bow underneath a bed, in a giant freezer and in a closet. Eventually, the dad gives up and takes the bow with him to work, where he can keep it more easily hidden from his wife.

A mother and her daughters similarly try to stow a bow in unusual places. This leads to comical moments, as one of his daughter declines story time with her dad so that he will not find the bow under her desk.

In another scene, the mom shifts her daughter's gaze downward from the ceiling, where the bow sits perched on a beam.

#### *Lexus' "The Bow Shuffle" December to Remember spot*

Another spot centers on trying to hide the car itself. A man stands in his friend's garage, where he is told that the man's wife needs the garage back.

This prompts the protagonist to say, "Oh, buddy," revealing his stress and the letdown of this news. Back at his own house, the man and his son creatively use snow to cover the Lexus, but the powder eventually melts.

Keeping sight lines out of the window obstructed, the man piles gifts in front of the panes. He also awkwardly tells his son that a call from the Lexus dealer is actually a robocall.

All of the spots end with the reveal of the surprise and the tagline, "Only one thing's more exciting than getting a Lexus: giving one."

Continuing its focus on multicultural outreach, Lexus' spots were created with versions or translations for Asian-American, Black and Hispanic audiences.

The television commercials will be appearing on cable sports networks during NFL, NHL, college football and English Premier League games.

Lexus will also run advertising in major airports during the holidays.



*Lexus' December to Remember campaign. Image courtesy of Lexus*

Print ads will feature white Lexus vehicles against an evergreen backdrop with the tagline, "More effective than mistletoe."

#### *Annual tradition*

Last year, Lexus looked beyond the holiday season with its annual December to Remember campaign.

The 2018 effort focused on the memories families can make together after they add a new Lexus to their households. While nostalgia remained a strong current throughout the vignettes, the advertisements were also forward-thinking and highlighted the longevity of a Lexus vehicle ([see story](#)).

Lexus showcased the inner child found within every adult for its 18th annual December to Remember Sales Event campaign.

For the 2017 holiday season, Lexus scripted three vignettes designed for specific target markets, but the theme of unbridled, childlike joy during the holidays is a consistent message that extends across all demographics. Playing off the nostalgia of the holidays is a common thread for marketers looking to engage with consumers on a personal, emotional basis ([see story](#)).

While Lexus shakes up its December to Remember creative concept on an annual basis, it keeps some elements in place, including the same jingle for the yearly ads. In doing so, the brand has created its own form of holiday tradition.

"In 1998, the month of December was just the 10th-best selling month of the year for Lexus," Ms. Materazzo said. "By 2000, Lexus was regularly selling more cars in December than any other month.

"In fact, the December to Remember campaign has resulted in luxury sales leadership during the competitive year-end selling season for 15 of the last 19 years," she said.

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